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Exploring Brand Attachment in Food Delivery Apps: Beyond Functional Values

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Master in Marketing

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Resumo

A crescente utilização de aplicações de entrega de comida tem transformado o comportamento dos consumidores, embora a maioria dos estudos existentes continue a dar primazia a dimensões funcionais como rapidez, preço e usabilidade. Este estudo procura colmatar essa lacuna, ao investigar o papel do valor experiencial ao longo da jornada do consumidor. O seu objetivo é compreender de que forma elementos emocionais, simbólicos e estéticos influenciam as perceções, preferências e comportamentos dos utilizadores em relação às plataformas de entrega de comida. A investigação adota uma metodologia qualitativa baseada em entrevistas semiestruturadas, permitindo uma análise aprofundada das experiências dos consumidores nas fases de pré-compra, compra e pós-compra. Através de uma análise temática, são identificados três tipos de valor que operam em diferentes momentos da jornada: o valor de base permite a adoção da plataforma, o valor diferenciador influencia a preferência e a mudança de aplicação, e o valor relacional promove a lealdade e a intenção de reutilização. Estes resultados são integrados num modelo conceptual revisto que demonstra como o valor experiencial interage com os aspetos funcionais na formação do comportamento digital dos consumidores. A originalidade deste estudo reside na aplicação da teoria do valor experiencial ao contexto das aplicações de entrega de comida, oferecendo um entendimento mais completo da fidelização em mercados caracterizados pela comoditização e baixos custos de mudança. O estudo contribui para o avanço teórico e fornece orientações práticas para o design de serviços e estratégias de plataforma.

Palavras-chave: Aplicações de entrega de comida; Jornada do consumidor; Valor experiencial; Comportamento do consumidor digital; Fidelização à marca; Mudança de plataforma

Classificação JEL: M31 – Marketing, L81 – Retail and E-commerce

Abstract

The growing ubiquity of food delivery applications has transformed consumer behaviour, yet most research continues to prioritise functional dimensions such as speed, price, and usability. This study addresses the need to understand the role of experiential value across the entire customer journey. Its objective is to investigate how emotional, symbolic, and aesthetic elements influence consumers' perceptions, preferences, and behavioural outcomes when engaging with food delivery platforms. The research adopts a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, enabling a rich exploration of user experiences across the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies three types of value operating at different points in the journey: threshold value enables platform adoption, differentiating value influences switching and preference formation, and attachment-building value supports brand loyalty and reuse intention. These findings are integrated into a revised conceptual model that demonstrates how experiential value interacts with functional aspects to shape digital consumer behaviour over time. The originality of this study lies in its application of experiential value theory to the context of food delivery apps, providing a more comprehensive understanding of platform loyalty in markets characterised by commoditisation and low switching costs. It offers both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for service design and platform strategy.

Keywords: Food delivery apps; Customer Journey; Experiential value; Digital consumer behaviour; Brand loyalty; Platform switching

JEL Classification: M31 – Marketing, L81 – Retail and E-commerce

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Abbreviations List

CDJ	Consumer Decision Journey
CROI	Consumer return on investment
ECM	Expectation-Confirmation Model
EVS	Experiential Value Scale
FDA	Food Delivery App
ISS	Information Systems Success Model
OFD	Online Food Delivery
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TCV	Theory of Consumption Values
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
UTAUT2	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2

1. Introduction

The widespread adoption of food delivery applications (FDAs) has fundamentally reshaped consumer behaviour in the foodservice sector. Platforms such as Uber Eats, Glovo, and Bolt Food have embedded themselves into the routines of urban consumers, offering unprecedented convenience, speed, and variety. Global revenues in the online food delivery sector surpassed $1.20 trillion in 2024 and are expected to grow to over 2.5 billion active users by 2029 (Statista, 2024). This growth is underpinned by rising smartphone penetration, the expansion of the gig economy, and consumer preferences that increasingly favour low-effort, time-efficient consumption experiences (Ray et al., 2019; Yeo et al., 2017).

Yet, despite this expansion, FDAs face a critical paradox: although user acquisition continues to rise, user loyalty remains low. Research suggests that most consumers operate multiple FDA apps simultaneously and exhibit fluid, transactional behaviours characterised by low emotional attachment and frequent switching (Kapoor & Vij, 2018; Ray et al., 2019). In this context, competition is often reduced to price incentives, delivery speed, and service availability, features that are easily replicable across platforms. As functional value becomes commodified, platforms struggle to create sustainable differentiation or long-term user engagement.

The academic literature has largely mirrored this functional orientation. Existing studies have focused predominantly on utilitarian drivers of FDA usage, such as convenience, affordability, and delivery speed (Ray et al., 2019; Yeo et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2020). While these factors undoubtedly shape initial engagement, they do not fully account for the emotional or symbolic aspects of service consumption, particularly in digital environments where user-brand interaction is increasingly mediated by interface design, tone, and perceived care (Gallarza et al., 2020; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Meanwhile, a parallel stream of literature in experiential marketing has demonstrated that consumers derive value not only from the functional benefits of a service but also from its capacity to deliver affective, aesthetic, and symbolic experiences (Gentile et al., 2007; Mathwick et al., 2001; Verhoef et al., 2009). These dimensions often referred to as experiential value have been shown to influence consumer satisfaction, trust, and brand attachment across industries such as retail, tourism, and hospitality. However, in the context of FDAs, the experiential dimensions of the service encounter remain relatively underexplored, especially in relation to their role in shaping switching behaviour and long-term loyalty.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how consumers perceive and evaluate experiential value throughout the customer journey with FDAs. It builds on recent calls to reconceptualise digital service interactions not simply as transactions, but as experiences that unfold over time and across multiple touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Rather than

isolating functional attributes, the study adopts a holistic view of the customer journey encompassing pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages and explores how emotional, aesthetic, and symbolic cues influence consumer perceptions, expectations, and outcomes at each stage.

In doing so, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital loyalty formation. It proposes that experiential value can function as a key differentiator and loyalty mechanism in markets where functional attributes are standardised. Specifically, the study investigates how different types of value threshold, differentiating, and attachment-building operate across the customer journey to shape decisions about whether to continue using or switch between FDAs.

By exploring this intersection between consumer psychology, service design, and digital experience, the study offers insights with both theoretical and practical implications. It challenges traditional assumptions about loyalty in app-based environments and reframes digital service success not as a matter of optimisation, but as a function of emotional resonance and experiential coherence.

1.1. Research Problem

Despite the rapid expansion of FDAs in recent years, the sector is increasingly characterised by weak consumer loyalty and high platform substitutability. Although usage rates continue to rise globally, the competitive landscape has become defined by marginal differences in price, speed, and functional efficiency—factors that are easily replicated across platforms. As a result, most consumers engage with FDAs in a highly transactional manner, switching between services based on short-term utility rather than sustained brand preference or emotional attachment (Ray et al., 2019; Yeo et al., 2017).

This phenomenon is mirrored in the academic literature, where research has predominantly focused on functional drivers of app usage such as affordability, ease of navigation, and delivery reliability (Lin et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2017). While such utilitarian features undoubtedly play a foundational role in platform adoption, they offer limited explanatory power in understanding differentiation and long-term engagement in increasingly commodified markets. In contrast, emerging literature in consumer experience and service design has emphasised the importance of experiential value—encompassing emotional, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions—as a critical determinant of satisfaction, loyalty, and brand attachment in digital contexts (Gallarza et al., 2020; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Mathwick et al., 2001).

However, this experiential perspective remains underdeveloped within the context of FDAs. Specifically, little is known about how consumers construct meaning across the

different stages of the food delivery journey, or how non-functional value influences their evaluations, platform preferences, and behavioural intentions. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to investigate the role of experiential value across the customer journey, with particular attention to how it may shape platform switching, reuse intention, and the development of emotional attachment in digitally mediated service environments.

To address this problem, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do consumers perceive and describe their experiences when using FDAs across the customer journey? (2) What role do experiential values play in shaping consumer experience and evaluation of FDAs? (3) How does the integration of experiential values influence the decision to continue using or switch FDAs during the journey? (4) Under what conditions can these enhanced experiences lead to outcomes such as reuse intention and brand attachment?

In response to the above questions, the study pursues the following objectives:

- To understand how consumers experience food delivery applications across the main phases of the customer journey.
- To investigate how experiential value, in contrast to functional or app-specific features, influences consumer perceptions and preferences.
- To explore whether and how experiential value contributes to consumer decisions to remain with or switch between apps.
- To examine whether enhanced experiential features foster reuse intention or even brand attachment over time.

1.2. Relevance and Contribution

This research contributes to both theoretical and managerial domains. From a theoretical perspective, it extends the experiential value literature by applying it to the under-studied domain of FDAs. It bridges functional and symbolic paradigms by proposing a revised conceptual model of the digital customer journey that incorporates three value layers: threshold, differentiating, and attachment-building. In doing so, it contributes to a more psychologically grounded understanding of platform switching, trust, and loyalty in digital contexts.

From a managerial perspective, the findings provide actionable insights for platforms seeking to improve customer retention in a hypercompetitive market. The study demonstrates that emotional tone, symbolic gestures, and coherent post-purchase interactions significantly impact perceived care and consumer satisfaction. As user acquisition costs rise and market growth slows, understanding the experiential drivers of loyalty becomes a strategic imperative.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

This thesis is organised into six chapters: Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on food delivery platforms, consumer decision-making, experiential value, and customer journey frameworks; Chapter 3 presents the conceptual model and defines the key constructs guiding the research; Chapter 4 outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical procedures; Chapter 5 presents the findings, organised thematically across the stages of the customer journey; Chapter 6 discusses the results in relation to the research questions, proposes a revised model, and outlines theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Decision-Making process

The consumer decision-making process has historically been represented through linear and rational models. One of the most established frameworks is the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (EBM) model (Engel et al., 1968), which outlines five sequential stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. This model reflects a deliberate, goal-directed decision-making process and has remained foundational in consumer behaviour theory (Howard and Sheth, 1969; Karimi et al., 2015; Pires et al., 2022).

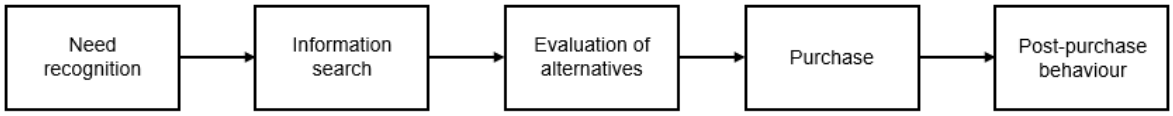


Figure 2.1.1: The traditional model of purchase decision-making process

Source: (Engel et al., 1968)

Despite its enduring influence, the EBM model has been increasingly criticised for its limited applicability in digital and mobile commerce environments. Online consumer behaviour often deviates from a strict sequence of steps and instead exhibits a non-linear, recursive pattern characterized by continuous evaluation and dynamic interaction (Karimi et al., 2015; 2018). Furthermore, decisions in digital platforms are frequently made under bounded rationality and influenced by heuristics, as highlighted by Tversky and Kahneman (1974).

In response to these evolving behaviours, Court et al. (2009) proposed the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ) (Figure 2.1.2), a revised framework that challenges the traditional "purchase funnel" model. Rather than assuming a narrowing of options through a fixed progression, the CDJ recognizes that consumers frequently expand and contract their consideration sets, re-evaluate alternatives multiple times, and are influenced by touchpoints beyond the brand's control, such as user reviews and social media.

The CDJ consists of four key stages: the initial consideration set, active evaluation, moment of purchase, and post-purchase experience. A critical innovation in this model is the introduction of the "loyalty loop," which captures the potential for consumers to bypass active evaluation altogether in future decisions if the post-purchase experience was sufficiently positive to generate brand loyalty.

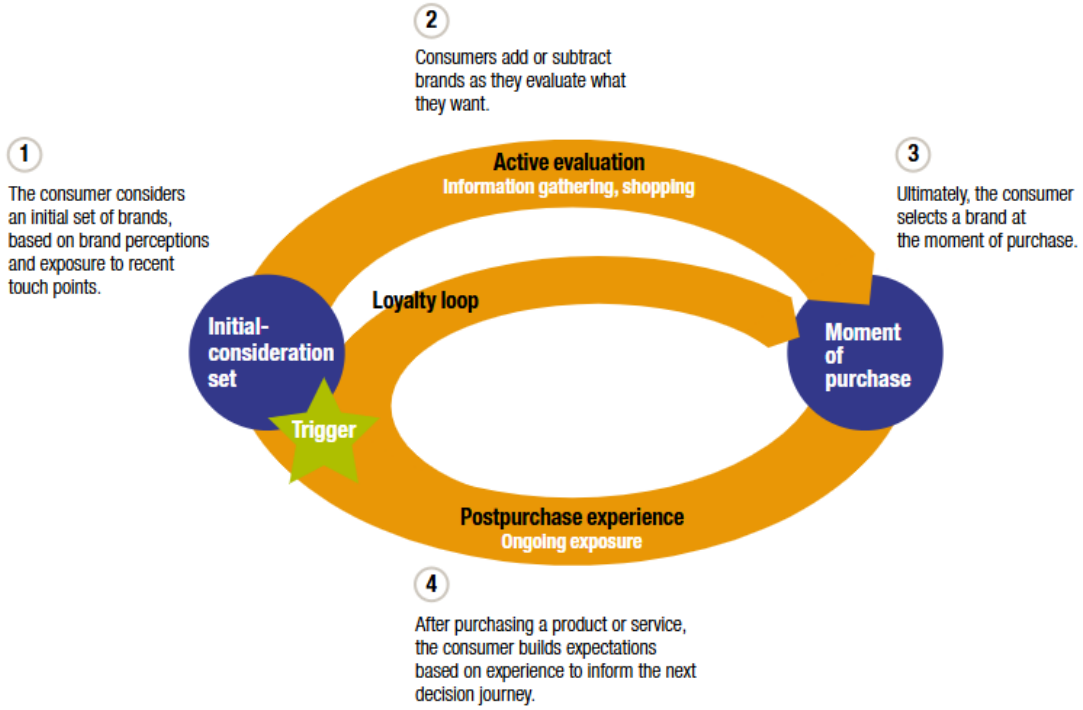


Figure 2.1.2: Consumer Decision Journey Model

Source: (Court et al., 2009)

This model (Figure 2.1.2) reflects the fluid nature of decision-making in digital contexts and highlights the ongoing role of experience, feedback, and emotional response in shaping future behaviour. These dynamics are especially relevant in app-based ecosystems such as FDAs, where functional parity among competitors makes it difficult for brands to differentiate on purely rational attributes such as price or speed.

As Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggest, consumer decision-making increasingly incorporates experiential, symbolic, and hedonic elements. In mobile app environments, the interface design, personalisation, and the perceived pleasure of interaction can significantly shape brand perceptions and influence reuse intentions.

Given these considerations, the present research adopts the CDJ model proposed by Court et al. (2009) as the theoretical foundation for analysing user behaviour in FDAs. However, in light of the specific characteristics of food delivery platforms, this model was adapted to incorporate experiential values and app-specific contextual variables. The adapted version of the CDJ will be introduced in Chapter 3 as the conceptual framework of this study.

2.2. App-specific values

Consumer decision-making in the context of FDAs is influenced by a set of platform-specific values that go beyond basic functionality. These values have been repeatedly identified as key drivers of behavioural intention, reuse, and loyalty. To analyse these dynamics, several

theoretical models have been applied, including the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), the Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and the Information Systems Success Model (ISS). Although these frameworks were not originally developed for the food delivery domain, they have been adapted to capture app-specific determinants of user behaviour in digital and mobile environments (Shankar et al., 2024; Zhao and Bacao, 2020).

Among the most consistently supported predictors are performance expectancy and effort expectancy, concepts aligned with perceived usefulness and ease of use in TAM based studies. These constructs reflect users' expectations that an application will help them complete their tasks efficiently and with minimal cognitive effort. Both have shown strong associations with behavioural intention across different consumer technology contexts. For instance, Abed (2023) demonstrates that effort expectancy can directly influence performance expectancy, while Troise et al. (2020) and Wen et al. (2021) confirm their predictive power in relation to app usage and reuse.

Social influence, hedonic motivation, and habit have also emerged as relevant factors. These elements are particularly important in the case of FDAs, where consumption behaviour is often impulsive, emotionally driven, and subject to peer influence. The work of Wen et al. (2021) and Abed (2023) highlights that these variables are especially influential among users with high digital fluency and a preference for seamless user experiences. Furthermore, habitual usage has been linked to continued engagement, with Kurniawan et al. (2023) showing that repeated exposure and platform familiarity reduce cognitive load and increase reuse intention.

To enhance explanatory power, some studies have incorporated economic factors. Price value, defined as the perceived trade-off between what one gives and what one receives, is frequently cited as a significant determinant of user intention (Chotigo and Kadono, 2021; Teo et al., 2024). Complementing this, price saving orientation captures consumer responsiveness to promotions and discounts, which are common stimuli in FDA marketing strategies. Empirical evidence from Ramos (2021) and Kurniawan et al. (2023) confirms that price sensitivity affects both initial adoption and continued use.

Trust also plays a fundamental role in shaping app evaluations. This includes trust in personal data protection, payment security, food quality, delivery reliability, and responsiveness in problem resolution. Abed (2023) and Nguyen et al. (2023) both identify trust as a direct antecedent of behavioural intention, while also highlighting its mediating role in satisfaction and loyalty outcomes. In the highly competitive landscape of FDAs, trust is not only essential to retain users but also to encourage brand advocacy.

Service quality, system quality, and information quality (key constructs in the ECM and ISS frameworks) further refine our understanding of post-adoption behaviour. Nguyen et al. (2023) show that interface responsiveness, clarity of menu information, and delivery accuracy contribute to perceived quality and increase satisfaction. These findings are echoed by Ahmad et al. (2025), who confirm that both system and service dimensions predict user satisfaction and reuse. Hoyos-Vallejo et al. (2023) additionally note that during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, expectations regarding service speed, hygiene protocols, and app reliability have become even more pronounced.

Beyond technology-focused models, the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991) has been increasingly applied to digital services. It introduces five value dimensions: functional, emotional, social, epistemic, and conditional. Sari et al. (2025) demonstrate that in the case of FDAs, functional and social values are particularly influential. Similarly, Chakraborty and Dash (2023) show that epistemic and emotional values, such as the novelty of the experience or its ability to evoke positive emotions, significantly shape behavioural intentions. These findings suggest that consumer choice in FDAs is not merely rational or utilitarian but deeply shaped by context, mood, and perceived experience.

A growing body of literature also addresses emerging value dimensions linked to sustainability and ethics. Prisco et al. (2024) and Dangelico et al. (2024) introduce constructs such as environmental concern, product familiarity, and perceived consumer effectiveness. These variables have been integrated into extended TPB models, showing positive correlations with behavioural intention, particularly in relation to sustainable consumption. In the context of FDAs, Tiutiu et al. (2025) emphasise that interface design, smoothness of the journey, and fairness in price transparency also contribute to users' perceptions of ethical alignment.

Finally, brand-related outcomes are increasingly linked to app-level factors. Teo et al. (2024) identify health consciousness, perceived food quality, convenience, and price value as key antecedents of satisfaction and brand loyalty. Ahmad et al. (2025) further show that system and self-service quality contribute significantly to reuse intention, particularly in the presence of high perceived service control and reliability.

Table 2.2.1: App value dimensions in FDAs identified in prior studies

Value dimension	Theoretical model(s)	Supporting references
Performance Expectancy	TAM, UTAUT2	Abed (2023); Troise et al. (2020); Wen et al. (2021)
Effort Expectancy	TAM, UTAUT2	Abed (2023); Wen et al. (2021)
Social Influence	UTAUT2	Abed (2023); Wen et al. (2021)
Hedonic Motivation	UTAUT2	Abed (2023); Wen et al. (2021)
Habit	UTAUT2, ECM	Abed (2023); Kurniawan et al. (2023)
Trust	ECM, ISS	Abed (2023); Nguyen et al. (2023)
Price Value	TAM Extensions	Chotigo and Kadono (2021); Siew Chein Teo et al. (2024)
Price Saving orientation	TAM Extensions	Kurniawan et al. (2023); Ramos (2021)
Application Quality	ISS, ECM	Chotigo and Kadono (2021); Hoyos-Vallejo et al. (2023)
Service and System Quality	ECM, ISS	Nguyen et al. (2023); Ahmad et al. (2025)
Food and Beverage Quality	Domain specific	Ramos (2021); Ahmad et al. (2025)
Functional, Social, Epistemic	TCV	Sari et al. (2025); Chakraborty and Dash (2023)
Emotional and Conditional	TCV	Chakraborty and Dash (2023)
Sustainability Values	Extended TPB	Prisco et al. (2024); Dangelico et al. (2024)
Interface and User Journey	TPB Extensions	Tiutiu et al. (2025)
Brand Loyalty and Advocacy	Mixed methods (outcome)	Siew Chein Teo et al. (2024); Ahmad et al. (2025)

Source: Own elaboration

2.3. Experiential Values

The concept of experiential value has emerged as a critical construct in understanding consumer behaviour in hedonic and digital service contexts. Initially developed in the fields of consumer behaviour and retail marketing, experiential value refers to the perceptions derived from direct or indirect interactions with a product, service, or environment that are intrinsically rewarding, sensorially rich, or emotionally engaging. This perspective departs from utilitarian and functional paradigms, positioning consumption as a form of experience and symbolic interaction (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Mathwick et al., 2001).

Mathwick et al. (2001) formalised the experiential value construct through the development of the Experiential Value Scale (EVS), identifying four core dimensions: aesthetics, playfulness, service excellence, and consumer return on investment (CROI). These dimensions capture both extrinsic (functional and relational) and intrinsic (emotional and symbolic) drivers of value. Aesthetic value, for instance, encompasses visual appeal and design harmony, while playfulness relates to enjoyment, entertainment, and the sense of escape during the service encounter. Service excellence reflects perceptions of professionalism and responsiveness, and CROI assesses perceived efficiency, time savings,

and resource optimisation. This multidimensional view has since served as a foundation for a variety of experiential marketing studies across retail, hospitality, and digital environments (Gallarza et al., 2020; Wu and Liang, 2009).

In mobile and online service contexts, experiential value becomes particularly salient due to the absence of physical environments and the increasing role of user interface design, interactivity, and personalisation. Several studies have confirmed that elements such as aesthetics, enjoyment, and emotional engagement contribute significantly to behavioural intention, satisfaction, and loyalty within mobile app ecosystems (Maghnati and Ling, 2013; Pang, 2024; Rejón-Guardia, 2024). In the specific case of FDAs, these experiential elements are accentuated by the immediacy and convenience of the service, as well as by gamified features such as live tracking, delivery animations, and personalised recommendations (Gavilan et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2023).

Aesthetic value, in particular, has gained relevance in digital contexts, where interface design and visual fluency directly shape user engagement. Rejón-Guardia (2024) demonstrates that visual stimuli within apps influence perceptions of quality and trust, even in the absence of physical cues. Similarly, Pang (2024) shows that the interplay between experiential and functional value moderates the relationship between app interactivity and loyalty, underscoring the importance of sensorial and affective features in sustaining digital engagement.

In addition to hedonic enjoyment and aesthetic appeal, relational and social value dimensions are frequently explored in recent literature. These include feelings of connectedness, brand attachment, and emotional resonance triggered by the digital service journey. Hu et al. (2023) and Lanfranchi et al. (2025) emphasise that experiential value in FDAs is often co-created through seamless navigation, smooth transitions, and personalised content, which contribute to user satisfaction and reuse intention. These findings are reinforced by studies applying ECM and ISS, which confirm that experiential quality influences trust, satisfaction, and behavioural outcomes such as loyalty and word-of-mouth (Ahmad et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2023).

A notable evolution in the experiential value literature is the integration of value constructs across psychological, emotional, and symbolic domains. Xancó-Grau et al. (2025) highlight the relevance of narrative experiences, symbolic consumption, and emotional involvement in experiential marketing, pointing to the need for platforms to foster more than just convenience. This shift reflects a broader movement toward affective and immersive design strategies in digital commerce and service delivery.

Ultimately, experiential value is not merely a complementary factor in digital consumer behaviour but a central driver of post-adoption dynamics. In the highly competitive

environment of FDAs, where switching costs are low and consumer expectations are shaped by immediacy and emotional gratification, platforms that deliver compelling experiences are more likely to achieve customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and sustained engagement (Li and Zhao, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023).

2.4. Customer Journey

The customer journey encompasses the full set of experiences and interactions a consumer has with a service provider, spanning from initial need recognition to post-purchase behaviours (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the context of FDAs, this journey is marked by fast-paced decision-making, digital engagement, and real-time service fulfilment. As illustrated in Figure 2.4.1, the customer journey is typically structured across three main stages: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. Each stage is shaped by specific behaviours and distinct touchpoints, which may be brand-owned, partner -owned, customer-owned, or socially and externally driven. The model presented by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) serves as the conceptual foundation for the analysis developed in the following subsections. While the original model includes three stages, this study introduces the delivery encounter as a distinct phase within the journey, given its operational and emotional importance in the context of FDAs.

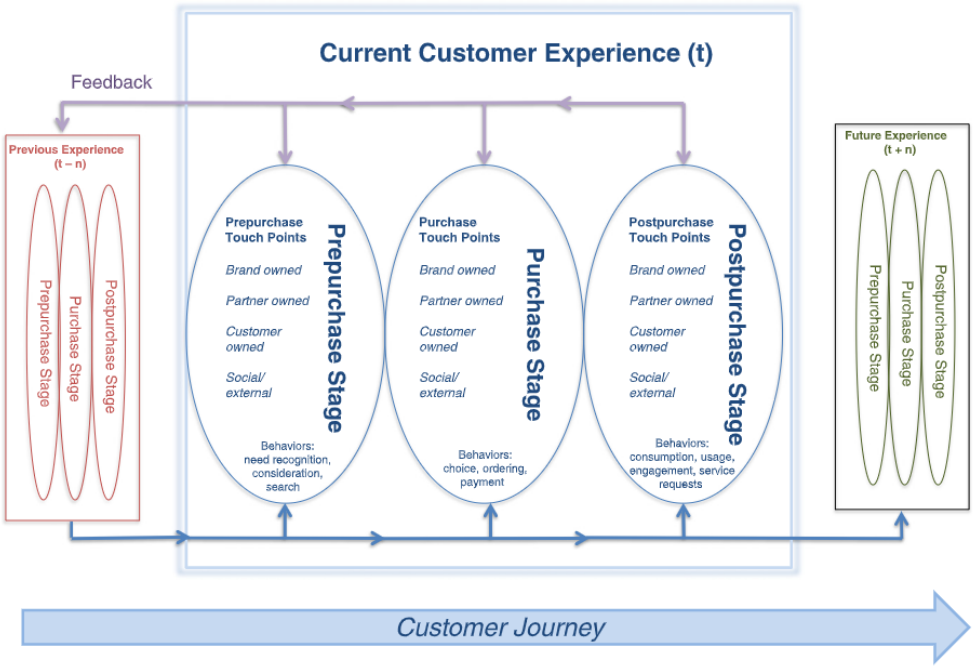


Figure 2.4.1: Stages and touchpoints of the Customer Journey

Source: Lemon and Verhoef, 2016

2.4.1. Pre-purchase stage

The pre-purchase phase involves need recognition, information search, and brand evaluation (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In FDAs, this is typically triggered by situational factors such as time constraints, convenience, or craving, and unfolds through customer interactions with app interfaces, reviews, social media, and previous experiences. It is in this stage that consumers form initial impressions, assess brand value propositions, and evaluate the perceived quality and reliability of a service (Rita et al., 2022).

Theoretical models such as the practice-based approach (Mele et al., 2024) and phygital journey frameworks (Koronaki et al., 2023) emphasise how physical, digital, and social interactions shape consumers' early expectations. These experiences are heavily influenced by external factors such as user-generated content, peer recommendations, and promotional offers (Schröder et al., 2025). Importantly, the pre-purchase stage is also where brand-owned and partner-owned touchpoints, such as app store presence, advertisements, and prior customer feedback, play a central role in influencing perceived credibility and usability (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2019).

From a value co-creation perspective, the consumer is not a passive recipient of information, but an active participant who selectively engages with content and chooses brands based on prior experience, emotion, and social context (Tueanrat et al., 2021). Emotional and experiential elements such as aesthetics, trust signals, and past satisfaction contribute to shaping expectations that carry over into subsequent journey stages.

2.4.2. Purchase stage

The purchase stage is characterised by decision-making and transactional behaviors, including restaurant selection, menu navigation, and payment processing. In FDAs, this stage is strongly mediated by interface usability, personalisation algorithms, and ease of ordering (Reitsamer & Becker, 2024; Bonfanti et al., 2023). As confirmed by Hamilton et al. (2021), touchpoints during this stage must meet heightened expectations for efficiency, simplicity, and responsiveness.

This phase also marks a shift from deliberation to action, often occurring under time pressure or habitual conditions. Deep learning and data-driven interfaces increasingly shape the journey at this point, optimising product visibility and guiding user choices based on behavioural predictions (Wang, 2024). Consequently, the purchase phase reflects a hybrid of consumer autonomy and platform nudging, where interface design becomes a determinant of perceived control and satisfaction.

In line with Lemon and Verhoef's framework, all four touchpoint types remain relevant: brand-owned (app interface), customer-owned (past preferences), partner-owned (restaurant

brand), and social (real-time reviews). The frictionless integration of these touchpoints is key to maintaining engagement and minimising cognitive effort.

2.4.3. Delivery encounter

While often underexplored in traditional customer journey models, the delivery encounter is a central and emotionally charged phase in FDAs. This stage bridges the digital transaction with the physical fulfilment of service, often shaping the overall perception of quality and trust. It involves waiting time, order accuracy, delivery staff interaction, packaging, and real-time tracking features (Rita et al., 2022).

Touchpoints here are predominantly brand- or partner-owned but heavily influenced by customer expectations and previous experience. Delays, errors, or negative delivery interactions can significantly degrade customer satisfaction, regardless of a smooth in-app experience (Mele et al., 2024). The presence of gamified elements like tracking animations or estimated delivery time updates has been shown to reduce perceived waiting time and mitigate anxiety, reinforcing emotional and experiential value (Vo-Thanh et al., 2022).

This stage is also where service failures are most visible, requiring platforms to manage expectations actively and offer responsive customer service mechanisms. Emotional dissonance can arise when delivery quality does not meet expectations formed in the earlier stages (Anas et al., 2023), making this moment critical in shaping long-term satisfaction and reuse intention.

2.4.4. Post-purchase stage

The post-purchase stage encompasses all experiences following the transaction, including product consumption, app feedback, customer support, and potential advocacy behaviours. In FDAs, this phase is often marked by requests for reviews, loyalty point allocation, and push notifications encouraging repeat purchases.

Studies have shown that the quality of the post purchase experience has a direct impact on brand loyalty, emotional attachment, and word-of-mouth intentions (Goyal & Deshwal, 2022). Moreover, as Lemon and Verhoef (2016) note, post purchase touchpoints create a feedback loop that influences future pre-purchase expectations. Vo-Thanh et al. (2022) argue that customer journey innovativeness at this stage, such as gamified feedback requests, loyalty integration, or personalised post-purchase content, can strengthen user engagement and brand relationship quality.

In this final phase, user-generated content and peer evaluations become new social touchpoints that reinforce or reshape perceptions, further influencing future consumer

behaviour (Schröder et al., 2025). Emotional closure, brand consistency, and responsive service recovery are essential for turning satisfied users into loyal advocates.

The customer journey within FDAs is nonlinear and emotionally dense, combining functional expectations with experiential value creation. Each stage (pre-purchase, purchase, delivery, and post-purchase) activates different touchpoints that influence user satisfaction, trust, and reuse intention. While earlier stages shape expectations, it is the delivery and post-purchase experiences that often determine emotional response and long-term loyalty.

2.5. From reuse intention to brand attachment

This study explores whether the integration of experiential values into the customer journey of FDAs influences consumers' platform preferences. In increasingly competitive digital environments, where functional parity across platforms is common, this research investigates the potential role of experiential value in shaping consumer choice. Experiential value, as defined in the literature, refers to dimensions that improve the overall customer experience by generating enjoyment, immersion, and meaningful interaction. These experiences go beyond efficiency and utility to stimulate emotional engagement, identity relevance, and satisfaction.

In this context, reuse intention is not treated as an isolated behavioural outcome but as a potential consequence of repeated app selection based on a more rewarding experiential quality. When users perceive that one application provides a more satisfying and emotionally engaging experience, they may be more inclined to choose it again. Over time, this behaviour may reinforce both evaluative judgments and affective bonds, thereby creating conditions for brand attachment to emerge.

Brand attachment refers to the strength of the emotional connection a consumer forms with a brand. It involves cognitive and affective dimensions such as brand-self connection and brand prominence, which reflect the extent to which the brand becomes personally significant (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). In the digital context, this attachment is believed to be influenced not only by consistent functional performance, but also by the quality of experiential value delivered throughout the customer journey. Some studies suggest that consumers may be more likely to develop attachment when the brand experience is emotionally rewarding, aesthetically engaging, or socially meaningful (Liu et al., 2020; Sampa Anupurba Pahi et al., 2024).

Brand attachment has been associated with a range of post-adoption behaviours, including continuance intention, repurchase, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty (Li & Fang, 2019; Tran et al., 2020). In app-based services, it may also contribute to emotional commitment and sustained platform preference (Srivastava & Malhotra, 2024). Furthermore, higher levels of attachment have been linked to greater tolerance for service failures, as users

may be more willing to defend the brand or overlook isolated negative experiences (AlFraihat et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2024).

The emotional relevance of brand attachment also has implications for user well-being. Some research suggests that in digital service contexts, the loss of attachment due to negative experiences can diminish perceived hedonic well-being (Sampa Anupurba Pahi et al., 2024). This highlights the potential importance of designing customer journeys that are not only functionally effective but also emotionally resonant.

3. Conceptual Model

In qualitative research, conceptual models serve as powerful tools to represent the researcher's line of reasoning, offering a structured way to articulate assumptions, research focus, and theoretical relationships (Lim, 2024; Yao et al., 2025). This chapter introduces the conceptual model developed to support the interpretive analysis of this study. Drawing from the literature on customer decision-making, platform loyalty, and value perception in mobile applications, the model is intended not as a predictive tool, but as an analytical lens to explore how experiential integrated with app-specific values may influence consumer behaviour across the food delivery customer journey. Its purpose is to structure the qualitative investigation, helping to identify how different forms of value are perceived at various stages, and how these perceptions may shape continued platform use or switching behaviour.

The model builds on key insights from the previous chapter. Although app-specific values such as functionality, usability, or responsiveness remain essential to ensuring basic performance (Chotigo & Kadono, 2021; Troise et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2021), they are increasingly perceived as equal across platforms (Nguyen et al., 2023; Ramos, 2021). When functional parity dominates the market, consumers often base their decisions on short-term incentives like discounts, availability, or convenience, resulting in frequent switching between applications (Meena & Kumar, 2022; Reitsamer & Becker, 2024; Rita et al., 2022). This pattern represents what can be considered the current behavioural norm in the digital food delivery market.

However, the literature suggests that experiential value, defined as the emotional, symbolic, relational, and aesthetic aspects of the service experience, may offer a distinct and underexplored pathway to sustained platform engagement (Gallarza et al., 2020; Mathwick et al., 2001; Rejón-Guardia, 2024). The model therefore proposes an alternative journey in which experiential value is not only present but embedded consistently throughout the user's interaction with the platform. This alternative path forms the core focus of the study. It aims to understand whether a richer and more emotionally resonant user experience can foster reuse intention and, eventually, brand attachment (Liu et al., 2020; Srivastava & Malhotra, 2024; Tran et al., 2020).

The model is structured around four stages of the customer journey: pre-purchase, purchase, delivery encounter, and post-purchase (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Tueanrat et al., 2021). Each stage is framed as a decision point, where the user may choose to either continue using the platform or switch to an alternative. These decision nodes are not only functional checkpoints, but also moments of emotional and symbolic reflection. In the current landscape, the tendency to switch is often linked to temporary functional advantages, while loyalty is rare and usually contingent on immediate satisfaction (Koronaki et al., 2023; Schröder et al., 2025).

In contrast, the model suggests that when experiential value is perceived consistently across the journey, the user is more likely to continue with the same platform, leading over time to a stronger emotional bond (Pang, 2024; Sun et al., 2024).

This is visually represented through two contrasting trajectories (Figure 3.1). The top path represents the current dominant user behaviour, marked by frequent switching due to functional parity among platforms. It leads to a cycle of platform hopping, where reuse is limited and brand connection remains weak (Anas et al., 2023; Goyal & Deshwal, 2022). The bottom path reflects the investigated scenario, in which the integration of experiential values across the journey leads to sustained use, reuse intention, and potential brand attachment. As continuity increases, so does the opportunity for attachment to develop (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005).

Brand attachment, as conceptualised in the literature, emerges from repeated, positive, and emotionally significant experiences with a service or platform (AlFraihat et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2014). In mobile applications, where interactions are frequent and often intimate, the potential for attachment is strong but under-researched (Li and Fang, 2019; Sampa Anupurba Pahi et al., 2024). This model proposes that experiential value may be a key mechanism in fostering such attachment, particularly when functional value is no longer sufficient to differentiate between platforms

The model is intentionally abstract at this stage. Specific experiential and app-specific values have not yet been assigned to each phase. These will be identified through qualitative analysis and integrated into the visual model in the results chapter. In this way, the model serves as both a theoretical synthesis and a flexible framework for empirical exploration.

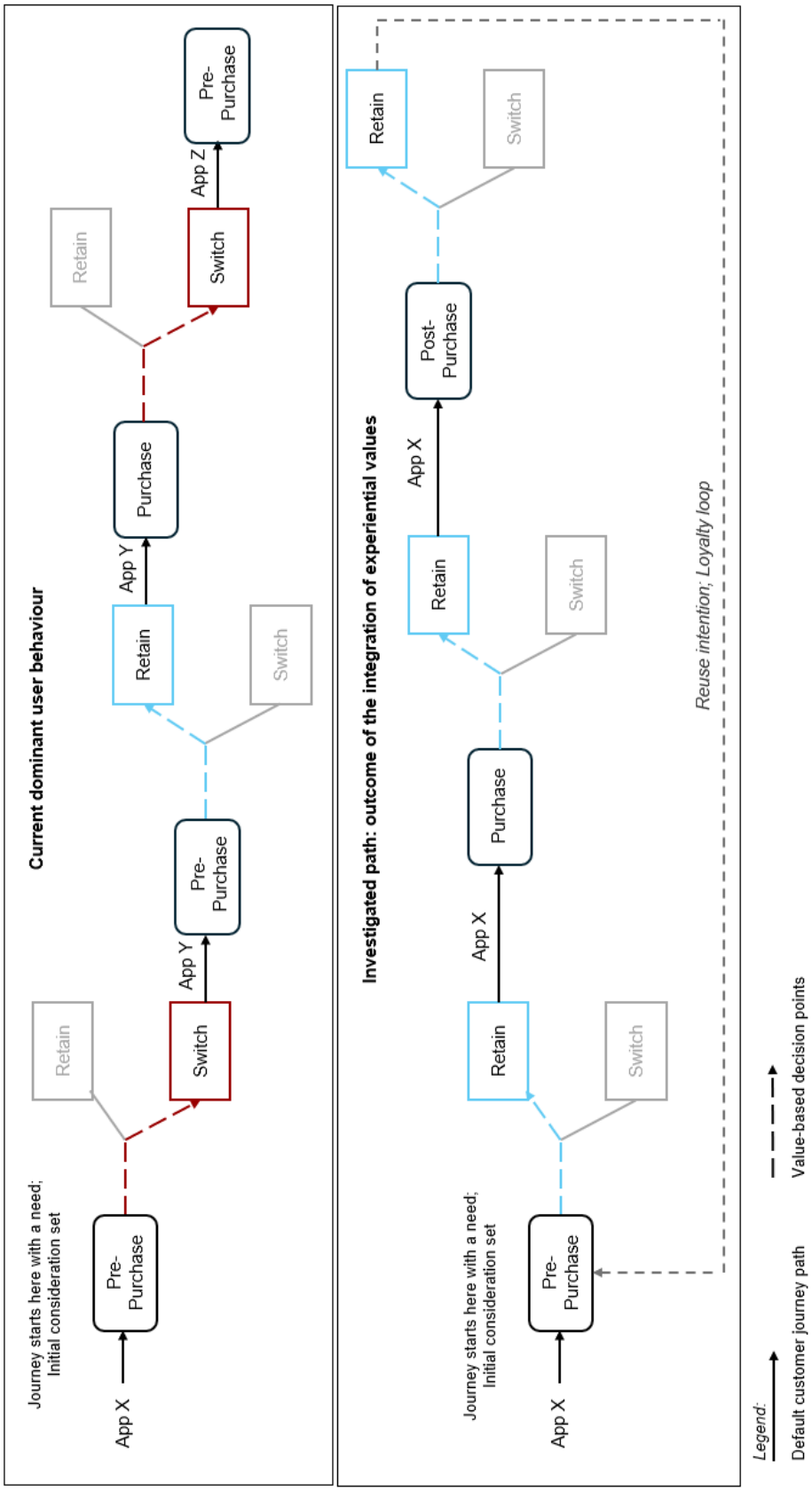


Figure 3.1: Proposed conceptual model: comparative user paths with and without experiential value integration

Source: Own elaboration

4. Methodology

4.1. Research objective and design

This study aims to explore how consumers experience and evaluate FDAs, with a particular focus on the experiential dimensions of value that influence user engagement, decision-making, and behavioural outcomes throughout the customer journey. While the research is conceptually informed, it is primarily data driven. Theoretical insights were used to define the study's scope and guide the development of the interview structure, but the analytical process remained flexible and grounded in participants' narratives.

The study is guided by four research objectives, each linked to a corresponding research question. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, these questions offer a structured lens through which to interpret the data. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) understand how consumers experience FDAs across the main phases of the customer journey; (2) investigate how experiential value, in contrast to functional or app-specific features, influences consumer perceptions and preferences; (3) explore whether and how experiential value contributes to consumer decisions to remain with or switch between apps; (4) examine whether enhanced experiential features foster reuse intention or even brand attachment over time.

Methodologically, the research follows an exploratory qualitative design. This approach is particularly suited to capturing the complexity and context-dependence of consumer perceptions, which may be difficult to access through quantitative methods (Lim, 2024). Given the predominance of survey-based studies in the OFD literature, this study responds to calls for deeper, experience-based insights into consumer interactions with digital platforms (Kacprzak & Hensel, 2023; Koronaki et al., 2023).

The logic of inquiry adopted here is best described as inductive-abductive. The initial literature review supported the development of a conceptual reference framework but did not impose constraints on the data collection or interpretation. The interviews were designed around broad themes drawn from the literature yet remained open-ended and participant led. Data were first analysed inductively, allowing categories to emerge organically, and were later interpreted through an abductive lens that related these themes back to theoretical constructs (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Throughout the research process, attention was given to methodological rigour, ethical integrity, and transparency. All participants were informed of the study's aims and their rights, and each provided explicit consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., I1 to I17), and all audio and textual data were securely stored in encrypted folders accessible only to the researcher.

The researcher adopted a reflexive stance, acknowledging a dual position. On one hand, there was familiarity with the use of FDAs, which allowed for an empathic understanding of participants' experiences. On the other hand, the researcher remained external to any specific platform or commercial affiliation, which helped to preserve analytical distance. Reflexive field notes were maintained throughout the research process in order to document observations, record interpretive decisions, and support the traceability of the analytical procedures. These measures contributed to the study's overall credibility, dependability, and confirmability, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), thereby strengthening the validity of the findings presented in the following chapters.

4.2. Sample design

A non-probabilistic purposive sampling strategy was adopted to recruit participants with recent and relevant experience using FDAs. Three inclusion criteria were applied to ensure that participants could reflect meaningfully on their decision-making and usage behaviour across different points of the customer journey. These criteria included active use of FDAs, at least one order placed in the previous two weeks, and familiarity with more than one platform.

From the outset, the sampling strategy aimed to ensure variation in gender and age in order to capture a range of perspectives. As a result, the final sample included nine female participants and eight male participants, representing 52.9 percent and 47.1 percent of the sample respectively. Participant ages ranged from 20 to 47 years. Although no formal demographic quotas were imposed, this level of variation allowed for richer analytical interpretation. During the data analysis phase, participants were grouped into two age segments. The first group included participants aged between 20 and 30 years. The second group included those aged above 30. This was done to support thematic organisation. However, age was not treated as a predefined analytical variable.

Recruitment was conducted through personal networks using informal digital channels, including WhatsApp and participant referrals. Prior to each interview, participants were fully briefed on the research objectives and procedures. Verbal informed consent was then obtained. All interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed, anonymised, and securely stored for analysis.

The final sample comprised 17 participants. This number was not established in advance. Instead, interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached, meaning that no new codes or insights were emerging from the data. This approach is consistent with qualitative research standards that determine sample adequacy based on information power and saturation, as recommended in recent literature. (Bouncken et al., 2025; Guest et al., 2020; Malterud et al., 2015)

4.3. Data Collection

4.3.1. Semi-structured Interviews

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to explore participants' experiences with FDAs across the main stages of the customer journey. The purpose of these interviews was to uncover the values, expectations, and perceptions that consumers associate with these platforms without limiting their responses to predefined constructs. This open-ended approach allowed participants to articulate what they personally found relevant, meaningful, or frustrating based on their own usage patterns.

The interview guide followed a three-part structure that included an introductory phase, a core section, and a closing segment. The core section was aligned with the conceptual phases of the customer journey, covering pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase experiences. The closing questions focused on outcomes related to brand preference and emotional attachment. This structure allowed for thematic consistency while still encouraging participants to express their experiences in their own words and on their own terms.

Interviews were conducted remotely using either Zoom or Google Meet, according to each participant's preference. Sessions lasted between 25 and 40 minutes depending on the level of engagement and elaboration. While the interviews followed a consistent thematic outline, follow-up questions were adapted based on participants' responses. This flexible approach ensured both topic coverage and the opportunity to explore emerging insights in greater depth when relevant.

Table 4.3.1.1 outlines the structure of the interview guide, including each stage, the primary questions asked, and illustrative prompts used to encourage elaboration.

Table 4.3.1.1: Interview Guide structure

Stage	*Section*	*Question*	*Elaboration Questions*
Introduction	Opening/ Warm-up	Q1: Can you walk me through the last time you used a food delivery app and what led you to choose that app?	(i) Which app did you choose and why? (ii) Do you usually stick to one or do you switch between different ones? (iii) Can you tell me more about when you use it? (iv) Would you say the reasons why you order differ depending on the situation?
Main Section	Pre-Purchase	Q2: How do you usually decide which app to open when you want to order food, and what does that process typically look like for you?	
		Q3: Can you describe a time when you compared more than one food	(i) Which apps were you considering? (ii) What influenced your choice?

Stage	*Section*	*Question*	*Elaboration Questions*
		delivery app and how you made your choice?	
		Q4: When two apps feel equally acceptable, what usually makes the difference for you in deciding which one to use?	(i) Do you notice any difference in your searching process when you decide for everyday orders versus more special occasions?
	Purchase	Q5: When placing an order and paying, what makes the process feel smooth and reliable to you?	(i) What steps or features help the process go quickly? (ii) Have you ever stopped using an app because the process felt complicated?
		Q6: While you are waiting or tracking your order, what kind of updates or notifications feel helpful, and which ones feel frustrating?	(i) Does this make any difference to you? (ii) Have you ever changed your view of an app because of this?
		Q7: How would you feel if a food delivery app added more interactive or playful features during the ordering or tracking process?	(i) Would this make you more likely to choose that app over another? (ii) What kind of features would feel valuable/unnecessary?
	Post-Purchase	Q8: When your food arrives, what makes you feel that the delivery was reliable or not?	(i) What roles does timeliness or accuracy play? (ii) Have you had an experience that made you switch apps because of delivery issues?
		Q9: Can you recall a delivery experience that stood out to you, either positively or negatively, and what made it memorable?	(i) Was it related to packaging, presentation, or the way food was delivered?
		Q10: If a delivery app offered extras like premium packaging, instructions to finish your dish, or even a video on how to plate it, how would that affect your experience?	(i) Would this make you more likely to choose that app again in the future? (ii) Would it feel like added value, or unnecessary?
Closing	Brand Attachment	Q11: If two apps offered the same prices and delivery times, what small details or experiences would make you choose one over the other?	(i) What experiential elements make a difference? (ii) What examples come to mind?
		Q12: Do you feel any sense of attachment or loyalty to a food delivery app, and what makes you feel that way?	(i) Do you think that the examples you just mentioned could also make you feel more attached to one app over another? (ii) In what way would these details create a closer connection to the brand?

Stage	*Section*	*Question*	*Elaboration Questions*
			(iii) Do you feel that, for you, attachment to a delivery app is unlikely regardless of these features?

Source: Self-developed

4.4. Data treatment

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software that supported the systematic organisation, coding, and retrieval of data segments. The use of MAXQDA ensured transparency, consistency, and traceability throughout the analytical process.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), which is appropriate for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data. The process began with an initial phase of familiarisation that involved reading the transcripts multiple times and taking analytical notes to capture first impressions and contextual observations.

In the first coding stage, descriptive codes were applied to relevant excerpts of text in order to capture distinct meanings or ideas. These first-order codes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories. As analysis progressed, these categories were refined and consolidated into overarching themes that reflected higher-level experiential patterns. This structured three-tier system of codes, categories, and themes facilitated analytical clarity and depth.

The entire analysis was organised according to the main phases of the customer journey, namely pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase, and brand-related outcomes, consistent with the study's conceptual framework. The use of MAXQDA's visual tools to examine code frequencies and co-occurrences supported the identification of both dominant and emerging themes across different phases of the journey. This alignment between thematic structure and conceptual design reinforced the internal consistency of the analysis.

To ensure analytical rigour, all coding decisions and theme development processes were documented in MAXQDA, creating a detailed audit trail that connected raw data to final interpretations (Nowell et al., 2017). The complete coding framework, including definitions and illustrative quotes, is provided in Appendix A.

Although the analysis followed a structured framework, the process itself was not strictly linear. After a holistic reading of all transcripts, initial coding began with the pre-purchase phase. First-order codes, categories, and themes were developed iteratively. As the process advanced to the purchase and post-purchase phases, the same coding logic and naming conventions were applied to maintain coherence, while remaining open to new context-specific insights.

It soon became apparent that some codes such as convenience, trust, or habit were recurrent across different phases but carried context-dependent meanings. For example, convenience in the pre-purchase stage might refer to app accessibility, whereas in the post-purchase stage it could relate to delivery speed. These variations were carefully interpreted and integrated into the final thematic framework to reflect the dynamic nature of consumer experience along the customer journey.

A concise illustration of this coding logic, including an example of how individual statements were grouped into categories and aggregated themes, is presented in Chapter 5.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Data Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the thematic analysis and offers an integrated interpretation of how participants perceive and evaluate FDAs across the customer journey. The analysis follows the four-stage structure outlined in the conceptual framework: pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase, and outcomes. The final stage considers potential behavioural consequences of these experiences, including reuse intention and brand attachment.

The findings are organised to highlight how experiential values influence consumer decision-making, satisfaction, and broader brand-related responses at each phase of the journey. Rather than restating the analytical procedures discussed in Chapter 4, this opening section introduces the thematic framework that emerged from the data and outlines how it supports the discussion.

In total, 13 aggregate themes were identified, each supported by second-order categories and first-order codes. These themes capture the experiential dimensions that participants consistently associated with their use of FDAs and illustrate how those experiences shaped their behaviour and preferences.

5.2. Pre-Purchase phase

The pre-purchase phase represents the initial and most intuitive moment of the food delivery journey, when consumers decide which app to open and what factors guide this choice. This section examines how participants describe that process and how their reasoning aligns with the experiential dimensions outlined in the conceptual framework, namely convenience, trust, emotional reassurance, and perceived value.

Quantitative analysis of the coded data revealed three dominant patterns of meaning: convenience and familiarity as decision heuristics, situational and emotional drivers of choice, and functional and experiential app evaluation. These categories emerged through iterative coding in MAXQDA, where overlapping first-order codes were grouped into higher-order conceptual themes.

The frequency analysis (Figure 5.2.1) demonstrates that convenience and familiarity as decision heuristics dominated participants' accounts, appearing in every interview (100%), followed by situational and emotional drivers of choice (94%) and functional and experiential app evaluation (88%). This distribution indicates that decision-making during the pre-purchase phase is primarily guided by routine and intuitive reasoning rather than deliberate evaluation. The near-universal presence of convenience-related codes suggests that effort minimisation and familiarity serve as central decision anchors, while emotional and situational cues act as

secondary but reinforcing influences. The slightly lower occurrence of experiential evaluation reflects that functional and interface-related considerations, though relevant, are often interpreted retrospectively through prior usage experiences rather than through active comparison.

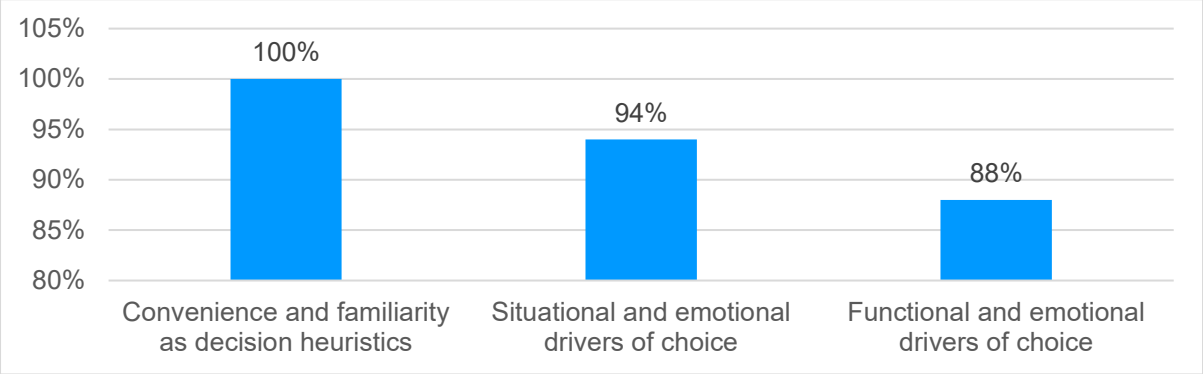


Figure 5.2.1: Frequency analysis of the aggregate themes from the Pre-purchase stage

Source: Own elaboration

Beyond frequency, the co-occurrence analysis confirmed strong interrelations between convenience, familiarity, and routine use, showing that these dimensions act as complementary mechanisms that simplify app choice through habit and reduced cognitive effort. Emotional and contextual variables, such as price sensitivity and emotional state, also intersected frequently, suggesting that practical evaluations are shaped by mood and situational context. Moderate connections between app experience and convenience revealed that perceptions of ease and trust often stem from prior positive interactions, reinforcing habitual use and shaping future preferences.

Visual mapping of first-order codes reinforced these relationships (Figure 5.2.2). Terms such as *default app usage*, *saved info in app*, and *streamlined decision flow* were consistently present across transcripts, confirming that many users choose apps based on prior behaviour, ease of use, and effort minimisation. These findings suggest that the pre-purchase moment is not one of comparative analysis, but of fast, emotionally guided decision-making informed by experience.



Figure 5.2.2: Visual representation of first-order codes from the Pre-purchase stage

Source: Developed with MAXQDA software

Convenience emerged as the most influential factor guiding consumer choice. Participants consistently described their behaviour as automatic, guided by ease rather than comparison. One participant noted, "*Typically, I always open the app I'm subscribed to. It's easy, I'm familiar with it, and I know what it offers*", while another added, "*It saves me from having to overthink it or waste time searching. I just open it almost on autopilot*". These statements illustrate how decision-making in this phase operates through heuristic shortcuts, consistent with bounded rationality and the use of cognitive simplification strategies in digital environments (Karimi et al., 2015; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). The findings also align with the concept of effort expectancy from the UTAUT2 model, where the perceived ease of use of an application directly influences behavioural intention (Abed, 2023; Wen et al., 2021).

This habitual engagement also reflects a form of psychological lock-in that reinforces retention, even when users are aware of potentially better alternatives. Once users establish trust and familiarity with an app, switching becomes cognitively and emotionally costly. This pattern resonates with findings on habit and continuity bias in FDAs, where routine and familiarity reduce cognitive load and support long-term engagement (Kurniawan et al., 2023; Mathwick et al., 2001). In this sense, the pre-purchase decision is not about feature comparison but about activating a previously established routine that maintains emotional comfort and efficiency.

Nevertheless, convenience alone did not fully explain the pre-purchase experience. Emotional and situational triggers often influenced whether participants used a FDA in the first place. Many described orderings as a reaction to fatigue, mood, or social setting, rather than a planned decision. One participant explained, "*being too tired to cook (…) led me to open Uber Eats",* while another noted, "*I was having dinner with friends at my place, and since we didn't have time to cook, we decided to order in.".* These insights support recent research that

highlights emotional and conditional value as key drivers of behaviour in digital contexts (Chakraborty & Dash, 2023; Sari et al., 2025).

Situational cues such as time pressure, weather, or social presence amplified the appeal of convenience. In several cases, ordering served as a way of emotionally regulating stress or avoiding effort. This shows that convenience is not only a functional factor but also an affective one. As noted in the experiential value literature, emotional reassurance and psychological ease often coexist with usability and perceived value (Mathwick et al., 2001; Rejón-Guardia, 2024). These emotional aspects deepen the user's connection to the platform, reinforcing reuse intention through both rational and symbolic experiences (Hu et al., 2023; Pang, 2024).

Participants also evaluated apps through experiential and functional lenses, using prior satisfaction, interface usability, and reliability as benchmarks. One participant shared, "*I also had Bolt Food, but I stopped using it because I often had problems with customer support, tracking orders, or even receiving them. In the end, I decided to stick with the app that I always felt more confident and satisfied with, which was Uber Eats."*. Others linked aesthetic design to trust and professionalism, such as, "*When I had both apps, I always ended up choosing Uber Eats. It looks more premium and higher quality to me, even down to the pictures and presentation of the restaurants."*. These views mirror findings from the ISS and ECM models, which highlight that service quality, system responsiveness, and information clarity contribute directly to perceived trust and reuse intention (Ahmad et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Trust and experience thus operate as a mutually reinforcing loop. A smooth, reliable interface enhances emotional reassurance, which encourages habitual use and discourages switching. This dynamic is consistent with the conceptual model adopted in this study, where experiential value mediates the relationship between convenience, trust, and consumer behaviour in FDAs (Lim, 2024; Mathwick et al., 2001).

5.3. Purchase phase

The purchase phase represents the transactional moment of the customer journey, when consumers move from evaluation to commitment. It marks the point at which convenience and trust converge into the experience of ordering, paying, and tracking. The analysis followed the same inductive procedure as the pre-purchase stage, with first-order codes grouped into three overarching themes: Transactional Trust and Transparency, Functional Fluency and Emotional Reassurance, and Perceptions of Playfulness and Experiential Enhancement. Question 7 (see Table 4.3.1.1) was specifically introduced to explore how experiential value elements such as playfulness and aesthetics might influence perceived value during the act of purchase (Gallarza et al., 2020; Mathwick et al., 2001).

The frequency analysis of aggregate themes during the purchase phase (Figure 5.3.1) highlights the centrality of functional fluency and emotional reassurance and transactional trust and transparency, both mentioned by all participants (100%). In comparison, perceptions of playfulness and experiential enhancement appeared in 76% of interviews. This lower frequency may partly reflect the structure of the interview guide, as playfulness was explored explicitly only in Question 7 (see Table 4.3.1.1). Consequently, mentions of playfulness were more concentrated and context-specific, rather than emerging spontaneously across multiple stages. Nonetheless, the theme's presence in over three-quarters of the interviews reinforces its relevance, particularly as a complementary source of value when it aligns with usability and emotional comfort.

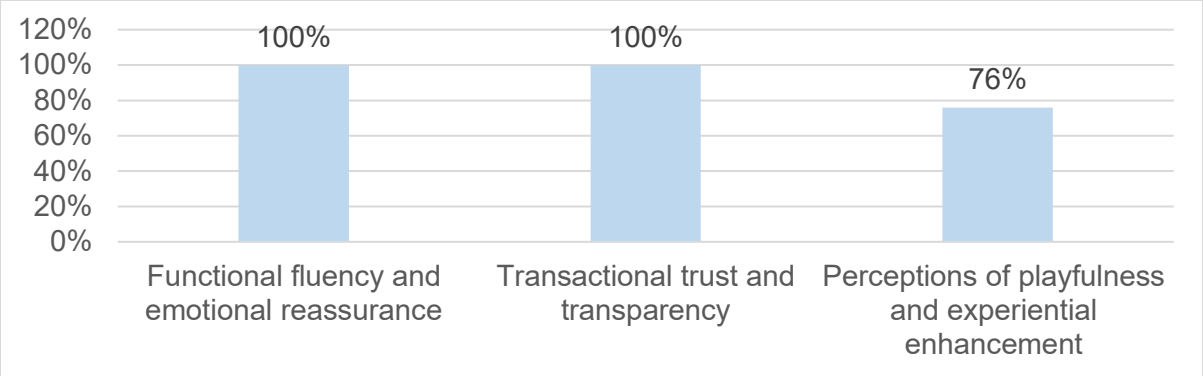


Figure 5.3.1: Frequency analysis of the aggregate themes from the Purchase stage

Source: Own elaboration

The word cloud (Figure 5.3.2) generated from all coded segments reinforces these themes. The prominence of terms related to functional fluency and emotional reassurance, transactional trust, and reliable process indicates that participants framed their experience primarily around confidence and ease. Terms such as secure payment, navigation support, and order tracking satisfaction underscore the importance of control and reliability, while concepts like cost transparency and information visibility highlight how clarity and fairness sustain trust. In contrast, expressions related to playfulness and aesthetic appeal appeared less frequently, suggesting that experiential dimensions were appreciated only when they complemented, rather than disrupted, fluency and reliability (Rejón-Guardia, 2024).



Figure 5.3.2: Visual representation of first-order codes from the Purchase stage

Source: Own elaboration

As suggested by Bonfanti et al. (2023), trust has evolved into a baseline assumption in digital contexts rather than a differentiating factor. Participants in this study consistently framed reliability, transparency, and secure payment as fundamental to satisfaction. Many described how saved payment details and systems such as Apple Pay made the process fast and dependable. One participant explained, *"I think what makes the process feel smooth is that I already have my bank details saved, so I can just use Apple Pay. That makes it really quick.".* Another commented, "*Checkout feels smooth when everything is transparent and efficient, clear fees, few steps, the option to repeat past orders, quick payment, and the ability to leave notes. At the same time, I think cancellation policies are important. High or unexpected cancellation fees make me hesitate*.". These views reflect the findings of Abed (2023), Kacprzak and Hensel (2023), and Bonfanti et al. (2023), who emphasize that clarity, consistency, and perceived security reduce risk and enhance trust in digital transactions.

Participants also reported that moments of friction, such as failed payments or inaccurate updates, immediately undermined trust. One noted, "*What frustrates me are vague or delayed notifications, because then I start trusting the app less."*, while others highlighted the importance of options and transparency: "*I've abandoned orders before when payment failed, when hidden fees appeared at the last step*". These insights reinforce that transactional trust is built not only on data protection, but also on visible fairness and predictable processes (Chotigo & Kadono, 2021; Rejón-Guardia, 2024).

While trust referred to safety and predictability, fluency described how these elements were experienced. Participants repeatedly defined fluency through minimal effort and seamless flow. As one participant expressed, "*For me, a smooth process is when everything just flows naturally.*", while another shared, "*where I don't have to overthink anything. (…) everything flows naturally,*". This aligns with the idea that perceived control and usability are

essential to emotional reassurance, transforming practical interactions into low-effort, high-comfort experiences (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Fluency also depended on feedback and communication during the tracking stage. Participants valued accurate, real-time updates that reduced uncertainty and reinforced confidence. One participant explained, "*The most useful notification for me is when the courier actually picks up the food. That's the moment when I feel reassured that everything is moving forward.*" Another added, "*I like receiving clear updates at each stage, when the restaurant starts preparing the food, when it's ready, when the driver is on the way, and when the order arrives. These notifications give me peace of mind and set clear expectations.*" When such updates were absent or inaccurate, participants expressed frustration: "*What really bothers me is when the tracking isn't accurate, for example, when the driver's location doesn't move for a long time and then suddenly, they're outside my building. That kind of delay makes me feel unprepared, and it adds unnecessary stress.*". These reactions support findings from Rejón-Guardia (2024), who shows that consistent feedback enhances emotional stability and reduces perceived complexity.

This is consistent with Shankar et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of reducing customer effort and friction as a critical source of experiential value in digital services. Participants often linked their confidence in the system to the ease of interaction. The two constructs, predictability and emotional comfort, operated in tandem, reinforcing each other throughout the transaction phase (Lim, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023; Shankar et al., 2024).

Question 7 (see Table 4.3.1.1) explored whether experiential or playful design elements could enhance this process. Responses revealed selective openness. Younger users showed greater appreciation for aesthetics and light interaction features, while older users preferred straightforward functionality. As one younger respondent put it, "*I actually enjoy it when an app includes curated recommendations, smooth design, or playful touches, as long as they're well implemented and not intrusive*.". In contrast, an older respondent noted, "*I'm not looking to be entertained while I order food; I just want the process to be clear, simple, and efficient*.". These responses show that playfulness is welcomed when it reinforces usability but is rejected when it distracts from fluency.

Many participants reframed playfulness in utilitarian terms, expressing interest in features that solve real problems. For instance, "*I think it would be great to have the option to split the bill between different people with accounts on the same app. Those kinds of features would add real value."*, or "*I would love features that solve real problems. For example, communication with couriers isn't always easy, sometimes they don't speak the same language as me, and misunderstandings happen. In those cases, I get frustrated because I can't explain things clearly. A live translation feature in the chat would completely change that*

experience. That's the kind of interactivity that would add real value for me.". These comments show that experiential value during the purchase phase is accepted when it enhances control or personalisation, not simply when it adds decoration or entertainment. This supports the EVS proposition that aesthetics and playfulness contribute to perceived value only when aligned with functional needs (Gallarza et al., 2020; Mathwick et al., 2001).

While playfulness appeared less frequently in the data, its qualitative significance was notable. It revealed that experiential value in FDAs is not universally desired but conditionally appreciated. Participants accepted it when it enhanced control, enjoyment, or convenience, but rejected it when it created friction or cognitive load. This confirms findings from Rejón-Guardia (2024) and Lim (2024), who argue that in digital service environments, experiential enhancements must support rather than disrupt fluency.

Although perceptions of playfulness and experiential design were less frequently mentioned, their qualitative richness revealed important nuances in how consumers interpret experiential value during the transaction. Question 7 (see Table 4.3.1.1) allowed for deliberate reflection on how aesthetic, interactive, or symbolic elements could enhance the ordering process. Participants did not reject playfulness outright; rather, they redefined it in functional terms, expressing interest in features that reduce effort, increase control, or personalise the experience. This suggests that experiential value during the purchase phase is not decorative but functionalised, perceived as valuable when it simplifies, reassures, or humanises the digital interaction. These findings support the core proposition of this thesis: that experiential value, when well-integrated, operates as a complementary force that strengthens trust, enhances fluency, and fosters satisfaction. Rather than disrupting the flow, such enhancements are welcomed when they resonate with users' emotional and practical expectations, particularly among younger participants, who framed experience as an opportunity for customisation, not entertainment.

Overall, the purchase phase illustrates an equilibrium between functional reliability and emotional reassurance. Trust and fluency emerged as inseparable foundations of perceived quality, while playfulness added a selective but meaningful experiential layer. Security, transparency, and predictability established confidence; fluency translated these into emotional comfort; and playfulness, when aligned with both, contributed to engagement. These findings confirm the conceptual model's proposition that trust, and experiential reassurance operate together to shape satisfaction and loyalty in digital services (Bonfanti et al., 2023; Lim, 2024; Mathwick et al., 2001; Nguyen et al., 2023; Rejón-Guardia, 2024; Shankar et al., 2024).

5.4. Post-purchase phase

The post-purchase phase represents a crucial moment in the customer journey, where the quality of the delivery and the emotional aftermath of the experience influence future app engagement. This stage reveals how functional outcomes, symbolic gestures, and emotional responses interact to shape memory and satisfaction. Based on the thematic analysis, four major patterns emerged: experiential value integration, perceived delivery reliability, emotional and experiential aftermath, and trust repair and service recovery evaluation.

The frequency analysis of aggregate themes during the post-purchase phase (Figure 5.4.1) shows that experiential value integration and perceived delivery reliability appeared in all interviews (100%), highlighting their central role in post-delivery appraisal. Emotional and experiential aftermath followed with 76%, and trust repair and service recovery evaluation was present in 59% of cases. The high incidence of experiential value integration is partly attributable to the structure of the interview itself: Question 10 (see Table 4.3.1.1) explicitly asked participants how they would react to the inclusion of experiential elements during the delivery moment. As with Question 7 (see Table 4.3.1.1) in the purchase phase, this focused prompt helped to uncover specific perceptions and expectations about symbolic value during this final stage.

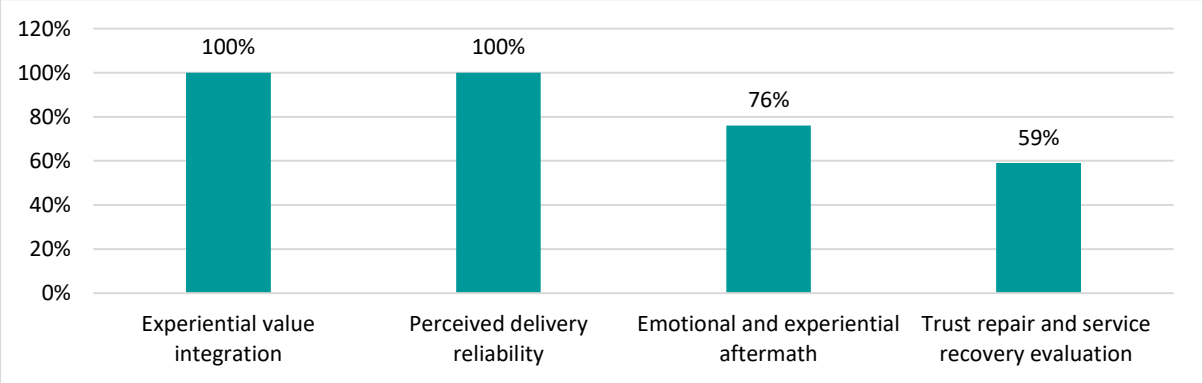


Figure 5.4.1: Frequency analysis of the aggregate themes from the Post-purchase stage

Source: Own elaboration

The word cloud in Figure 5.4.2 visualises the linguistic density and interconnections among the themes, with terms such as timeliness, courier interaction, food condition, and added detail signalling the convergence of functional performance and emotional tone. These associations reflect how consumers assess the delivery not only based on punctuality and accuracy, but also on how the experience made them feel.

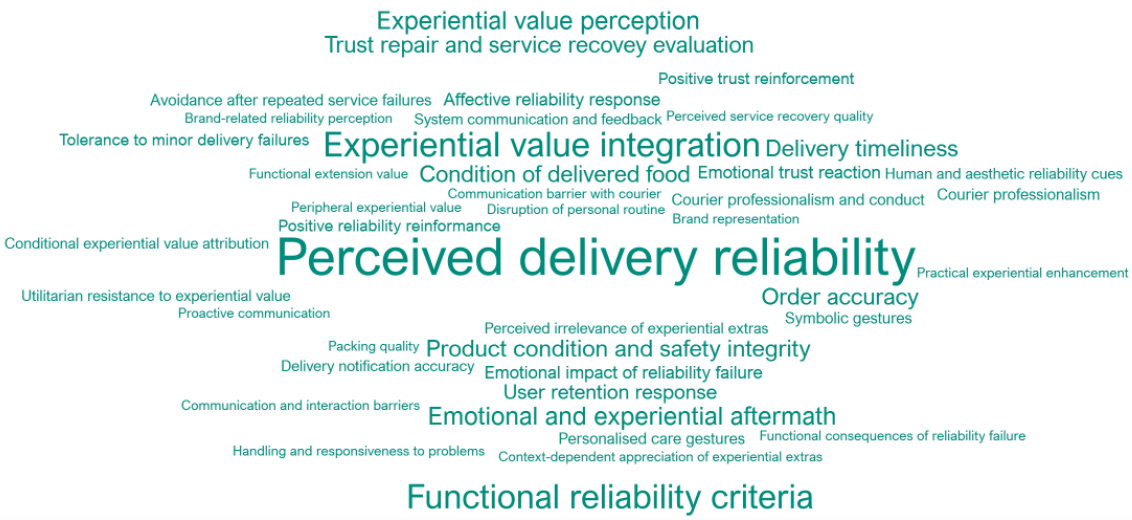


Figure 5.4.2: Visual representation of first-order codes from the Post-purchase stage

Source: Developed with MAXQDA software

Reliability dominated respondents' reflections. Participants consistently linked satisfaction to punctuality, order accuracy, and the physical condition of the food. *"If it arrives on time and everything is correct, that's what makes me trust the service"*. Another respondent added, *"Even if it's a bit late, as long as it's right and nothing is missing, I still consider it reliable"*. These narratives confirm that reliability functions as a threshold rather than a differentiator. Consumers expect accuracy and timeliness as the baseline of value. When these criteria fail, frustration immediately follows, aligning with literature that treats fulfilment reliability as the most decisive component of post purchase satisfaction in digital services (Nguyen et al., 2023; Rita et al., 2022).

However, reliability alone did not determine how experiences were remembered. When failures occurred, what shaped long term trust was the quality of recovery and communication. *"Mistakes happen, but if they fix it fast and are transparent, I stay loyal"*. Conversely, *"They didn't even reply to my complaint, so I deleted the app"*. Participants valued fairness, responsiveness, and acknowledgement more than compensation itself, confirming that perceived justice and transparent recovery restore credibility and prevent switching behaviour. This dynamic mirrors the service quality literature, where post failure interactions are central to maintaining trust and satisfaction (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Rita et al., 2022).

Emotional and experiential aftermath captured the affective residue that followed the functional performance. Even when deliveries met expectations, participants recalled small gestures that transformed the experience into something memorable. *"The restaurant added a free dessert once, and that made me order again"*. *"Sometimes they write a thank you note, and it changes how I see the brand"*. These gestures functioned as relational signals, converting routine fulfilment into perceived care. Conversely, negative experiences involving impolite couriers or poor packaging left lasting dissatisfaction. *"The courier was rude and didn't*

wear any uniform; it felt unprofessional". Such reactions illustrate the interplay between emotional cues and perceived professionalism, supporting the experiential value framework where service excellence and aesthetics jointly shape emotional responses (Gallarza et al., 2020; Mathwick et al., 2001).

Experiential value integration was investigated in depth through Question 10 (see Table 4.3.1.1), which explicitly asked participants how they would respond if the post purchase moment incorporated more symbolic or emotionally engaging features. This prompt provided an opportunity to assess participants' openness to experiential value beyond the traditional app specific dimensions such as speed, price, or accuracy. Responses revealed a nuanced and context sensitive evaluation. While some participants reacted positively, describing experiential additions as meaningful enhancements when aligned with the tone of the meal, others saw them as unnecessary for routine orders. For instance, *"If it's sushi or a special dinner, I'd appreciate instructions or elegant packaging, it makes it feel special"*, versus *"I just want it hot and fast, I don't need fancy extras"*.

This divergence highlights a key insight for the research question. Experiential value is not uniformly demanded, but when well-integrated, it enhances symbolic meaning, strengthens emotional resonance, and reinforces perceived care. These outcomes directly align with the conceptual model of this study, where experiential value operates not in opposition to functional performance, but as a complementary layer that can elevate the service from adequate to memorable.

Participants' reflections suggest that experiential elements such as premium packaging, human touches, or emotionally intelligent design have the potential to deepen brand attachment when implemented with coherence and relevance. This supports Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) view of consumption as an experiential act, and reinforces the argument made by Mathwick et al. (2001) and Gentile et al. (2007) that symbolic value is a core driver of emotional bonding in service contexts.

Moreover, the theme demonstrates that the addition of experiential value in the customer journey is not merely decorative. It is capable of modulating the emotional tone of the entire experience, especially when consumers are in emotionally loaded states. In this sense, the responses to Question 10 (see Table 4.3.1.1) provide direct qualitative support for the central hypothesis of this thesis: that integrating experiential value into the existing customer journey architecture of FDAs can enhance not only perceived satisfaction, but also psychological engagement and long-term loyalty.

Co-occurrence mapping in MAXQDA confirmed the relational structure among these themes. Perceived reliability strongly overlapped with emotional aftermath and trust repair, suggesting that failures or successes in the functional dimension directly influenced affective

evaluations. Meanwhile, experiential integration intersected mainly with emotional aftermath, indicating that aesthetic and symbolic gestures primarily enriched emotional memory rather than immediate performance. Together, these relationships demonstrate that post purchase satisfaction is not a static evaluation of delivery success but a layered judgment that merges reliability, fairness, and emotional resonance.

In sum, the post purchase phase illustrates that consumers evaluate food delivery not only through punctuality and accuracy but also through how those outcomes make them feel and how the brand responds when expectations falter. Reliability forms the foundation of trust. Recovery practices protect it. Experiential cues elevate it by adding symbolic and emotional depth. This convergence of functional and experiential value substantiates the idea that lasting satisfaction and loyalty emerge when operational efficiency is accompanied by empathy, care, and aesthetic coherence. These are the qualities that transform a simple delivery into a memorable experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Mathwick et al., 2001; Rita et al., 2022).

5.5. Outcomes

The final part of the interviews explored possible outcomes of the overall customer journey, namely whether experiential value influences the reuse of FDAs and whether those experiences can lead to brand attachment. Participants were asked what details would make them choose one application over another if functional aspects such as pricing and availability were identical, and whether they felt any sense of attachment or loyalty to a specific platform.

In contexts where FDAs offer comparable pricing and delivery times, users increasingly rely on subtle experiential cues to differentiate between platforms. Thematic analysis of responses to Questions 11 and 12 (see Table 4.3.1.1) reveal that these micro-level distinctions, ranging from interface quality and personalization to delivery tracking, packaging, and problem resolution, play a critical role in shaping user preferences, reuse intentions, and brand attachment. These findings indicate a shift away from rational choice models toward one in which symbolic, aesthetic, and emotional value governs consumer behaviour.

Several participants highlighted the influence of interface design and usability on their app preferences. One user noted that "*a cleaner interface, faster loading, or better suggestions might sway me*," explaining that "*even the way notifications are designed can influence my perception. Uber Eats, for example, shows categories right away, which makes it easier and faster to decide, and that keeps me coming back to it*". These comments align with Mathwick et al.'s experiential value dimensions, particularly aesthetics and playfulness, which are key in digital environments where visual and interactive elements replace physical touchpoints. In these settings, the user interface becomes a critical mediator of perceived professionalism, ease, and trust.

Beyond design, participants placed significant value on small symbolic gestures and emotionally resonant features. One individual explained, "*I like little surprises, like when you order a birthday cake and the app suggests adding candles, that kind of detail makes a difference*". These playful interactions reinforce Holbrook and Hirschman's notion of consumption as a symbolic act. Another participant described selecting a particular platform simply because "*it's live tracking showed not only the courier's map location but also their name and photo. That made the wait feel more personal and less frustrating*". These examples demonstrate how perceived personalization and humanization of service interactions transform routine deliveries into emotionally engaging moments.

Personalization emerged as a particularly influential factor in shaping engagement and platform preference. Several users expressed appreciation for apps that saved previous orders, adapted to their preferences, or flagged potential allergens. One user commented, "*if it saves my regular orders or suggests dishes I actually like, that's a real plus. It makes the experience feel more personal and less like starting from scratch every time*". Another added, "*having a profile with my preferences or even warning me about ingredients I'm allergic to would show that the app is paying attention to me as an individual*". These accounts illustrate that personalization is not solely functional but also symbolic, signalling attentiveness and care. This finding supports the emotional and epistemic value dimensions proposed by Sheth and colleagues, while also confirming UTAUT2's emphasis on hedonic motivation and habitual usage as drivers of sustained engagement.

Trust and reliability were mentioned consistently across the responses, but not as differentiating factors. Most users treated accurate and timely delivery as a baseline expectation rather than a source of added value. As one participant put it, "*if it arrives on time and everything is correct, that's just what I expect*". However, users became particularly sensitive to how the app responded when problems occurred. One individual explained, "*if an app replied quickly when I had a problem, or if it guaranteed delivery times and offered compensation when food arrived late, that would definitely make me prefer it*". Another added, "*mistakes happen, but if they fix it fast and are transparent, I stay loyal*". Conversely, inadequate responses led to disengagement, as one participant mentioned, "*they didn't even reply to my complaint, so I deleted the app*". These accounts underscore the importance of responsive customer service in reinforcing or repairing trust, consistent with the post-purchase stage of the CJM and supported by the ECM.

When discussing loyalty and brand attachment, many participants described their connection to a particular app as primarily functional. Users cited convenience, familiarity, or subscriptions as the basis for continued use. As one respondent explained, "*I wouldn't say I'm loyal in a strong emotional sense, but I definitely tend to stick with Uber Eats. It's the app I use*

most, it feels reliable, and I'm familiar with how it works. Over time, this convenience has turned into a sort of attachment". Similarly, another participant noted, "*I'd describe myself as functionally loyal to Uber. I use it because it's convenient, everything is already set up, and I've built a history with it. But it's not an emotional connection*".

However, some users did report a gradual development of emotional attachment, particularly when the service consistently delivered small gestures that conveyed attentiveness. As one respondent described, "*some apps make me feel like they know me. Little things like saved favourites, reliable packaging, and clear updates make me trust the app more and gradually build loyalty. Those small touches don't just make ordering easier; they humanize the brand and create a sense of connection over time*". This shift from functional to emotional loyalty supports Park's (2010) model of brand attachment, which posits that repeated, meaningful interactions lead to the formation of affective bonds between users and brands. Such attachment is not merely habitual but emotionally anchored and identity relevant.

Nonetheless, participants made clear that their loyalty remained conditional. Even those who described emotional attachment acknowledged that negative experiences could quickly dissolve that bond. "*If I were to have a really bad experience, that would not only break my expectations but also my trust, and I wouldn't hesitate to switch to another app*". This confirms that brand attachment can buffer against occasional failures but is not impervious to consistent breakdowns in service quality or responsiveness. Emotional loyalty is therefore sustained only through consistent delivery of both functional performance and symbolic recognition.

These findings illustrate that in a saturated and competitive app-based marketplace, consumer preference is shaped not by technical superiority but by the cumulative effect of subtle, emotionally significant experiences. Micro-interactions, whether through visual design, human-like communication, thoughtful packaging, or responsive customer support, influence how users evaluate services, form expectations, and develop trust. In line with the CJM satisfaction and loyalty emerge not solely from operational efficiency but from emotionally intelligent and aesthetically coherent service delivery across the entire user experience.

In conclusion, experiential value proves to be a central driver of sustained engagement in FDAs. When platforms offer more than functional reliability and create emotionally resonant experiences through personalization and care, they foster deeper brand relationships. These relationships are not only more enduring but also more resistant to competition, provided that trust and emotional consistency are preserved.

5.6. Integration of Empirical Findings and Theoretical Framework

This section integrates the empirical findings from the thematic analysis with the conceptual framework developed in earlier chapters, in order to directly address the research questions and refine the proposed model. Drawing on the literature on consumer experience, value perception, and digital behaviour in FDAs, the findings are discussed through the lens of experiential and functional value integration across the customer journey. This analysis contributes both to a deeper understanding of user behaviour and to the theoretical development of the CDJ in app-based service contexts.

RQ1: How do consumers perceive and describe their experiences when using FDAs across the customer journey?

Consumer experiences in FDAs were found to be shaped by both rational and affective appraisals, which varied by journey stage. In the pre-purchase phase, users placed high value on interface usability, speed, and search fluidity, confirming the importance of effort expectancy (Abed, 2023; Wen et al., 2021) and perceived usefulness (TAM) (Troise et al., 2020). However, these were not sufficient for differentiation. Users evaluated experiences holistically, often through the lens of aesthetics, emotional cues, and memory from past use, dimensions consistent with the EVS (Mathwick et al., 2001).

Throughout the purchase and post-purchase stages, functionality remained a baseline expectation, but emotional and symbolic aspects became increasingly salient. Elements such as design clarity, perceived reliability, and even anticipation during delivery (e.g., tracking or packaging) triggered emotional responses that influenced satisfaction and loyalty (Rejón-Guardia, 2024; Vo-Thanh et al., 2022). These findings align with Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) emphasis on stage-specific touchpoints, and reinforce that the FDA journey is a non-linear, affect-rich sequence rather than a transactional funnel (Court et al., 2009).

RQ2: What role do experiential values play in shaping consumer experience and evaluation of FDAs?

Experiential values emerged as a key determinant of perceived service quality and app preference. Aesthetic, emotional, and symbolic elements, such as personalised suggestions, pleasing design, and emotionally intelligent notifications shaped affective judgments and long-term evaluations. As Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argue, symbolic consumption and hedonic responses are fundamental components of consumer choice. In FDAs, where functional parity is high, experiential value often serves as the main source of differentiation (Hu et al., 2023; Pang, 2024).

These values were most influential when integrated coherently with the brand identity and app architecture. Visual fluency, smooth transitions, and emotional feedback loops generated a sense of trust and comfort, even in high-pressure or habitual consumption contexts. The findings confirm prior research that highlights the centrality of experiential value in digital environments where users seek both utility and affective resonance (Gallarza et al., 2020; Xancó-Grau et al., 2025).

RQ3: How does the integration of experiential values influence the decision to continue using or switch FDAs during the journey?

The decision to remain loyal to an app or switch platforms was shaped less by isolated events and more by perceived experiential coherence over time. Functional breakdowns such as late delivery or technical glitches did not necessarily cause switching if the platform had previously delivered reliable, emotionally satisfying experiences. This finding aligns with the concept of a "loyalty loop" (Court et al., 2009), in which positive post-purchase experiences short-circuit future evaluations and reinforce reuse.

Conversely, when platforms failed to respond empathetically to service failures, or lacked experiential depth (e.g., sterile design, impersonal communication), users were more likely to defect even if the functional offering was strong. Trust emerged as a mediating factor in this process, confirming the role of trust and perceived justice in post-adoption behaviour (Abed, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023). Experiential value, in this sense, acted as a buffer against dissatisfaction and a reinforcer of platform attachment.

RQ4: Under what conditions can these enhanced experiences lead to outcomes such as reuse intention and brand attachment?

Brand attachment and reuse intention were most likely to emerge when experiential value was not only present, but perceived as consistent, personalised, and emotionally rewarding. Over time, repeated exposure to thoughtful interactions such as preference-based suggestions, reliable performance, and relational cues led users to form cognitive and emotional bonds with a platform. These findings support Park et al.'s (2010) theory of brand-self connection, in which symbolic alignment fosters affective commitment and brand prominence.

Habit, another key variable, also contributed to retention, but only when initial experiential conditions were met. As Kurniawan et al. (2023) argue, habitual use in digital platforms is built on prior satisfaction and low cognitive friction but can erode quickly if users encounter emotional dissonance or unmet expectations. Thus, reuse intention in this study was not purely functional; it was shaped by the perceived humanisation of the app experience,

confirming the importance of symbolic and emotional dimensions (Chakraborty & Dash, 2023; Sari et al., 2025).

5.7. Revised Conceptual Model

The refined model integrates these findings by identifying, for each phase of the customer journey, the specific value-based decision drivers that influence whether a consumer retains or switches an FDA. These drivers fall into three categories: (1) threshold values (e.g., app speed, price transparency, and delivery reliability), which are fundamental expectations enabling participation but insufficient to generate loyalty; (2) differentiating values (e.g., interface aesthetics, personalised suggestions, emotionally intelligent design), which shape preference and often determine platform choice when functional parity exists; and (3) attachment-building values (e.g., trust-based recovery mechanisms, symbolic gestures, and relational consistency), which foster reuse, emotional connection, and long-term brand attachment.

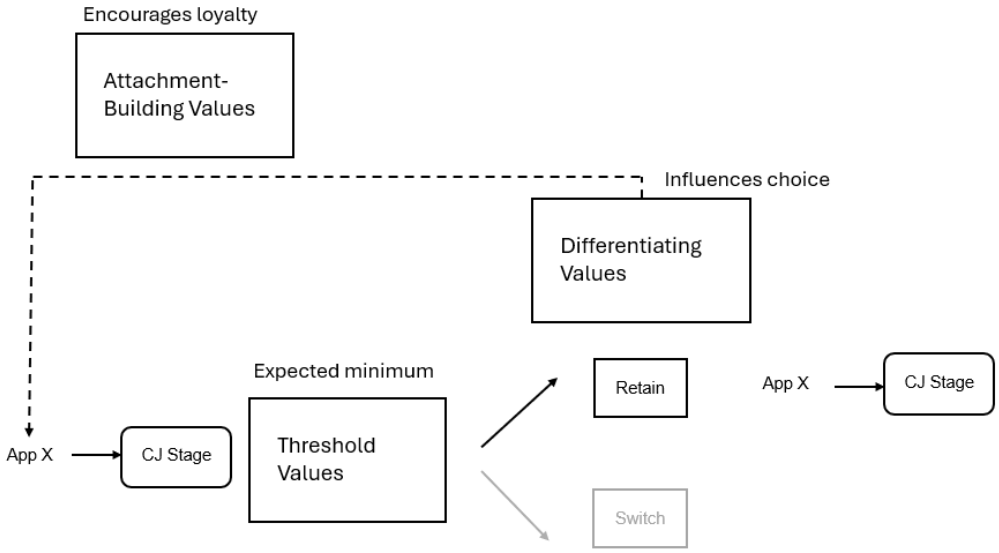


Figure 5.7.1: Revised Conceptual Model

Source: Own elaboration

These value drivers operate dynamically throughout the customer journey, with functional and experiential dimensions exerting varying influence at different stages. In the pre-purchase phase, consumer engagement is shaped by threshold functional values such as app usability, pricing clarity, and platform reliability. At the same time, experiential elements including visual appeal, personalisation, and brand tone begin to act as differentiators that guide initial platform preference and selection.

During the purchase phase, threshold functional factors such as secure payment, ordering accuracy, and clarity of delivery options continue to play a critical role. In parallel, experiential cues like the emotional tone of the interface, intuitive navigation, and perceived ease of use reinforce differentiating value and support the formation of platform preference.

In the post-purchase phase, consumers evaluate the experience in a more holistic and reflective manner. Functional fulfilment, such as timely delivery and order accuracy, forms the basis of satisfaction. However, experiential aspects including packaging quality, symbolic gestures, and human interaction enhance differentiation. It is primarily in this stage that attachment-building value emerges. Elements such as fair service recovery, transparent communication, and emotionally resonant interactions contribute to a sense of care and trust, encouraging reuse intention and deepening brand attachment.

Table 5.7.1: Functional and Experiential values across the Customer Journey

Journey Phase	**Functional value**	**Experiential value**	**Dominant value type**
Pre-purchase	App usability, availability, pricing clarity	Personalised interface, visual appeal, tone of voice	Threshold & Differentiating
Purchase	Secure payment, accurate processing, delivery options	Intuitive flow, emotional tone, anticipation	Threshold & Differentiating
Post-purchase	Order accuracy, delivery time, problem resolution	Packaging, symbolic gestures, human interaction	Differentiating & Attachment-Building

Source: Own elaboration

Ultimately, this study shows that FDA retention is not a by-product of functionality alone. Rather, it is constructed through a sequence of perceived value contributions that combine functional, emotional, and symbolic elements. The revised model reflects this by presenting the customer journey as a series of value-based decision points, where the interplay of threshold, differentiating, and attachment-building values determines whether the consumer continues with the platform or considers alternatives. Experiential value thus emerges as a transversal mechanism operating across phases that reinforces platform engagement and strengthens consumer-brand relationships over time.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Closing remarks

This dissertation set out to investigate how consumers perceive and evaluate their experiences with FDAs across the customer journey, with particular emphasis on the role of experiential value. In a market increasingly shaped by functional parity and low switching costs, the study aimed to determine whether experiential elements, emotional, aesthetic, and symbolic could influence user preferences, loyalty, and platform retention.

The findings demonstrate that consumer experiences are constructed dynamically across three core phases: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. At each stage, different types of value influence decision-making. Threshold values (e.g., app speed, clarity, and reliability) act as prerequisites for usage but do not build preference. Differentiating values (e.g., personalisation, design fluency, emotional tone) help shape app choice and guide switching behaviour. Most critically, attachment-building values (e.g., service recovery, symbolic gestures, relational coherence) were found to reinforce trust and deepen emotional connections over time.

These insights directly address the four research questions. They show that consumers experience FDAs as a layered, affect-driven journey; that experiential value is a decisive factor in shaping evaluations; that its integration discourages switching and increases platform loyalty; and that when well-executed, experiential elements can lead to sustained outcomes such as reuse intention and brand attachment.

The study concludes by proposing a revised conceptual model that illustrates how value-based decision points shape behaviour across the journey. The model contributes to theory by clarifying how experiential value operates not in isolation, but as an integrated mechanism of influence. It contributes to practice by demonstrating that digital loyalty is not earned through functionality alone, but through consistently meaningful and emotionally resonant experiences that foster lasting engagement and brand attachment.

6.2. Contributions to theory

This study offers several contributions to theory by deepening the understanding of experiential value and its role in consumer decision-making within the context of digital food delivery services. While prior literature has extensively examined functionality-based drivers of satisfaction and platform choice (e.g., price, speed, ease of use), this research demonstrates that experiential value comprising emotional, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions functions not merely as a supplementary benefit, but as a central determinant of consumer behaviour in app-mediated service journeys.

First, the study extends the experiential value literature (e.g., Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Mathwick et al., 2001; Gallarza et al., 2020) by empirically applying it to the FDA context, a domain where emotional and symbolic aspects have traditionally been underexplored. It highlights how experiential value interacts with functional performance across distinct journey phases, and how its presence or absence shapes consumer retention, switching behaviour, and emotional engagement.

Second, the research contributes to the evolving conceptualisation of the customer decision journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) by introducing the notion of value-based decision points. Instead of treating the journey as a linear process or a set of functional touchpoints, this study proposes that each phase is governed by distinct types of value: threshold, differentiating, and attachment-building which collectively determine consumer responses and outcomes. This reconceptualization allows for a more dynamic and psychologically grounded interpretation of consumer journeys in digital environments.

Third, the study advances theoretical understanding of digital loyalty and brand attachment by demonstrating that emotional and symbolic value experiences can foster long-term behavioural outcomes, even in high-choice, low-switching-cost contexts. It shows that brand attachment is not exclusively built through repeated use or habit, but can emerge through relational signals, emotionally intelligent design, and meaningful service recovery elements that traditional loyalty models often overlook.

Taken together, these contributions position experiential value not as a peripheral construct, but as a core driver of consumer behaviour in digitally mediated service ecosystems, thereby expanding both the theoretical reach and practical relevance of experience-based marketing and loyalty research.

6.3. Implications for practice

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for food delivery platforms, digital service designers, and marketers operating in high-choice, low-loyalty environments. A key insight is that functional excellence, while necessary, is no longer sufficient to ensure user retention. Consumers expect basic reliability, such as fast loading times, transparent pricing, and accurate fulfilment, as a minimum threshold. However, when these elements are standardised across platforms, differentiation must emerge from experiential dimensions.

For app developers and product teams, this means that design decisions should prioritise emotional coherence alongside functional clarity. Personalised content, tone of voice, and interface aesthetics should be calibrated not only for usability but also for emotional resonance. Small experiential touches, such as dynamic visual feedback, restaurant

recommendations tailored to user mood, or humanised order tracking, can serve as subtle but powerful differentiators in an otherwise commodified experience.

Marketing and branding professionals should also recognise the strategic value of symbolic and emotional cues in post-purchase stages. Gestures such as thoughtful packaging, surprise rewards, or follow-up messages after service failures can signal care and foster attachment. Rather than over-relying on price-based promotions or short-term incentives, platforms should invest in trust-building mechanisms and service recovery strategies that emphasise fairness, empathy, and consistency.

Importantly, experiential value should not be treated as decorative or optional. It must be embedded across the journey in a coherent and context-sensitive way. Platforms that achieve this are more likely to move consumers out of the default switching loop and into a loyalty path. In short, the design and delivery of food services must evolve from a purely transactional model toward a relational one, where experience becomes a long-term competitive asset.

6.4. Limitations

While this study offers meaningful insights into consumer experience with FDAs, it also presents several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative and exploratory nature of the research, based on a limited number of in-depth interviews, prioritises depth over generalisability. The findings reflect the subjective perceptions of a small group of participants and cannot be statistically extended to the broader population of FDA users.

Second, the study is context-specific, both culturally and geographically. All participants were drawn from a single national context, and their expectations around service quality, emotional resonance, and platform usage may be shaped by local norms. As such, the transferability of findings to other cultural or market environments is limited.

Third, the research design focused on self-reported perceptions and intentions, rather than observing real-time consumer behaviour. While rich in narrative, the data does not capture how users act under dynamic or high-pressure conditions, nor does it track actual retention or switching patterns over time.

A further limitation relates to the construction of the interview protocol. Given the limited availability of prior research directly addressing experiential value in the context of FDA journeys, the interview guide had to be developed from first principles. While this approach enabled originality and flexibility, it also carried the risk of missing relevant dimensions or unintentionally guiding responses. Future research could benefit from more systematically validated instruments or comparative frameworks to strengthen both reliability and interpretative consistency.

6.5. Suggestions for future research

Building on the findings and limitations of this study, several directions for future research emerge. First, the revised conceptual model introduced in this thesis could be tested quantitatively to assess its validity across a broader and more diverse population. A large-scale survey or structural equation modelling could help confirm the relationships between the three value types (threshold, differentiating, and attachment-building) and behavioural outcomes such as reuse intention and brand attachment.

Second, future research could explore how experiential value is perceived across different user segments. Variables such as age, frequency of app use, digital literacy, and lifestyle orientation may influence how users interpret emotional or symbolic value in digital services. Investigating these distinctions would allow for a more granular understanding of loyalty mechanisms and platform preference in food delivery contexts.

Third, cross-cultural studies could provide valuable insights into how expectations around experiential value vary across regions. As this research was conducted in a single cultural setting, comparative studies in other markets would enhance external validity and reveal how cultural norms shape both satisfaction and switching behaviour.

Finally, researchers could extend the conceptual framework to other digital service categories where commoditisation and platform switching are prevalent, such as ridesharing, grocery delivery, or subscription-based commerce. Such extensions would test the generalisability of the experiential value typology and contribute to broader discussions on digital loyalty, service design, and consumer-brand relationships in mediated environments.

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Appendix A: Codes Glossary

Appendix A.1: Codes generated from Pre-purchase stage

Aggregate theme	Second-order theme	First-order theme	Definition/Description
Convenience and Familiarity as decision heuristics	Ease over effort	Convenient app choice	Reflects the perception that some apps are easier or faster to use, leading participants to prioritise minimal cognitive or physical effort during ordering. Convenience acts as an automatic heuristic guiding app selection.
		Saved info in app	Refers to how previously stored personal details (e.g., address, payment, preferences) streamline the process, creating a sense of continuity and frictionless repetition that strengthens habitual use.
		Streamlined decision flow	Indicates a fast, intuitive decision process with minimal deliberation. Users tend to rely on established patterns rather than comparing options extensively, reinforcing the perception of efficiency.
	Variety of choice	Wide restaurant selection	Describes how perceived diversity in available restaurants or cuisines enhances user satisfaction and signals higher utility and flexibility, contributing to a perception of overall convenience.
	Familiarity-led choice	Familiarity outweighs promotions	Suggests that users often choose the most familiar and trusted app, even when other platforms offer financial incentives. Familiarity reduces uncertainty and acts as a shortcut for trust and reliability.
		App switching as cross-check	Refers to the behaviour of briefly checking other apps for price or availability before returning to the preferred one. This pattern indicates confidence in a default choice, while still maintaining a sense of control.
	Effort justified by need	Reinstalls app for specific craving	Illustrates strong intrinsic motivation or craving that justifies higher effort (e.g., reinstalling an app) when users seek a specific food, showing how desire can override effort reduction.
	Situational triggers	Responds to app notifications	Captures how situational cues such as app notifications, limited time offers or reminders can prompt spontaneous orders, reflecting the influence of external triggers over deliberate intention.

	Routine reinforcement	Default app usage	Highlights the role of habit and repetition: users tend to default to the same app due to accumulated familiarity, smooth usability, and memory of past successful experiences. This reinforces behavioural consistency over time
Situational and Emotional drivers of choice	Price sensitivity	Promoting hunting	Describes the active search for discounts or promotions that make one app more appealing than another. This behaviour reflects cost-conscious decision-making and rational evaluation of short-term savings.
		Delivery fee as determinant	Refers to the decisive influence of delivery costs in app choice. When fees are perceived as excessive, users switch to competitors; conversely, lower or waived fees reinforce app loyalty.
		Overall deal evaluation	Indicates that users compare total perceived value—combining food price, delivery fee, and speed—before ordering, assessing which app offers the “better deal” rather than focusing on a single factor.
	Subscription advantage	Premium membership for benefits	Highlights how subscription plans (e.g., “Prime” memberships) create a psychological anchor for loyalty by reducing perceived risk and reinforcing convenience through free deliveries or exclusive offers.
		Price-brand perception	Reflects how users associate certain apps with affordability or frequent discounts, forming brand-based mental shortcuts that simplify cost evaluations during decision-making.
	Routine use	Routine daily usage	Refers to the integration of food delivery apps into everyday routines, such as weekly meals or workday lunches, showing how repetition and familiarity reduce deliberation and increase reliance.
		Low situational variation	Captures how users tend to repeat similar app choices across different situations, indicating stable habits and a low influence of external contextual changes.
		Weekly meal tradition	Represents structured and recurring ordering habits (e.g., “Friday sushi night”), linking food delivery behaviour to ritualised consumption and comfort-seeking.
	Emotional state	Effort avoidance	Describes the use of food delivery as a response to physical or mental fatigue. In these moments, convenience and emotional relief override other evaluative criteria such as price or variety.

		Ordering as stress relief	Highlights the emotional comfort derived from delegating effort. Ordering functions as a form of self-reward or stress alleviation, aligning with hedonic motivations behind consumption.
	Social context	Use in social setting	Refers to instances where social situations (e.g., gatherings or shared meals) influence app choice. Group consensus or peer familiarity often determines the selected platform.
	Contextual triggers	Motivation changes with situation	Indicates that motivations for ordering vary with context — such as weather, mood, or company — showing that behavioural triggers are situationally fluid rather than stable preferences.
		Late-night availability	Represents how time-based constraints (e.g., limited restaurant options after hours) shape decision-making, with users defaulting to the app that remains functional or offers more options late at night.
Functional and Experiential app evaluation	Real-time engagement	Order tracking satisfaction	Refers to how real-time tracking creates a sense of control and engagement during the ordering process. The ability to visualise progress reduces perceived waiting time and enhances trust in the system.
	Reliability and service quality	Service failure	Describes moments when users experience repeated delivery or service issues, which strongly influence future app avoidance. Reliability emerges as a key determinant of trust.
		Service excellence	Reflects how consistent, timely, and professional delivery reinforces positive attitudes toward the app, increasing perceived quality and satisfaction.
		Faster ETA	Represents how shorter or more credible estimated delivery times are interpreted as indicators of superior service performance, shaping app preference and perceived reliability.
	Satisfaction	Prior satisfaction or dissatisfaction	Indicates how users rely on previous experiences to guide new decisions. Positive encounters enhance loyalty, while negative ones heighten sensitivity to minor issues and drive app switching.
	Aesthetics and presentation	Perceived presentation cues	Captures the influence of app interface design and restaurant curation (e.g., visuals, layout, and imagery) on perceived quality and user enjoyment. Even functional features acquire symbolic value when well presented.

	Trust and brand reputation	Brand reputation	Highlights how the perceived credibility and standing of the app (e.g., known partnerships, market leadership) shape users' confidence in its reliability and professionalism.
		Platform trust	Refers to trust built through transparency, consistent service, and predictable experiences, functioning as a risk-reduction mechanism in digital consumption.
	Usability and interaction	Category clarity aids decision	Describes how well-structured menus, filters, and categories facilitate quicker and less stressful decision-making, reinforcing perceptions of app competence and efficiency.
		Poor segmentation slows decision	Represents frustration when poor information organisation forces users to spend more time searching, increasing cognitive effort and discouraging use.
		Poor usability triggers switching	Indicates that confusing navigation or excessive steps during ordering lead users to abandon the app, prioritising alternatives perceived as simpler or faster
	Feature value and innovation	Unique functional feature	Reflects how specific or innovative app functionalities (e.g., reorder shortcuts, saved preferences) create added experiential value and distinguish the platform from competitors.
		Personalization	Describes how personalised recommendations, tailored suggestions, or memory of previous orders enhance perceived customer centricity and strengthen affective bonds with the app.

Appendix A.2. Codes generated from Purchase stage

Aggregate theme	Second-order theme	First-order theme	Definition/Description
Transactional trust and transparency	Platform trust	Secure payment	Refers to the perceived safety and reliability of payment systems. The presence of recognised, efficient methods (e.g., Apple Pay, MB Way) reduces perceived risk and fosters confidence in the transaction.
		Perceived fairness and transparency enhance trust	Captures how clearly displayed costs, transparent fees, and visible policies generate feelings of fairness and strengthen trust in the platform's integrity.
		Information transparency	Denotes the extent to which clear, complete, and easily accessible information allows users to feel informed and secure when finalising an order.
		Reliable process	Refers to consistent, dependable system functioning — including stable connections, on-time processing, and predictable order flow — that enhances confidence in the service.
	Brand perception	Positive brand evaluation through reliability	Describes how consistent operational quality and error-free transactions reinforce perceptions of professionalism, competence, and brand credibility.
		Expectation-based forgiveness	Represents users' willingness to tolerate minor issues when the platform demonstrates a strong reputation for reliability and honesty.
	Cost transparency	Hidden fees reduce perceived reliability	Highlights how the discovery of hidden or ambiguous charges during checkout undermines perceptions of fairness and damages trust in the service.
	Reliability/Service quality	Payment failure reduces satisfaction	Indicates how technical errors or incomplete payments disrupt user confidence and reduce satisfaction by breaking the sense of procedural reliability.
		Lack of notifications reduces satisfaction	Suggests that the absence of timely status updates increases uncertainty, leading users to perceive the process as less reliable and transparent.
		Transparent delay notifications preserve trust	Captures how openly communicating delays sustains credibility and prevents frustration by framing transparency as an indicator of accountability.
		Inaccurate information reduces trust	Describes how misinformation, inconsistent updates, or unclear tracking data weaken perceptions of system reliability and professionalism.
		Communication breakdown increases stress	Refers to moments when miscommunication between courier, restaurant, or platform disrupts trust, heightens anxiety, and reduces satisfaction.

Functional fluency and emotional reassurance	Accessibility	Accessibility options ease interaction	Interface options such as language or layout adjustments facilitate inclusive use and make the experience more intuitive.
	Navigation issues	Poor usability triggers switching	When navigation feels confusing or slow, users tend to abandon the platform and move to competitors.
	Navigation support	Intuitive design	Layouts that anticipate user needs enable seamless interaction with minimal cognitive effort.
		Category clarity aids decision	Clear and logical structuring of menus and categories simplifies product selection and accelerates decisions.
		Seamless checkout flow	Streamlined processes reduce friction and enhance a continuous sense of fluency from selection to payment.
	Payment flexibility	Variety of payment methods	Offering multiple payment options, such as cards, MB Way, PayPal, or Apple Pay, enhances user convenience and sense of control
	Emotional reassurance	Reassurance through functional fluency	Smooth and predictable processes create a sense of calm and confidence during use
		Information visibility increases confidence	Clear and accessible updates strengthen trust in the app's reliability
		Inaccuracy increases stress	Tracking inconsistencies disrupt predictability and cause anticipatory anxiety
	Real-time engagement	Order tracking satisfaction	Real-time updates and progress feedback make users feel informed and in control
		Desire for precise pre-arrival updates	Users value small, timely heads-ups that match real delivery progress.
		Notification redundancy reduces clarity	Excessive or repetitive updates decrease usefulness and user satisfaction
	Ease over effort	Saved info in app	Storing previous orders or details reduces friction, supporting habitual and effortless interaction.
		Streamlined decision flow	Simple and automated steps shorten the decision process and preserve cognitive ease.

Perceptions of playfulness of experiential enhancement		Functional extensions enhance perceived ease	Adding practical new features, such as meal voucher or card integration, simplifies the process and increases perceived convenience
		Personalization increases perceived usefulness	Customizable or personalized features add functional and emotional relevance.
		Inclusive functionality enhances perceived value	Features that enable accessibility or inclusivity increase perceived fairness and trust
		Segmented interactivity enhances inclusiveness	Optional, context-based features (e.g., family/kid mode) promote inclusivity
		Aesthetic design enhances emotional connection	Visually appealing or thoughtful details increase enjoyment and attachment
		User control enhances reassurance	Empowering users with practical options increases trust and comfort
		Affective personalization enhances emotional connection	Personalized, caring interactions build positive emotional responses.

Appendix A.3. Codes generated from Post-purchase

Aggregate theme	Second-order theme	First-order code	Short description / definition
Experiential value perception	Contextual & Conditional Experiential Value	Context-dependent appreciation	Extras are valued only when they fit the meal type or context (e.g., premium dishes, special occasions).
		Effort–value moderation	Extras are accepted when the enjoyment or benefit outweighs the effort or time required to use them.
	Functional & Practical Enhancement	Functional extension value	Extras that add practical or functional utility, such as reheating tips or ways to reuse leftovers.
		Sustainability-oriented value	Value created by extras that reduce waste or promote eco-friendly behaviour.
	Hedonic & Affective Enrichment	Hedonic self-reward / occasion value	Extras that transform the delivery into a special or indulgent moment, creating emotional pleasure or self-reward.
		Interactive co-creation experience	Involving the customer in food assembly or finishing, making the experience more playful and engaging.
	Economic & Quality Evaluation	Price-conditioned acceptance	Extras are appreciated only when they do not significantly increase cost or when perceived as fair for the price.
		Packaging as quality signal	Premium packaging is interpreted as a tangible sign of quality and professionalism.
	Strategic & Segmented Differentiation	Experiential differentiation advantage	Extras can serve as a strategic differentiator between apps if offered selectively and optionally.
	Utilitarian Resistance	Perceived irrelevance of experiential extras	Extras are viewed as unnecessary or irrelevant; the user prioritises convenience, speed, and reliability.
Emotional and experiential aftermath	Contextual personalisation	Context-fit emotional response	Positive reaction when the delivery or extras match the user's situation, meal type, or personal preferences.
		Adaptive experience relevance	Recognition that the service adapts to different contexts (e.g., casual vs. special meals), enhancing emotional satisfaction.
	Sustainability and ethical cues	Eco-conscious appreciation	Emotional response of satisfaction or trust when the brand shows environmental or ethical responsibility (e.g., sustainable packaging, anti-waste).
		Moral reassurance	Feeling of doing "the right thing" or supporting responsible behaviour through the service choice.
	Symbolic gestures	Personalised attention cues	Emotional connection triggered by small gestures (notes, gifts, greetings) showing personal care.
		Humanised service symbolism	Seeing gestures or details as signs of empathy and genuine concern rather than routine marketing.

	Expectation alignment	Fulfilled expectations	Emotional satisfaction when the delivery meets time, quality, and condition promises.
		Exceeded expectations	Positive surprise when the service goes beyond what was expected, increasing delight and trust.
	Emotional trust reaction	Trust reinforcement	Growth of confidence in the service after positive, consistent performance.
		Trust recovery	Emotional restoration of trust after a previous failure is well handled or compensated.
	Proactive communication	Reassuring updates	Emotional comfort derived from timely, transparent notifications about delivery progress.
		Empathic problem-handling	Feeling cared for when communication during issues is polite, fast, and solution-oriented.
	Positive delight response	Emotional uplift	Immediate feelings of joy, surprise, or pleasure following an unexpectedly good experience.
		Memorable enjoyment	Long-lasting positive emotional memory associated with the service due to exceptional treatment or delivery.
Trust repair and service recovery evaluation	User selective disengagement	Situational avoidance	Temporary withdrawal from an app or restaurant after a negative delivery incident, without full switching.
		Platform switching trigger	Permanent abandonment of an app due to repeated or unresolved delivery failures.
	User retention response	Forgiveness through recovery	Continued use of the app after an issue, when the resolution is handled fairly and promptly.
		Trust reinforcement through accountability	Increased trust or loyalty when the brand takes responsibility and resolves issues transparently.
	Fairness-based trust repair	Perceived distributive fairness	Feeling that the compensation or refund offered after a failure is fair in relation to the inconvenience caused.
		Procedural fairness perception	Evaluation of whether the recovery process was clear, timely, and user-friendly.
		Interactional fairness perception	Evaluation of the politeness, empathy, and tone shown during communication about the problem.
	Handling and responsiveness to problems	Responsiveness speed	How quickly the platform or courier reacts to user complaints or delivery incidents.
		Empathic handling of issues	Feeling that the brand listened and cared during problem resolution, rather than providing automated or generic responses.
		Transparency in updates	Perceived openness and clarity in communicating the status and resolution of a reported issue.

Perceived delivery reliability	System–courier coordination	Operational alignment	The degree to which the platform and courier coordinate effectively to ensure timely and accurate deliveries.
		Routing and logistical consistency	Perceived reliability based on stable, predictable courier routing and efficient coordination between restaurant, courier, and system.
	System communication and feedback	Accuracy of notifications	Trust in the service increases when tracking updates and notifications reflect real-time delivery progress accurately.
		Responsiveness of support system	User confidence in how quickly and clearly the app communicates or reacts when delivery information changes or issues occur.
	Functional consequences of reliability failure	Disruption of user routine	Late or incorrect deliveries causing frustration by interrupting planned activities or mealtimes.
		Perceived service unreliability	Users' broader perception of the brand's consistency and dependability after repeated or serious reliability failures.
	Product condition and safety integrity	Temperature and packaging condition	Evaluation of whether food arrives warm, sealed, and intact, preserving freshness and safety.
		Order completeness and accuracy	Whether the entire order arrives as requested, with all items present and correct.
		Hygiene and handling care	Trust reinforced when packaging is clean and the courier handles food carefully, maintaining sanitary standards.
	Functional reliability criteria	Timeliness of delivery	The extent to which the delivery meets or exceeds the promised time window.
		Accuracy of order fulfilment	Reliability judged by receiving exactly what was ordered, free of errors or substitutions.
	Courier professionalism	Appearance and conduct	Users associate professionalism (uniform, polite behaviour, respectful attitude) with reliability and brand credibility.
		Accountability and courtesy	Perceived reliability reinforced when couriers show responsibility, communicate politely, and resolve issues respectfully.