



Convenience at a Cost: The Evolution of Food Delivery App Use in Canada

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Abstract: Food delivery applications have become embedded in Canadian food consumption, evolving from niche services into mainstream platforms. This study employs a comparative longitudinal survey analysis using a repeated cross-sectional design, comparing two nationally representative Canadian surveys: the 2020 Angus Reid/Dalhousie survey (n = 1,552) and the 2025 Dalhousie–Caddle survey (n = 3,311). Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Consumer Value Theory, the study examines changes in adoption, usage frequency, and barriers to sustained engagement with major platforms, including UberEats, DoorDash, and SkipTheDishes. Consumer exposure increased significantly from 39.0% in 2020 to 51.5% in 2025, confirming that food delivery apps have become a mainstream component of Canadian food culture. However, growth in regular use has been more modest, with 27.4% of Canadians classified as regular users in 2025, while 23.9% were lapsed users who had previously used food delivery apps but discontinued use. Younger consumers remain the most active users, motivated primarily by convenience, accessibility, and variety. Consistent with Consumer Value Theory, affordability emerged as the dominant determinant of continued engagement. Delivery fees, menu markups, and tipping expectations remain significant barriers to repeat use, while concerns related to food quality, reliability, and delivery performance continue to affect retention. The analysis also highlights increasing market consolidation, with UberEats emerging as the dominant platform, alongside the growth of culturally targeted niche services such as Fantuan. Overall, the findings suggest that while perceived usefulness and convenience drive initial adoption, long-term engagement is increasingly shaped by value considerations, service quality, and consumer trust as the Canadian food delivery market reaches maturity.

Keywords: Online Food Delivery (OFD); technology acceptance model; consumer value theory; digital consumer behavior; platform economy; food service digitalization

1. Introduction

Digitalization continues to redefine how food is purchased, consumed, and experienced. In Canada, food delivery applications (apps) such as UberEats, DoorDash, and SkipTheDishes have fundamentally altered the Canadian food landscape, transforming restaurants into “platform-dependent” enterprises and consumers into app-mediated eaters. The initial surge in adoption in 2020 was fueled by pandemic restrictions, but by 2025 the market has matured, revealing both resilience and structural weaknesses.

This paper addresses two central questions: (1) what drives and sustains consumer engagement with food delivery apps, and (2) how do Canadian patterns compare with global trends in digital food services? Drawing on a new national survey (August 2025), our study

integrates Canadian data with an extensive literature review on food apps, situating findings within theories of technology adoption, consumer value, and service quality.

1.1. Food App Use

Food delivery applications epitomize what Lehdonvirta et al. (2020) describe as the “platformization” of food services—where digital platforms become entrenched intermediaries that connect consumers, service providers, and delivery agents. Much like ride-hailing or accommodation apps, food-delivery platforms create and capture value through convenience, powerful network effects, and sophisticated, data-driven personalization.

Food distribution theory emphasizes that the success of such digital platforms hinges on their ability to reduce friction in consumer decision-making. Huang and Benyoucef (2013), for example, underscore how effective platforms integrate multiple decision stages—search, evaluation, transaction—into a seamless user experience, thereby lowering cognitive and transactional barriers to adoption. Food-delivery apps exemplify this frictionless model: users can search for menus, place orders, and submit payments—all within a single mobile interface. This convergence of functionalities not only streamlines the user experience but also amplifies the platform’s utility and hedonic appeal, reinforcing user retention and reinforcing the positive cycle of network effects inherent to these digital intermediaries.

1.2. Consumer Behavior and Adoption Drivers

The adoption of food delivery apps is shaped by an interplay of demographic, psychological, and situational factors. Demographically, younger consumers consistently adopt these platforms at higher rates, a pattern largely attributable to digital fluency, peer influence, and lifestyle pressures. In Canada, for instance, survey data revealed that 67% of individuals under the age of 34 had adopted food delivery apps, compared with only 15% of those over 55, underscoring the generational divide in digital food service use (Agri-Food Analytics Lab/Caddle Survey, 2025). These findings align with earlier studies showing that age and digital familiarity are strong predictors of technology uptake in the food sector (Yeo et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020).

Convenience has been identified as the most frequently cited motivator for adoption. Ray et al. (2019) observed that food delivery apps are perceived primarily as time-saving tools, substituting not only for restaurant dining but also for home meal preparation. In this sense, such apps effectively function as “on-demand restaurants,” embedding themselves into users’ routines by reducing transaction costs associated with cooking or eating out.

Variety and novelty also play significant roles in shaping consumer engagement. Wu et al. (2022) argue that food apps extend access to a broader range of cuisines and establishments than traditional delivery boundaries would allow. This expansion of choice positions food delivery platforms as experiential consumption spaces, where variety-seeking individuals are encouraged to trial unfamiliar options and explore new culinary experiences. Together, these factors highlight how food delivery apps appeal simultaneously to utilitarian and hedonic motivations, explaining their rapid integration into modern food consumption patterns.

1.3. Barriers to Adoption and Sustained Use

Despite the rapid uptake of food delivery apps, several barriers continue to limit sustained engagement. Cost is one of the most significant deterrents. Numerous studies highlight high menu markups, delivery fees, and tipping expectations as major obstacles for consumers (Cho et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022;). This trend is evident in our 2025 Canadian survey, where 70.2% of respondents indicated that lower prices would encourage them to use these services more frequently. Service quality is another recurring issue. Consumers often report dissatisfaction with food freshness, incorrect orders, and inconsistent delivery times, concerns also identified in earlier research (Ray et al., 2019). In our own data, 18.1% of participants cited poor food quality upon arrival as a barrier. Finally, sustainability concerns play a role, though to a lesser extent in Canada. Problems such as overpackaging and environmental impact are widely recognized in the literature (Li et al., 2020),

but in our survey only 5.2% of Canadians cited them as a primary reason for avoiding food delivery services in 2025.

1.4. The Role of Trust and Perceived Risk

Trust is a multi-dimensional construct in online food delivery, spanning confidence in the platform's governance (privacy, pricing transparency, dispute resolution) and confidence in the last-mile service (safe handling, timeliness, order accuracy). During COVID-19, the most salient trust driver was health assurance: studies show that contactless options, visible hygiene protocols, and perceived safety meaningfully increased adoption intentions (and mitigated perceived risk) beyond classic Technology Acceptance Model factors such as usefulness and ease of use (Jun et al., 2022; Francioni et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

In the post-pandemic period, the trust calculus has tilted toward fairness and reliability. Large-scale analyses of reviews indicate that consistent delivery times, order accuracy, and the perceived competence of both couriers and restaurants now dominate quality perceptions, shaping continuance intentions through trust (Ma et al., 2024; Shankar et al., 2022). It is the willingness or decision to keep using a technology, product, or service after the initial adoption. When failures occur, consumers dynamically reassign "credit and blame" among the triad of restaurant, courier, and platform—an attribution process that can either erode or reinforce platform trust depending on recovery and communication quality (Line & Hanks, 2024).

At the transactional layer, perceptions of price fairness and transparency are increasingly central to trust. Policy and legal scholarship highlight growing calls for clearer disclosure of fees, commissions, and algorithmic pricing rules in the online food environment, arguing that opaque practices undermine consumer confidence and may warrant regulatory remedies (Greenthal et al., 2024). Privacy and security assurances are also trust prerequisites: evidence from adjacent digital commerce like UberEats and DoorDash shows privacy concerns and data-governance signals materially affect purchase intentions—concerns that map onto food delivery, where account-takeover risks have been widely reported (Alzaidi et al., 2022).

Finally, reputation mechanisms help bridge trust across actors. Trust transfers from known restaurant brands to platforms (and vice versa) are amplified by e-Word of Mouth: firm-generated information and user reviews reduce uncertainty about food quality and service reliability, bolstering platform and process trust and, in turn, adoption (Ray et al., 2021; Alghamdi et al., 2023).

1.5. Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Global comparisons highlight the importance of context in shaping the adoption and evolution of food delivery apps. In Asia, platforms such as Meituan and GrabFood have transformed into "super-apps," combining food delivery with payment systems and mobility services, thereby embedding themselves more deeply into everyday life and fostering stronger consumer dependence (Yeo et al., 2021). By contrast, in Europe, concerns over sustainability play a more central role. Regulatory pressures have influenced both packaging choices and labor practices, reflecting broader societal debates about the environmental and social costs of digital food ecosystems (Zurek et al., 2022). In North America, while app penetration is high, structural barriers related to cost perceptions remain salient. Inflationary pressures and entrenched tipping norms magnify consumer concerns about affordability, which has slowed the growth in usage frequency despite widespread adoption.

1.6. Substitution Effects: Apps vs. Restaurants and Meal Kits

Substitution effects illustrate how food delivery apps occupy a competitive space alongside restaurants, grocery stores, and meal kit providers. While apps and restaurants both serve as channels for prepared meals, apps extend convenience by minimizing consumer effort and maximizing immediacy. In contrast, meal kits offer at-home preparation experiences but often struggle to maintain long-term customer engagement, as research shows that the perceived effort of preparation outweighs novelty or initial interest (Cho et al., 2020). Despite these differences, both food delivery apps and meal kits face challenges in sustaining retention. Their use patterns tend to

be episodic rather than habitual, with consumers highly responsive to fluctuations in price and perceived value, underscoring the centrality of cost sensitivity in shaping engagement across these formats.

1.7. Adoption and Popularity of Food Delivery Apps

To analyze the growing popularity of food delivery apps, this paper adopts an integrated theoretical framework that draws from established models of consumer behavior and technology use. The Technology Adoption Model (TAM), introduced by Davis in 1989, is one of the most widely used frameworks for explaining why individuals choose to adopt new technologies. It posits that two key perceptions—usefulness, or the belief that a technology will improve performance and outcomes, and ease of use, or the belief that it will require little effort—shape users’ attitudes toward a system and, in turn, their intentions to use it. These intentions are strong predictors of actual adoption and continued usage, making TAM a parsimonious yet powerful model for studying technology acceptance across contexts. Over time, scholars have extended the model to incorporate additional factors such as social influence, enjoyment, anxiety, trust, and risk, leading to versions like TAM2, TAM3, and broader frameworks such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Despite these expansions, TAM endures as a foundational approach because of its simplicity, predictive power, and adaptability to diverse domains including e-commerce, digital finance, health technologies, and food delivery platforms.

Food delivery apps align strongly with these dimensions by offering accessible, on-demand services that streamline ordering and payment processes. Complementing this, Consumer Value Theory highlights how individuals weigh functional, emotional, and social values when making consumption choices (Sheth et al., 1991). Food delivery platforms succeed in maximizing functional value through time-saving and variety, while also generating emotional value through novelty and convenience, and, to a lesser extent, social value by enabling lifestyle signaling and peer influence.

Despite their widespread penetration, food delivery apps continue to face barriers that limit habitual use. High delivery fees and inflationary pressures undermine affordability, while concerns over food quality, such as temperature control and order accuracy, weaken consumer trust. Moreover, sustainability issues related to packaging waste have become increasingly salient, echoing findings from both the Angus Reid/Dalhousie survey (2020) and international research. Finally, the disruptive nature of food delivery apps situates them within a broader landscape of substitution. They compete directly with restaurants, grocery shopping, and meal kits, reshaping traditional patterns of food consumption. Their rapid growth suggests that consumers are reallocating portions of both home cooking and dining-out occasions toward digital platforms, reinforcing their role as a transformative force within the contemporary food economy (Grewal et al., 2020).

Our proposed conceptual model situates Adoption and Popularity of Food Delivery Apps at the center, driven by:

- Drivers: Convenience, accessibility, variety, digital literacy.
- Barriers: High costs, quality concerns, sustainability issues.
- Moderators: Age, income, region, cultural preferences.
- Outcomes: Increased frequency of at-home consumption, pressure on traditional restaurants, and changes in consumer expectations.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. Building on the Technology Acceptance Model and Consumer Value Theory, the framework proposes that food delivery app adoption and continued use are influenced by a balance between adoption drivers (convenience, accessibility, variety, and digital literacy) and barriers (cost, service quality concerns, and sustainability considerations). The strength of these relationships is moderated by demographic and contextual factors such as age, income, region, and cultural preferences. Adoption outcomes are expected to manifest through changes in food consumption patterns, restaurant demand, and consumer expectations.

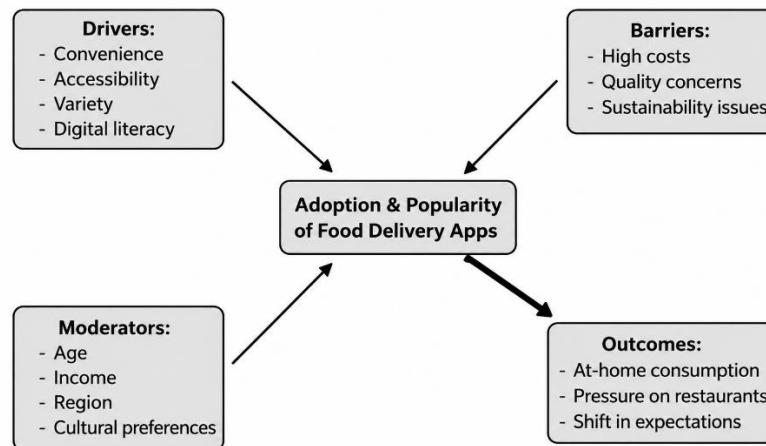


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Adoption and Popularity of Food Delivery Apps.

1.8. Toward an Integrated Understanding of Food Delivery App Adoption

While the literature often treats adoption drivers, barriers, trust, and service quality as distinct constructs, these factors are highly interconnected in shaping consumer behavior toward food delivery applications. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as primary determinants of adoption (Davis, 1989), but subsequent research demonstrates that continued use depends on a broader evaluation of value and risk.

Consumers initially adopt food delivery apps because they offer convenience, accessibility, and expanded food choices (Yeo et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2019; Arora et al., 2025). However, sustained engagement is influenced by the extent to which the service delivers value relative to its costs. High delivery fees, menu markups, tipping expectations, and concerns about food quality can reduce perceived value and weaken repeat usage intentions (Wu et al., 2022; Thuannadee & Praneetpholkhang, 2026). In this context, trust functions as a mediating mechanism between service performance and consumer loyalty. Reliable delivery times, order accuracy, transparent pricing, and responsive customer service reinforce trust, whereas service failures increase perceived risk and discourage continued use (Shankar et al., 2022; Line & Hanks, 2024).

This relationship suggests that adoption and retention should not be viewed as separate phenomena. Rather, they represent different stages of the same consumer decision process. Initial adoption is driven primarily by convenience and perceived usefulness, while long-term retention depends increasingly on affordability, service quality, and trust. As food delivery markets mature, factors that encourage trial become less important than those that sustain repeated use (Chan et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding food delivery app usage requires an integrated perspective that combines technology acceptance, consumer value, and trust-based explanations of behavior.

This integrated framework provides the conceptual foundation for the present study, which examines not only the growth of food delivery app adoption in Canada but also the factors influencing continued engagement and market maturation between 2020 and 2025.

2. Methods

This study draws on two large-scale national surveys conducted in Canada over a five-year period to examine changes in consumer adoption and use of food delivery applications. The research employs a repeated cross-sectional design, comparing two independent nationally representative samples collected at different points in time.

The first survey was administered by Angus Reid between January 28 and 29, 2020. Data were collected through Angus Reid's online panel, which consists of Canadian adults who voluntarily participate in survey research. A total of 1,552 respondents completed the questionnaire. Quota sampling was used to approximate the Canadian adult population based on province, age, gender, household income, and education. Following data collection, post-stratification weights were

applied using Statistics Canada population benchmarks to improve representativeness. The resulting sample has an estimated margin of error of ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The second survey was conducted in August 2025 by Dalhousie University's Agri-Food Analytics Lab in partnership with Caddle, a Canadian consumer insights platform. A total of 3,311 adult Canadians completed the survey through a hybrid online methodology combining mobile-app and web-based participation. Respondents were recruited from Caddle's national consumer panel and received points-based incentives for participation. Sampling quotas and weighting procedures were applied using the same demographic dimensions as the 2020 survey, including region, age, gender, household income, and education level. The final weighted sample has an estimated margin of error of ± 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

To ensure longitudinal comparability, the 2025 questionnaire was developed using the 2020 Angus Reid instrument as its foundation. Several core questions were replicated verbatim across both surveys. These common items measured awareness of food delivery applications, platform usage, frequency of use, and reasons for non-use. Frequency of use was operationalized through ordinal response categories (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly, and never). Adoption was measured as self-reported use of at least one third-party food delivery application. Respondents were also asked to identify the platforms they used most frequently, including UberEats, SkipTheDishes, DoorDash, and other services available at the time of each survey.

The 2025 survey expanded upon the original instrument by incorporating questions reflecting changes in the marketplace since 2020. New items measured attitudes toward delivery fees, tipping practices, food quality upon arrival, environmental concerns associated with packaging and transportation, grocery delivery services, alcohol delivery, and subscription-based meal offerings. While these variables were analyzed descriptively for the 2025 sample, only measures that were conceptually and operationally equivalent across both survey waves were used for longitudinal comparisons.

Data analysis relied primarily on descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Weighted proportions were calculated for all key variables. Comparisons between the 2020 and 2025 surveys were conducted using percentage-point differences in adoption rates, usage frequency, platform preferences, and reported barriers to use. Where appropriate, subgroup analyses were performed by age, gender, region, and urban-rural residence to identify demographic differences in adoption patterns. Because the study uses repeated cross-sectional surveys rather than a longitudinal panel, observed differences are interpreted as population-level changes over time rather than changes among the same individuals.

By combining these two nationally representative datasets, the study provides a unique opportunity to examine the evolution of food delivery app usage in Canada before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, while also capturing the effects of inflation, market consolidation, and changing consumer expectations on the digital food service landscape.

In addition to descriptive analyses, statistical significance testing was conducted for key variables measured consistently across both survey waves. Differences in proportions between the 2020 and 2025 samples were assessed using two-sample z-tests for independent proportions. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$).

3. Results

3.1. Adoption and Usage

The results reveal substantial growth in the penetration of food delivery apps over the five-year period, as shown in figure 2. In January 2020, 39% of Canadians reported having tried a food delivery app at least once, up from 29% in May 2019. By August 2025, this figure had increased to 51.5%, suggesting that food delivery apps have moved from a novelty service to a mainstream component of Canadian food culture. However, patterns of sustained use differ. In 2020, weekly use was concentrated in Ontario and Alberta, where 21% of app users reported ordering at least once per week. By 2025, 27.4% of Canadians overall reported being regular users, while 23.9% were lapsed users who had experimented with apps but subsequently stopped.

Despite rising exposure, disengagement remains high, with 34% of Canadians in 2025 indicating no interest in using these services at all.

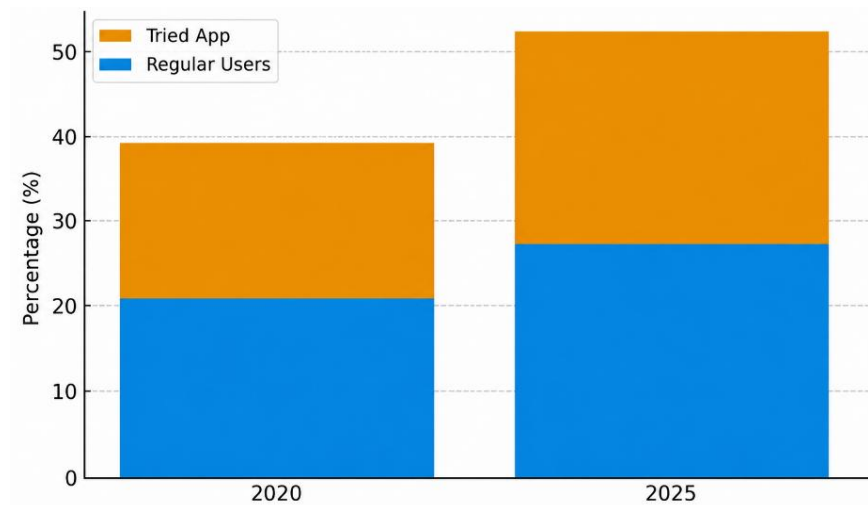


Figure 2. Adoption of Food Delivery Apps in Canada (2020 vs. 2025).

To assess whether observed changes between 2020 and 2025 reflected meaningful shifts in consumer behavior, two-sample tests of proportions were conducted for variables measured consistently across both survey waves. Results, shown in Table 1, indicate that the increase in overall food delivery app adoption from 39.0% in 2020 to 51.5% in 2025 was statistically significant ($z = 8.16$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the proportion of Canadians reporting no interest in using food delivery applications declined significantly over the period ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that the growth in food delivery app penetration reflects a genuine population-level shift rather than sampling variation. Given the large sample sizes and the repeated cross-sectional design, the observed differences provide strong evidence that food delivery applications have become more deeply embedded in Canadian food consumption patterns over time.

Table 1. Changes in food delivery app use and consumer interest between 2020 and 2025

Variable	2020 (%)	2025 (%)	Difference (pp)	z-statistic	p-value
Ever used a food delivery app	39.0	51.5	+12.5	8.16	<0.001
Regular users	21.0	27.4	+6.4	4.56	<0.001
No interest in food delivery apps	46.0*	34.0	-12.0	7.4	<0.001

3.2. Frequency of Use

The frequency of app usage also shifted between 2020 and 2025. In 2020, heavy use was concentrated regionally, with Ontario and Alberta leading in weekly adoption, while users in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were less frequent despite higher penetration rates. By 2025, usage patterns had become more uniform nationwide. As shown in Figure 3, approximately 27.7% of Canadians ordered two to three times per month, 23.7% used apps once a week, and 18.5% reported multiple weekly uses, illustrating a broadening of the heavy-user segment across provinces.

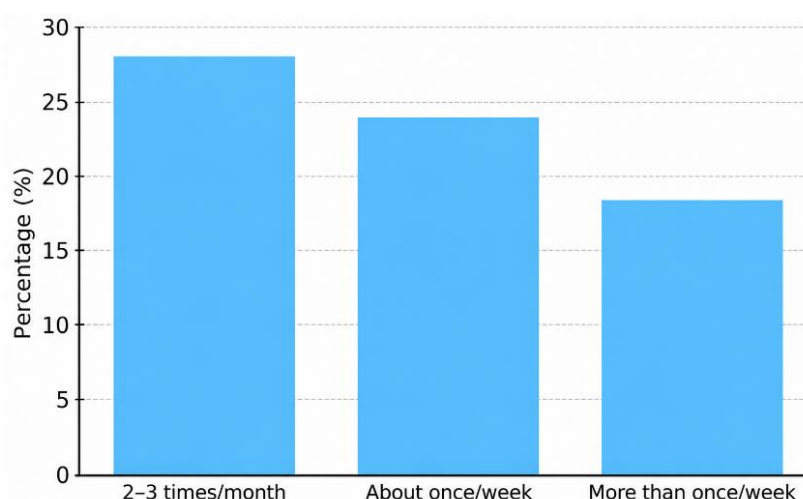


Figure 3. Frequency of Food Delivery App Use (2025).

3.3. Barriers to Continued Use

Barriers to adoption and retention were consistent across both survey periods, though relative salience shifted. In 2020, 64% of Canadians identified high prices as their primary concern, followed by food temperature (45%) and overpackaging (32%). Concerns about professionalism of delivery personnel (17%) and limited menu variety (15%) were also noted. By 2025, affordability remained the dominant barrier: 57.2% cited overall food prices, and 52.5% identified service and delivery fees specifically. Concerns over food quality (18.1%) and reliability (12.9%) persisted, though packaging waste, which was prominent in 2020, appeared less frequently in 2025 responses. This suggests that cost has become an even more central determinant of consumer decision-making in the context of rising inflation and shifting tipping norms.

Where comparable measures were available across both surveys, differences in reported barriers were also tested statistically. Cost-related concerns remained the dominant barrier in both survey waves and did not differ substantially in magnitude, suggesting that affordability has remained a persistent structural constraint on adoption. However, concerns related to packaging and environmental impacts declined significantly between 2020 and 2025 ($p < 0.05$), while concerns regarding delivery fees became more prominent as a distinct category in the later survey. These findings indicate that consumer concerns have evolved from broader service-related issues toward more specific affordability-related considerations.

3.4. Platforms of Choice

Platform competition also evolved between the two survey points. In 2020, UberEats, SkipTheDishes, GrubHub, and Foodora were among the leading services, with significant overlap as more than 61% of users in Quebec and Ontario reported using more than one platform. By 2025, UberEats emerged as the dominant service, used by 72.7% of respondents, followed by DoorDash (54.3%) and SkipTheDishes (54.2%). Niche platforms also registered, with Fantuan serving 11.1% of respondents, reflecting diversification and the targeting of specific cultural markets.

3.5. Motivators for Future Adoption

Consumer motivators show both continuity and change. In 2020, dissatisfaction was framed largely around high prices, food quality, and packaging waste. By 2025, the emphasis had shifted to affordability as the clear lever for future growth: 70.2% of respondents indicated that lower fees would increase their frequency of use. Other motivators included faster delivery (31.8%), improved food quality (23.9%), and healthier menu options (19.8%). These results underscore that while convenience remains a baseline driver, affordability and value are the decisive factors influencing long-term consumer engagement.

3.6. Openness to New Formats

Finally, openness to delivery formats beyond restaurant meals expanded modestly. In 2020, interest in diversification was limited and focused on app availability at local restaurants. By 2025, however, 26.8% of Canadians expressed interest in grocery delivery, 12.3% in subscription-based restaurant meals, and 7.0% in alcohol delivery. Nonetheless, more than half (55.8%) of respondents expressed no interest in exploring alternative formats, highlighting the challenge of broadening beyond core offerings.

4. Discussion

4.1. From Novelty to Maturity

The combined results of the 2020 and 2025 surveys confirm the trajectory of food delivery apps in Canada from emerging novelty to mainstream feature, but with clear signs of market maturation. In 2020, 39% of Canadians had tried a food delivery app, whereas by 2025 this had risen to 51.5%. This represents substantial growth in penetration, yet the share of regular users grew more modestly—from approximately 21% of users in certain provinces reporting weekly usage in 2020 to 27.4% of Canadians overall in 2025. This widening gap between trial and regular use underscores the transition into the later stages of Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation curve, where adoption stabilizes, and novelty-driven experimentation gives way to selective, value-driven usage.

4.2. Frequency and Consumer Segmentation

Both surveys highlight that Canadians treat food delivery apps as supplemental, rather than primary, food access channels. In 2020, weekly adoption was concentrated in Ontario and Alberta, while other provinces showed lower engagement despite higher penetration. By 2025, frequency of use had become more evenly distributed nationwide: 27.7% used apps two to three times per month, 23.7% about once per week, and 18.5% more than once per week. These findings suggest a bifurcation of the market: a majority of Canadians adopt episodic, convenience-driven patterns, while a smaller but stable heavy-user segment integrates food delivery into daily routines. As Li et al. (2020) argue, this reflects the role of food apps as “episodic conveniences,” primarily substituting for time-pressed restaurant visits rather than replacing home cooking entirely.

4.3. Barriers Across Time: The Primacy of Cost

While affordability emerged as the dominant barrier in both survey waves, its increasing importance reflects broader economic and market dynamics rather than a simple preference for lower prices. Between 2020 and 2025, food inflation, delivery fees, service charges, and tipping expectations collectively increased the perceived total cost of app-based food purchases. As consumers became more familiar with food delivery platforms, they also became more aware of the price premium associated with convenience. Consequently, the evaluation of food delivery services shifted from novelty and accessibility toward value assessment.

This finding suggests that the long-term challenge for food delivery platforms is not adoption but value justification. Consumers appear willing to pay for convenience, but only when the perceived benefits outweigh the cumulative financial costs. As markets evolve, affordability becomes increasingly important because consumers compare food delivery not only with restaurant dining but also with alternative channels such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, and meal kits. The growing prominence of cost considerations therefore reflects a more deliberate and economically rational evaluation of platform services.

4.4. Market Consolidation and Cultural Niches

Platform dynamics also shifted. In 2020, the Canadian market was more fragmented, with UberEats, SkipTheDishes, GrubHub, and Foodora all present, and more than 61% of Quebec and Ontario users engaging with multiple apps. By 2025, consolidation was evident: UberEats dominated (72.7%), followed by DoorDash (54.3%) and SkipTheDishes (54.2%). Yet cultural niches emerged, with Fantuan capturing 11.1% of users by catering to immigrant communities. This

development supports research on ethnic marketing (Peñaloza & Barnhart, 2011), which suggests that culturally embedded platforms may achieve loyalty even in markets dominated by multinational competitors.

4.5. Motivators and Future Growth

Motivators for future engagement reflect the persistent primacy of cost. In 2025, 70.2% of Canadians indicated that lower fees would increase their usage, a pattern consistent with 2020 concerns over affordability. While faster delivery (31.8%) and improved quality (23.9%) remain important, the shift from novelty to sustained adoption highlights affordability as the decisive factor. Interest in healthier options (19.8%) reflects niche opportunities, particularly among younger and wellness-oriented consumers, though not yet at scale.

4.6. Openness to New Formats

Comparison across time also reveals cautious Canadian attitudes toward diversification. In 2020, dissatisfaction often centered on app availability at local restaurants, indicating limits to consumer choice. By 2025, new models such as grocery delivery (26.8% openness), subscription-based restaurant meals (12.3%), and alcohol delivery (7%) attracted interest, yet more than half of Canadians (55.8%) expressed no interest in experimenting with any new format. This contrasts with Asian “super-app” ecosystems (Yeo et al., 2021), where integration across food, grocery, payments, and mobility drives expansion. Canadian reluctance suggests structural limits to platform diversification, rooted in entrenched consumer habits and cost concerns.

4.7. Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by suggesting that the factors driving initial adoption differ from those influencing continued use. Consistent with TAM, convenience and perceived usefulness appear to encourage trial and early adoption. However, the results indicate that as consumers gain experience with food delivery apps, economic considerations, trust, and service quality become increasingly influential. This supports extensions of TAM that incorporate perceived risk and trust as determinants of continuance behavior rather than initial adoption alone.

The findings also support Consumer Value Theory. While food delivery apps continue to provide emotional value through convenience and novelty, long-term engagement appears to be driven primarily by functional value. Affordability, transparent pricing, and service reliability consistently outweighed experiential benefits when consumers evaluated whether to continue using delivery services. This suggests that the relative importance of value dimensions changes over time, with functional value becoming more influential as novelty diminishes.

Rather than concluding that the Canadian market has reached full maturity, the results suggest that food delivery services are entering a more mature phase characterized by slower growth in regular usage and greater emphasis on retention. The data support the existence of widespread awareness and adoption but do not directly measure future growth potential. Accordingly, the findings are best interpreted as evidence of a transition from rapid adoption toward a more retention-oriented stage of market development.

4.8. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, both surveys rely on self-reported data, which are subject to recall bias and social desirability effects. Respondents may overstate or understate their frequency of use, spending, or barriers, particularly given the stigma sometimes associated with high delivery spending or tipping behaviors. Second, while both the 2020 Angus Reid/Dalhousie and the 2025 Dalhousie–Caddle surveys employed nationally representative samples with post-stratification weighting, online survey methods may underrepresent populations with limited internet access or lower digital literacy, including older Canadians and those in rural or remote areas. This is particularly relevant when examining

adoption trends, as such populations may systematically differ in their engagement with food delivery platforms.

Third, the comparability of results across time is constrained by slight differences in survey design and question framing. Although efforts were made in 2025 to align with the 2020 survey instrument for longitudinal consistency, additional modules were introduced, and some measures were phrased differently, which may influence response patterns. Fourth, the surveys capture consumer perceptions and behaviors at two specific points in time—January 2020, just prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, and August 2025, during a period of inflationary pressure and labor market adjustment. These distinct economic and social contexts limit the extent to which differences can be attributed to organic market maturation alone.

Fourth, an additional limitation relates to the observational nature of the study design. Because the analysis relies on repeated cross-sectional surveys rather than experimental or longitudinal panel data, the findings do not support causal inference. While significant associations and population-level changes are identified between 2020 and 2025, it is not possible to determine whether specific factors, such as affordability, service quality, or trust, directly caused changes in adoption or continued usage. Furthermore, the study relies entirely on self-reported behavior and attitudes rather than observed behavioral data obtained from food delivery platforms. As a result, reported usage frequencies and motivations may differ from actual purchasing behavior. Future research would benefit from integrating transaction-level platform data, loyalty program data, or digital trace measures to validate self-reported responses and provide a more robust understanding of consumer behavior.

Finally, while the study provides insights into national and regional patterns, it does not fully capture granular variation across socioeconomic or cultural subgroups beyond broad demographic categories. For example, while the presence of culturally targeted platforms such as Fantuan was noted in 2025, deeper qualitative or mixed-methods research would be required to understand how ethnicity, immigration status, and community networks influence platform adoption and loyalty. Similarly, the data cannot capture restaurant perspectives or supply-side dynamics, which are crucial for understanding long-term platform sustainability.

5. Conclusion

This study provides an updated assessment of food delivery app adoption and consumer engagement in Canada, using new survey data collected in August 2025. The results confirm that food delivery apps have achieved widespread visibility, with more than half of Canadians having tried them. However, the proportion of active users has plateaued, and sustained use is concentrated among a smaller segment of price-sensitive, convenience-driven consumers. Frequency of use remains modest for most, with only a minority relying on delivery as a routine or essential channel.

The findings reinforce key themes in the literature. Consistent with global studies, affordability emerges as the single most important determinant of engagement, overshadowing convenience and variety once the novelty of adoption wears off. Concerns over food quality and reliability remain persistent, limiting the sector's ability to convert trial into long-term loyalty. At the same time, Canada's market structure reflects both consolidation—dominated by UberEats, DoorDash, and SkipTheDishes—and diversification, with culturally targeted platforms like Fantuan highlighting opportunities for niche marketing.

This study contributes to the growing literature on digital food consumption by providing one of the first comparative longitudinal analyses of food delivery app adoption and engagement in Canada. By integrating the Technology Acceptance Model and Consumer Value Theory, the findings demonstrate that the factors driving initial adoption differ from those sustaining continued use. While convenience and perceived usefulness encourage trial, long-term engagement is increasingly shaped by affordability, service quality, and trust.

The results suggest that food delivery apps have become an established component of the Canadian food landscape, but continued engagement remains constrained by consumers'

assessment of value. As digital food platforms evolve, understanding the transition from adoption to retention will be increasingly important for both researchers and industry practitioners. Future research should examine these dynamics using behavioral and transaction-level data to better understand how consumer expectations and platform strategies evolve over time.

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