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Discovering Consumer Complaint Behavior in Online Food Delivery

SMMM20: SM: Master's (Two Years) Thesis

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Sincerely,

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## **Abstract**

Online food delivery is becoming increasingly popular and has attracted more and more attention of scholars. However, the study on online food delivery faces a gap of consumer complaints. Those complaints can help service providers improve their service and business. This thesis aims to identify the factors that cause customers to complain and the behaviors customers show when they complain in the context of online food delivery. Semi-structured interviews with ten participants and online review examinations were conducted. This study demonstrates that delivery delay, bad food quality, unprofessional delivery man, and technical issues are the main factors that drive customers to complain. No action, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from the business, and exit or boycott are the complaint behaviors customers display when they are dissatisfied. Finally, we suggest that online food delivery companies and restaurants need service quality management, strategic complaint management, and human resource management to prevent and take advantage of consumer complaints.

**Keywords:** Complaints; consumer behavior; online food delivery; dissatisfaction.

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## **Introduction**

Technology has achieved rapid development since the Second World War, and people's everyday lives and society have been changed significantly (Castells, 2009). Computers, the internet, smartphones were born in succession, opening the door to the current digital age. New digital technology plays a significant role in society, increasing productivity, reducing costs, and promoting economic growth. The business world also values technology as customers demand higher quality service. In this sense, business firms need to adapt to the new digital age to meet more customers' needs (Hirschberg et al., 2016), and the food delivery business is no exception. With the help of the internet, the food delivery business has been extended to online service.

Online food delivery refers to a process where customers choose a restaurant and order food on websites or mobile apps. After finishing ordering and payment, the restaurant will receive the order and start to prepare the food. In the meantime, the delivery partner will receive a notification and go to the restaurant to pick up the food and then deliver it to the customer (Devipriya et al., 2020). Online food delivery offers customers numerous restaurants and food items to choose from. Customers also can compare food menus, prices, reviews, and locations to make an optimal choice. Online food delivery service is making people's life much easier and more convenient. In turn, accessibility and timeliness have become the most significant advantages of online food delivery (Devipriya et al., 2020).

As the number of internet and smartphone users has mushroomed, online food delivery has reached a rapid growth. The online food delivery market hit 136.4 billion U.S dollars in revenue in 2020 worldwide, increased by 27 percent compared to 2019 (Statista, n.d.). Moreover, the number of online food delivery users around the world has reached 1.2 billion by the end of 2020 (Statista, n.d.). The number of digital orders in restaurants has achieved an average of 23 percent annual growth since 2013 (NPD Group, 2019). On the other hand, the COVID-19 global pandemic brings the online food delivery market a considerable opportunity to develop because of either the lockdown implemented by the government or people choosing not to go to public restaurants to reduce the risk of infection (Chauhan, 2020). Statista (n.d.) predicts that

the global revenue of the online food delivery market will reach 182 billion U.S. dollars with 1.6 billion users in 2024. Therefore, online food delivery is a fast-growing market filled with development potential. It has also raised more and more attention to academia.

### **Previous Research on Online Food Delivery**

As interest in online food delivery grows, the scope of the research in this field has become more extensive and more significant. Much existing literature on online food delivery concentrates on the technological aspect, studying an assignment algorithm to optimize the process of online food delivery system to reasonably allocate delivery men based on the location of restaurants and users to minimize the delivery time and cost (Kumar Kottakki et al., 2020; Huq et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2020). Some other research is involved in the area of the environment (Arunan & Crawford, 2021; Xie et al., 2020), sustainability (Li et al., 2020), and innovation (Gavilan et al., 2021).

On the other hand, plenty of literature on online food delivery focuses on customers' experiences, behavioral intention, and the relationship between different factors involved in online food delivery when it comes to service and customers. Customers use online food delivery because it can provide fun and pleasure, bring convenience, help them save time and money, and earn their trust (Yeo et al., 2017; Ray & Bala, 2021; Gunden, 2020). Other research identifies some factors in online food delivery. Food delivery time, service quality, price (including both food price and delivery fee), and the condition of food delivered are primary factors that have a direct impact on the success of online food delivery (Saad, 2020), which will further influence the rating provided by customers (Devipriya et al., 2020). Besides, some indirect factors, such as variety and diversity of restaurants and food menus, the packing of food, locations of both restaurants and customers, traffic, software, and network, will also affect online food delivery and on-time delivery system (Saad, 2020; Devipriya et al., 2020). Therefore, the customers, the online platforms, the restaurants, and the delivery agents all play an essential role in the performance of online food delivery service.

Furthermore, service quality will affect customer satisfaction, which will further influence the repurchase intention of customers in the context of online service (Kalia et al., 2016; Leonnard, 2019), which applies to the online food delivery service as well. Customer satisfaction has been suggested to be the mediation role between service quality and behavioral intentions to use online food delivery (Suhartanto et al., 2019; Annaraud & Berezina, 2020; Yusra & Agus, 2020). In other words, excellent service quality can make customers feel satisfied, and satisfied customers would love to order food from the same restaurant at the same platform again.

### **Problematization**

As described above, scholars have done a lot of research on online food delivery. However, there is still at least one aspect that has not been studied yet: consumer complaint. Online food delivery belongs to the service industry. Given that services are variable and uncertain in how they are conducted, mistakes and errors cannot be avoided during the service process (Hart et al., 1990). Customers usually feel dissatisfied and choose to complain about their dissatisfaction when products are defective, or services are poor (Matusitz & Breen, 2009). However, there is, in particular, lacking understanding of how online food delivery users complain about their dissatisfaction during the online food delivery service. Besides, in previous research on online food delivery, little has explored what causes customers to complain.

Regarding the complaints from consumers, scholars came up with the theory of consumer complaint behavior, which is closely related to customer dissatisfaction, and analyzes and discusses customers' behaviors in case of dissatisfaction (Kitapci et al., 2019). Understanding consumers' complaints and complaint behaviors are vital as they could reduce the negative impact on the service provider and help providers survive and develop sustainably (Tronvoll, 2008). Feedback and customer complaints are key drivers to improving service and business as they provide helpful information with service providers, including common service problems, marketing intelligence data, and service quality perception (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005; Johnston & Mehra, 2002; Jean Harrison-Walker, 2001). Therefore, there is a need for research to explore consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery.



## **Research Aim & Question**

By examining the previous research, we found out that the study on online food delivery lacks knowledge of consumer complaint behavior. Hence, this research aims to determine what factors drive customers to complain during online food delivery service and what behaviors customers display based on the framework of consumer complaint behavior. On the one hand, this research aims to fill the research gap and contribute a deeper understanding of consumer complaint behavior to online food delivery. On the other hand, this study is expected to provide theoretical support to the online food delivery industry (e.g., online food delivery companies and restaurants) and point out the direction for future research. Therefore, this thesis comes up with two research questions:

1. What factors cause online food delivery customers to complain about the service experience?
2. What behaviors do customers show when they complain?

Given the research questions are involved in the social interaction between customers and service providers and the nature of exploring the consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery, the research will be conducted based on a qualitative approach. Factors causing online food delivery customers to complain and behaviors customers display when they complain will be identified through the data analysis built on interviews and netnography.

## **Overview of the Structure**

The thesis is structured as follows: previous research on online food delivery, research problems, and research questions and aims have been introduced in this section. Theories and frameworks related to cognitive appraisal, customer dissatisfaction, and consumer complaint behavior are introduced and discussed in the next section. It is followed by the methodology, which introduces how the research is conducted and how research data is collected and analyzed. Besides, research ethics and research quality

are considered. The thesis then analyzes and explains the research results about factors causing customers to complain and consumer complaint behaviors in online food delivery. Finally, the whole research is concluded. Also, theoretical implications for the research field of online food delivery, managerial implications for the online food delivery industry, research limitations, and suggestions for future study are presented.

## **Literature Review**

In this section, theoretical frameworks in this research will be presented. In order to answer research questions and fulfill the research aim, we will depart from customer dissatisfaction first because it is commonly regarded as a prerequisite for customers to engage in compliant behavior. Then, we will introduce the cognitive-emotive appraisal, which comes after the customer's unsatisfied experience. It explains why people use very different coping strategies to react to a dissatisfied service. After the cognitive-emotive evaluation, different complaining behavioral consequences of customers will be introduced; that is the main focus in our research — customer complaint behavior.

### **Customer Dissatisfaction**

In recent years, researchers have paid a great deal of attention to customer satisfaction. Much research aims to understand what makes consumers satisfied or dissatisfied and how they respond under these different conditions, which is of paramount importance for marketing practitioners as well as for managers to make better decisions in service organizations (Rosen et al., 2003).

The dominant theoretical model with regards to customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction is the Expectancy Disconfirmation Paradigm (EDP) proposed by Oliver (1977). The expectancy disconfirmation model proposes a process by which the consumers compare their pre-purchase expectations with the actual perceived performance of a product or service (Chih et al., 2012; Koc, 2017). Oliver (1980) suggested that “subjective disconfirmation represents an intervening ‘distinct cognitive state resulting from the comparison process and preceding a satisfaction judgment.’” Rosen et al. (2003) made a similar conclusion in the service quality measurement research, which supported that the expectations create a frame of reference to make comparative judgments, leading to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the consumption. When the expectations are more significant than the experienced performance, customers' expectations are negatively disconfirmed, whereas when the delivered performance is less than the prior expectations, customer expectations are positively disconfirmed (Chih et al., 2012; Koc, 2017). Thus, positive disconfirmation

leads to satisfaction, and negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction (Chih et al., 2012), where satisfaction is a direct function of the disconfirmation gap (Koc, 2017; Rosen et al., 2003).

While the expectation disconfirmation paradigm has become the most widely applied method of consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction assessment, the EDP's validity and reliability may be disputable for some reasons. For example, the difficulty to conceptualize the pre-purchase expectations, the logical inconsistency, the hardship to accommodate the dynamic nature of expectations, etc. (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). Moreover, Tronvoll (2011) and Liu et al. (2020) argued that disconfirmation theory emphasizes the cognitive aspects of service experience, which fails to consider other perspectives such as emotional, hedonic, and behavioral.

### **Cognitive-emotive Appraisal and Coping Strategies**

A dissatisfaction experienced by customers could lead to a cognitive-emotive appraisal (Gyung Kim et al., 2010), formulated by Lazarus (1966). This general conceptual framework was initially to address how people deal with a negative situation (Chebat et al., 2005; Gyung Kim et al., 2010) and further elaborated by Lazarus and his co-workers who developed into a three-stage appraisal process: primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and coping behavior (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). They described cognitive-emotion appraisal as “a process through which the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being, and if so, in what ways” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 992). As such, situational and personal factors play important roles in how an individual evaluates an event, whether stressful or not, resulting in different perceptions and coping behaviors (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998).

Marketing researchers have adapted this cognitive-emotive model to understand consumer complaint behavior as coping responses utilized in an unsatisfying consumption experience (Chebat et al., 2005; Gyung Kim et al., 2010; Menon & Dube, 2004). When a dissatisfying event appears, consumers begin their appraisal of a negative incident itself and the emotions it produces (primary appraisal), followed by

an appraisal of their capabilities to deal with dissatisfying experiences (secondary appraisal), and these two components determine people's coping strategies (Gyung Kim et al., 2010).

Corresponding to Lazarus's cognitive-emotive model, the coping strategies can be categorized into three types: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance-type behaviors (Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The problem-focused coping behavior refers to customers seeking confrontive redress to the problem. Conversely, the emotion-focused coping behavior is more inward-directed, aiming to reduce their negative feelings. Finally, people who adopt an avoidance-based method tend to ignore the situation and therefore taking no action to make things better.

### **Consumer Complaint Behavior**

Based on the results of the appraisal process, consumers will decide their coping strategies and complaint behaviors in particular in order to deal with the dissatisfying experience (Gyung Kim et al., 2010). Consumer complaint behavior refers to "an action taken by an individual which involves communicating something negative regarding a product or a service to either the firm manufacturing or marketing that product or service, or to some third-party organizational entity" (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981, p. 6). It is closely connected to customer dissatisfaction as service failure is inevitable during the service process, and customers could be unhappy or dissatisfied about problems or errors they encountered. Consequently, customers would complain about the service failure.

Consumer complaint behavior has been attracting the attention of scholars since the 1970s. Hirschman (1970) presented three different types of responses of customers to the deterioration of the quality of the product or service provided for the first time: "exit," "voice," and "loyalty." "Exit" signifies that customers stop buying products or services from the company or members leave the organization. "Voice" refers to customers or members who report the failure or dissatisfaction directly to the management or some other authorities, or privately to close people, such as family

members, friends, or colleagues. “Loyalty” means that customers or members take no action about the dissatisfaction.

Later on, Day and Landon Jr. (1977) came up with a dichotomy, classifying consumer complaint behavior into two dimensions: action and non-action. The action dimension is split into two categories: public actions and private actions. Hence, complaining directly to the service provider, reporting to the authorities or third-party agencies can be regarded as public actions (Heung & Lam, 2003), while stopping purchasing or boycotting products or services from the firm, and discussing and communicating the negative word of mouth with acquaintances are considered as private actions (Kitapci & Taylan Dortyol, 2009).

Following Day and Landon Jr. s’ (1977) dichotomy, Singh (1998) argued a revised classification containing voice responses, private responses, and third-party action. Loyalty (i.e., taking no action) and voice (i.e., complaining directly to the service provider) should be categorized in voice responses. Private responses include negative word of mouth and boycott, while legal action and complaining to customer organizations can be considered third-party action. Later, in the 2000s, Mattila and Wirtz (2004) categorized voice into interactive actions and remote actions based on how customers complain to the service provider. Son & Kim (2008) added one more category, namely information provision other than public actions and private actions, in terms of personal information in the context of digitalization. Specifically, information provision refers to customers who stop providing their information to the online service provider when it comes to complaint behavior. Among various taxonomies, the dichotomy of consumer complaint behavior presented by Day and Landon Jr. (1977) is considered as the foundation for all, as it provides a clear, comprehensible, and effective explanation to understand different sorts of consumer complaint behavior (Panda, 2014; Singh, 1988).

All in all, there are five types of consumer complaint behavior, namely, no action, exit or boycott, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from business and complain to third-parties, according to the dichotomy framework presented by Day and

Landon Jr. (1977) and reviewed and summarized by Kitapci et al. (2019). These five consumer complaint behaviors will be introduced and discussed as follows:

### *No Action*

No action implies that customers take no action or keep silent when they encounter service failure or dissatisfaction (Day & Landon, 1977; Day et al., 1981). In the existing literature regarding the consumer complaint behavior, besides “no action,” different names such as “non-behavioral” (Singh, 1988), “inertia” (Gyung Kim et al., 2010), “inactivity” (Kaur & Sharma, 2015), and “silence” (Kaur & Sharma, 2015) are all used to describe non-compliant behavior or consumers.

In fact, a great number of customers would not complain even though they had a bad or unsatisfied product or service experience (Chebat et al., 2005; Ro, 2015). Ro (2015) identified four dimensions that explain why customers do not complain: time and effort, compassionate trust, lack of responsiveness, and social pressure. Time and effort imply that customers need to invest plenty of time and effort to express their dissatisfaction to the service provider effectively. Compassionate trust reflects that some customers are loyal to a company and show sympathy for the service provider when a service failure occurs. Lack of responsiveness is connected to the opinion of customers toward a company. When customers cannot find someone to complain or do not think their complaint will be valued, they usually choose not to complain. Finally, social pressure describes that since negative emotions such as anger and depression are usually involved in complaining, customers do not want to express these emotions in front of others.

### *Exit or Boycott*

Exit or boycott is one of the private actions of consumer complaint behavior. Exit or boycott happens when “consumers terminate their relationship with the company, product, service, brand or retailer,” including switching to other brands or companies (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). Istanbulluoglu et al. (2017) argue that some customers would like to voice their exit behavior and incite acquaintances to stop using or boycott

the product or service, while others prefer to leave quietly and silently. On the other hand, no matter which customer exits, the company would not directly notice because customers have already abandoned the company and would not express their dissatisfaction (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). Moreover, Broadbridge and Marshall (1995) propose that customers usually exit or boycott the product or service when they encounter difficulties in problem solving, including a long time waiting and poor service, and would perceive the brand or company as unreliable, which can further influence brand loyalty and repurchase intention. Therefore, exit or boycott is one of the most harmful complaining actions (Day et al., 1981), and coping strategies of the company for exit or boycott behavior are vital, including proactive actions, such as apology and compensation (Lee & Song, 2010).

### *Negative Word of Mouth*

Another private action of consumer complaint behavior is negative word of mouth (NWOM). Jansen et al. (2009) present the original meaning of word of mouth (WOM) that “a process of conveying information from person to person.” In the context of commerce, NWOM has been considered as one of consumer complaint behaviors. NWOM is defined as “consumer communications that denigrate, complain or advise against a product, service or organization usually due to an unpleasant experience” (Kimmel, 2010).

Moreover, Sundaram et al. (1998) identified four motives for NWOM: altruism, anxiety reduction, vengeance, and advice seeking. Altruism implies that customers communicate complaints to prevent others from encountering the same problem. Anxiety reduction signifies that NWOM gives vent to customers’ negative emotions, including anger, frustration, and anxiety. Vengeance means that customers incite others not to buy products or services from a particular company that does not care about consumers or does not listen to customers. Finally, advice seeking indicates that customers share their negative experiences to get some advice from others.

As the development of information technology, negative electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), defined as negative statements and complaining made by actual and former



customers about a product/service or company itself through Internet-based technology such as social media platforms, can also be included in NWOM (Dahlgaard-Park, 2015; Gyung Kim et al., 2010; Istanbuluoglu et al., 2017). Many researchers have studied customers' intentions to engage in online NWOM communication (Mardhiyah et al., 2013; Verhagen et al., 2013). In addition to the four motives mentioned previously, Verhagen et al. (2013) pointed out that senders's intentional conduct is a significant driver of online NWOM. This factor could be explained by the fact that consumers perceive direct complaints to the company as futile or their efforts will be in vain, so they are more likely to choose online NWOM communication (Mardhiyah, 2013). In short, there are crucial influences from the likelihood of success (Mardhiyah, 2013) and usefulness (Andreassen & Streukens, 2013) of making a complaint with online NWOM through digital channels.

#### *Voice or Seek Redress Directly from Business*

Seeking redress directly from business is one of the public actions of consumer complaint behavior, implying that customers express their dissatisfaction directly to the service provider through company-owned or company-managed one-to-one communication channels to resolve the problem or get some kind of compensation (Day & Landon, 1977; Istanbuluoglu et al., 2017). It is also named as "voice" (Hirschman, 1970; Gyung Kim et al., 2010) or "public complaining to the company" (Istanbuluoglu et al., 2017). Moreover, the possibility of getting compensation, the company's willingness to resolve the problem, how likely the firm takes the correct or effective action for customers, the attitudes of dissatisfied customers towards complaints, and the loyalty of consumers to the firm are factors that influence customers whether voice or seek redress directly from the service provider (Kitapci et al., 2019).

Furthermore, voicing or seeking redress is beneficial to the service provider and the company, as dissatisfied customers provide information about their dissatisfaction and offer opportunities to discover and resolve problems, further facilitating the company to improve the quality of products or services (Kitapci et al., 2019; Gyung Kim et al., 2010; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987). Likewise, customers choosing to complain to the company indicates that they trust the company and believe that the firm can fix and

improve the problem (McKee et al., 2006). However, not all consumers voice legitimately. Reynolds and Harris (2005) argue that there is some illegitimate voice from customers triggered by money, solitary ego, peer-induced esteem, or disruptive motivations.

### *Complain to Third-parties*

Another public action of consumer complaint behavior is to complain to third parties, which refers to that customers seek help from external agencies, including the government, legal organizations, customer organizations, and mass media, to file their dissatisfaction and complaints (Gyung Kim et al., 2010; Istanbuluoglu et al., 2017). Third-party complaints are significant as they represent high-order actions that any other complaint behavior (Feick, 1987). For instance, customers can voice their complaints to a third-party organization if they do not get a decent or satisfying response from the service provider. Singh (1989) argues that customers choose to complain to third parties 1) only when all other complaint actions do not work; 2) when they do not think they can get an effective response or the problem cannot be resolved when directly voicing to the service provider; or 3) unrelated to other complaint actions.

Even though a relatively small number of customers would complain to third-party organizations, the problems are usually serious and demanding to the company due to the intervention of external agencies, which can further harm the interest of the company and cause a severe financial risk (Gyung Kim et al., 2010).

Furthermore, online complaining is a new way of complaining to third-party organizations. On online complaint sites, customers can easily file a complaint, which is likely to be communicated among other consumers. Hence, monitoring and managing online consumers' complaints are vital for service companies (Lee & Song, 2010).

## **Summary and Reflections of Theoretical Frameworks**

Building on the previous research, we are able to map out five common consumer complaint behaviors in the literature. This includes no action, exit or boycott, negative word of mouth, voicing directly to the business, and third-parties complaint. The five common consumer behaviors are also highly relevant to coping strategies influenced by the emotive-cognitive appraisal process. In this sense, customer's complaint behavior to a dissatisfying experience depends on the evaluation of the adverse event itself as well as their own ability to cope with the situation, resulting in different coping strategies, either problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidance-type behaviors.

The frameworks in this section provide theoretical lenses for us to make sense of our research questions: what factors motivate customers to engage in a complaint behavior, and how do they complain? Expectancy Disconfirmation Paradigm (EDP) (Oliver, 1977) provides a credible explanation to interpret what situations lead to customer dissatisfaction. Followed by a cognitive-emotive appraisal (Lazarus, 1966) in which people deal with a negative situation through a three-stage appraisal process: primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and coping behavior (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

At the end of the theoretical framework, we present Day and Landon Jr.'s (1977) dichotomy of consumer complaint behavior to help us understand how customers complain after encountering dissatisfaction. The complaint behaviors include no action, exit or boycott, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from the business, and complaint to third parties. Lazarus & DeLong's (1983) and Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) research about problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance-type of coping strategies resonated the five types of consumer complaint behavior in a way that voicing and third-party complaints can be categorized into problem-focused behavior, exit, and negative word of mouth refer to emotion-focused behavior, and no action relates to avoidance-type behavior. As a result, the two frameworks allow us to analyze our empirical data and understand how modern customers react after encountering a dissatisfied experience in an online food delivery context.

## **Methodology**

To understand what factors contribute to customer complaints and what complaining behaviors customers display during the online food delivery service, the research is conducted based on two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and netnography. The methodology section introduces the methodological approach in the beginning. It is followed by data collection methods of how interviews and netnography are conducted and how research data is collected. Then the section explains how the data is analyzed. Finally, ethical consideration and research quality evaluation are discussed.

## **Methodological Approach**

This research employs a qualitative approach to discover a deeper understanding of consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery. From an epistemological position, the research uses an interpretivist approach, which emphasizes the understanding of the social world by examining participant's interpretation of that world (Bryman, 2012). In this research, the understanding of consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery is aimed to be identified, interpreted, and understood by collecting and analyzing the experiences and opinions of online food delivery users. Moreover, from an ontological position, the research builds on a constructivist approach, which suggests that the social world and social phenomena are built up and constituted in and through social interaction (Bryman, 2012). This research seeks to understand how the phenomenon of consumer complaint is constructed by the social interaction between online food delivery customers and service providers, including food delivery platforms, restaurants, and delivery men.

Moreover, abductive reasoning is used by this research, as with abduction, researchers need to describe and interpret the world from participants' perspectives, and a social scientific account of the social world must come from those perspectives (Bryman, 2012). On the other hand, unlike induction, abduction features that the theory is grounded in the understanding and interpreting of the contexts and the social world (Bryman, 2012). In this research, we aim to figure out the factors that cause online food

delivery customers to complain and their behaviors when they complain from the perspective of those customers and based on the social interactions between customers and service providers. Besides, especially for the second research question, our interpretation is built on the theoretical framework of consumer complaint behavior. We use both the theory and words from participants to understand consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery. Thus, abduction is suitable for this research. All in all, these methodological approaches build a foundation of the choice of research methods, as it helps us understand consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

### *Interviews*

In order to interpret and conclude the phenomenon of consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery, interviews were adopted as the first method to gain primary data. Semi-structured interviews were carried out as this type of interview provided respondents with opportunities to answer more in their way while keeping a better structure for comparability than focused interviews or unstructured interviews (May, 2011). Focus group interviews were also considered because they cost less and gain richer data, help respondents remember events, and provide more significant reflectiveness between respondents (Flick, 2014). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, consequent gathering restrictions, geographical distance limitations, and time zone difference focus group interviews were not possible to be an option. Therefore, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted as the first qualitative research method.

The primary requirements for respondent selection are that they had used online food delivery service more than once and preferably had some bad experiences or felt dissatisfied with the service provider. Respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. At first, we picked respondents we know, and then those respondents introduced us to more respondents who fit the requirements. In the end, ten respondents were selected. Respondents are from 20 to 30 years old, originally from eight countries of five continents (see table 1).

<b>Interview number</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Recruitment method</b>
1	17/03/2021	23	Female	Taiwan	Direct contact on Facebook
2	18/03/2021	29	Female	Canada	Direct contact on Discord
3	18/03/2021	25	Male	China	Direct contact on Facebook
4	19/03/2021	24	Female	Malaysia	Direct contact on Discord
5	20/03/2021	20	Female	The United States	Direct contact on Discord
6	21/03/2021	30	Male	Ghana	Direct contact on Facebook
7	22/03/2021	23	Male	France	Direct contact on Facebook
8	23/03/2021	24	Male	Brazil	Through a mutual friend
9	24/03/2021	25	Male	China	Direct contact on Discord
10	25/03/2021	26	Male	France	Through a mutual friend

Table 1. List and information of respondents

The interviews were conducted in English. All respondents speak English fluently and can express their thoughts clearly, even though English is not the first language of most of them. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, travel and gathering restrictions are implemented. Hence, all interviews were carried out online. Zoom was picked as the interview tool as it is free, easy to set up and use, and available on most common operating systems (ZOOM, 2020). Furthermore, interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, and some following questions were asked for those short answers to improve the depth and enrich the content of interviews (May, 2011).

The interview process and questions followed the interview guide (see Appendix 1). Interviews started with some introducing questions to understand respondents' general understanding and use habits of online food delivery. Then it was followed by open-ended questions about bad experiences with online food delivery service. For example, what was a bad experience respondent encountered and what thing or who caused it? Moreover, questions regarding consumer complaint behavior were asked to find out what actual actions respondents took to deal with the dissatisfaction or service failure in online food delivery and the reasons are behind those actions. The interviews ended up with questions about reuse intentions and reasons for online food delivery. Moreover, terminologies are avoided, and some simple and easy-to-understand words are adopted in the interview questions to prevent respondents from incomprehension and confusion.

### *Netnography*

Small sample size in qualitative research is hard to achieve data saturation or informational redundancy to generalize a large population (Bryman, 2012). Ten semi-interviews are perceived as a relatively small sample size. Therefore, the second qualitative method, netnography, was considered. Netnography is defined as “ethnography conducted on the internet; a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of the online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications” (Kozinets, 2006, p. 193). Moreover, with the development of the internet and the popularization of personal computers and smartphones, more and more consumers can post their expressions and dissatisfaction with a brand, product, or service on digital media platforms, where those comments can be read by others (Kim et al., 2016). Hence, netnography is a proper method to examine online reviews towards online food delivery to gain rich data of causes of service failure and consumer complaint behavior.

Reviews on Trustpilot ([www.trustpilot.com](http://www.trustpilot.com)) were examined. Trustpilot is one of the most popular independent digital review platforms where consumers can leave their comments on any company about products and services (Trustpilot, n.d.). For the selection of searching keywords, according to The Business of Business (2018), the

world's top ten food delivery companies were confirmed. Then the five companies from the top-ten list with the most online reviews on Trustpilot were selected as searching keywords: "Uber Eats," "Grubhub," "Just Eat," "Deliveroo," and "DoorDash." Moreover, all reviews were filtered by bad ratings and English since the research object is bad experiences and consumer complaints. It turned out that there were 62,608 reviews in total. Given the massive number of reviews and limited time of data analysis, the first 50 reviews of each company, that is, 250 reviews altogether were checked. As reviews on Trustpilot are in chronological order, all reviews we examined are up to date.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

First, all interviews were recorded by the integral recording feature on ZOOM and transcribed by the authors, as transcription is necessary to interpret verbal data (Flick, 2014). The transcription produced 126 pages. Given the significant number of transcription text and online reviews, a structural approach to analyze data is required. Hence, thematic analysis was carried out, even though it is not perceived as an analysis approach (Bryman, 2012). First, the initial read of the text data was done, and content related to research questions was highlighted and divided into several segments. For the first research question, that factors causing customers to complain in online food delivery, we labeled codes on our own and categorized them into four themes, namely bad food quality, delivery delay, unprofessional delivery man, and technical issues. These themes are based on Saad's (2020) research that delivery time, service quality, price, and food condition constitute the success of online food delivery. We adopted and adapted them based on our collected data. Except for the price, the other factors are significant themes to our research on consumer complaint behavior. We further specified service quality to the unprofessional delivery man and considered technical issues as another important factor. As for the second question, that what behaviors customers display when they are dissatisfied, which is based on the current study of consumer complaint behavior mentioned in the literature review above, five categories were applied: no action, exit/boycott, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from the business, and complain to third-parties. Hence, text data of interviews and online reviews were divided into two central parts for two research questions and



several themes for each question. Moreover, texts were read carefully, and codes were reviewed more than once to reduce redundancy and repetitiveness (Bryman, 2012).

### **Ethical Consideration**

Researchers need to follow a series of ethical guidelines to reflect on the relationship with participants and take shape in the part of public discourse about the desirability of new forms of knowledge acquisition, which can further facilitate to avoid social research becoming vested interests and maintain the public cooperation and trust in social research (May, 2011). Hence, this research makes sure to follow ethical codes. First, all respondents were informed about the research information, including interview recording, research process, data analysis, and data usage, and gave consent to participate in the research. Second, the anonymity of the respondents is ensured, and their privacy is not revealed. Moreover, the relationship with respondents is taken seriously. All respondents were treated with enthusiasm and gratitude so that they felt being valued and respected.

Furthermore, for netnography data, given online reviews are public and can be accessed by everyone, there is no need to ask for permission to use those texts. However, considering ethics and personal privacy, all users from the Trustpilot website, including real names and nicknames, maintain anonymity. On the other hand, those four online food delivery platforms or companies were selected for the review examination and the research. We did not contact any platform or company and did not receive any information. Justice in analyzing data is maintained.

### **Research Quality**

Unlike quantitative research, research quality is not a technical problem in qualitative research, and the process of evaluating the quality cannot be standardized (Flick, 2014). However, the quality of the qualitative research is still important because it builds the foundation of choosing the research design and applying the theory. The classical criteria of accessing the research quality, including validity and reliability, with adequate reformulation, can be applied to qualitative research (Flick, 2014). First,

interview guides were double-checked by implementing a test interview and after the first interview to ensure the integrality of interview questions and increase the reliability of the research. Moreover, the reliability of data analysis is improved by reading and examining text data more than once to reduce the redundancy and repetitiveness of coding. Furthermore, for the result and analysis of the research, the original words from respondents and online reviews were used and presented for interpretation to ensure the meaning would not be misunderstood and increase the validity of the research.

In addition, language is another concern in this research. All interviews and online review examinations were conducted in English. On the one hand, not all respondents speak English as their native language. In this sense, their actual expression could be slightly different from what they think, which might influence the quality of the research. Hence, we ensured that we used words as simple as possible and spoke slowly and clearly in the interviews. We also showed our patience and gave opportunities to respondents to rephrase their sentences and express their ideas clearly to reduce the negative effects on the quality as much as possible. On the other hand, English online reviews were only chosen to be examined, excluding any other language, because machine translation is not accurate enough and may cause ambiguity, increasing data accuracy and affecting the quality of the research.

## **Results and Analysis**

Based on the first research question, to find out the factors that cause online food delivery customers to complain, we identified four main factors leading customers to complain about their service experience in online food delivery, namely, delivery delay, bad food quality, unprofessional delivery man, and technical issues. Moreover, in terms of the second research question, to understand what behaviors customers show when they complain, our data demonstrate and matches four out of five complaint behaviors based on the consumer complaint behavior framework introduced in the previous section, which are no action, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from the business, and exit or boycott. Complaining to third parties has not been found in the online food delivery service.

This section will analyze and discuss the data collected from two qualitative methods. The four main factors that cause online food delivery customers to complain are introduced first, including several subclasses. Four main consumer complaint behaviors are then presented, including reasons behind those behaviors. Moreover, the reason why no one complains to third parties is also discussed.

### **Factors of Consumer Complaint Behavior**

Results from previous literature showed that customer dissatisfaction is a prerequisite of their complaint behavior. Dissatisfaction can easily appear when an online food delivery user's expectation is greater than either the received food, the perceived service experience, or both since the root of a dissatisfied experience within food-service delivery is the fragmentation of the service delivery chain (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). Customer's expectation can be negatively disconfirmed at any stage of the service, from a mobile application to online payment, from waiting for the food delivery to receiving the food. Online food delivery users with dissatisfying experiences are thus in great quantity.

Our findings identified a number of different factors that trigger customer's dissatisfaction with online food delivery. We further categorize them into four major

factors, which highlight the cause of unsatisfied experiences—namely, bad food quality, delivery delay, unprofessional delivery men, technical issues. Among them, delivery delay accounts for the majority of bad online food delivery experiences. The second significant factor is bad food quality, followed by unprofessional conduct by a delivery man. The least common factor is technical issues. In the following section, we will elaborate on them in detail respectively.

### *Delivery Delay*

The delivery delay is the most common factor that led to customer dissatisfaction in our findings. According to Saad (2020), delivery time is a crucial factor in customer satisfaction as well as retention within the e-commerce environment; online food delivery is no exception. While time-saving function is positively related to the use of online food delivery (Saad, 2020), numbers of respondents in our interviews, as well as pieces of evidence from the online review system, revealed their negative experiences regarding delayed delivery, which is counterproductive to their initial intention to adopt this service. The delivery delay spoils the advantage of the convenience that online food delivery service brings, as illustrated by this review:

It took three hours to get our food. I could have ordered myself, picked it up by myself, and put the leftovers away easily an hour before our food arrived. It seems that unless you live two minutes away from the restaurant, Uber drivers don't want the job. I can't see me using this service again. There is no convenience waiting three hours for food.

(Uber Eats user, Trustpilot)

Customers are usually aware of the distance between the restaurant and their location and are thus time-conscious of the delivery, particularly when the estimated delivery time is far exceeded. This concerns a breach of expectations, leading to customer dissatisfaction (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). Respondent 7 indicated how frequent users do not accept long waits for relatively simple orders within a close distance of their home:

I have that one time in Canada, where I ordered food, and the food took very long time to arrive like forty minutes. And in a while because I ordered, like McDonald. And I know that McDonald is very close, it's quite close to my dorm in Canada, so it should not have taken that long. In the end, my food was not warm at all. It was completely cold. So yeah, that's one very bad experience.

(Respondent 7)

In some situations, the food delivery goes beyond delay. The ordered food never showed up. One of our interview respondents told us that:

I order the food and the food never came up... I was kind of mad at them because of the food, I call them like forty minutes later... They were like; we can't since the restaurant is closed. I would say, of course, I ordered at eight. The guy was supposed to come at nine. ..., they were like, oh we are sorry, now we are closed we cannot do anything for you.

(Respondent 10)

Negative customer experiences due to delays or even the cancellation of orders without informed consent led to frustration and a feeling that the food-delivery service cannot be trusted; thus, companies that cannot deliver as expected are perceived to be unreliable. (Furunes & Mkono, 2019) A different frequent scenario seemed to be that long waiting hours are followed by the cancellation of orders from the company side, as expressed by this customer:

I just ordered a meal around one pm. It took some time for the restaurant to start preparing my order so I used the messaging to ask a customer service if the order was going through. They confirmed it was but they were a little busy, so it might take a little longer to be delivered. Three hours later, they canceled my

order. What kind of a food ordering service is this? Why didn't you cancel it right away?

(DoorDash user, Trustpilot)

Dissatisfaction produced by delivery delay emerges when the actual delivery time exceeds the estimated time, which confirms Oliver's (1980) Expectancy Disconfirmation Paradigm where customers went through a comparison process and proceed a satisfaction judgment, either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In our findings, we notice that many online food delivery users tapped into the convenience of the delivery service yet ending up being disappointed. Since many of the customers are time conscious about the distance between the restaurant and the delivery address, long waits with a short distance are unacceptable. After all, to customers, a delay in delivery beyond the expected delivery time will hurt satisfaction regardless of the road and weather conditions (Saad, 2020).

In addition to delivery delay, in some cases in our research, the long waiting times of food delivery were in vain due to the company's cancellation. Without the customer's agreement, the 'disappear' order caused frustration and the feelings that the food-delivery service and the company itself were considered untrustworthy and unreliable. Therefore, the negative experience of delivery delay or long waits in vain encourages customers to engage in compliant behaviors.

### *Bad Food Quality*

Food quality refers to the overall performance of food to fulfill customer needs and is considered an important element of the customer experience with online food delivery (Suhartanto et al., 2019). In other words, the quality of food is one of the main factors affecting customer satisfaction. However, many online food delivery companies fail to satisfy customers' demands regarding food quality in our findings. Our interview respondents reported their dissatisfaction experiences with online food delivery service because of bad food quality received. Any deviation from the standard quality will negatively impact customer satisfaction (Chih et al., 2012; Koc, 2017).

We mapped out the three most common deviations that lead to bad food quality from our collected data. Firstly, the delivered food misses out on something that is supposed to come with the delivery. Secondly, the delivery firms delivered the wrong food to the customers, or the received food does not match what customers had ordered online. Thirdly, the condition of the delivered food is ruined and not well-presented to customer's hands. Respondent 5 shared a bad experience about some part of her order was missing:

Honestly, I think the most I would count as bad is one time they didn't have what I wanted... I wanted a strawberry milkshake from a place, and I got other food from there too, but they didn't have strawberry milkshakes at the time. But the delivery person wasn't able to call me and ask what I wanted instead of strawberry. Then they just didn't get anything.

(Respondent 5)

According to this statement, a lack of completeness of order can lead to dissatisfaction for customers. In another similar case, the sauce supposed to come with the order but got missed out:

I was quite frustrated because they forgot to give me the sauce supposed to come with the pizza. When I get the first time in the restaurant, they gave me a sauce, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted that particular pizza. So it didn't have that, and I was not happy about it.

(Respondent 6)

We can see that customers tend to compare their experiences with traditional foodservice in physical shops, which is established on hospitality rather than logistics (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). Online food delivery users have similar or even the same standards/ expectations regarding food quality as dining in a brick and mortar stores. As a result, it is important for restaurants to be consistent with their food quality both in-store and for delivery.

Providing wrong food to customers is another factor leading to dissatisfaction. The food ended up differently compared to what customers had ordered on the food delivery website. As described by Respondent 4:

I ordered six pieces of chicken, and it was supposed to be mixed flavor. They sent me all the same flavor, but I still got six pieces of chicken.

(Respondent 4)

The company did not follow the customer's order and instruction, and the food was wrongly delivered with the same flavors instead of the mixed flavors as customers requested. The problem may seem trivial, but any deviation from the standard framework will ultimately generate negative expectation disconfirmation and dissatisfaction (Oliver 1977).

The last dimension of bad quality food is being ruined. Fresh, well-cooked, and well-presented are important food characteristics for the customers to be satisfied (Saad, 2020). Yet, in our findings, many respondents had bad experiences with their food ruined. This problem is usually accompanied by poor delivery, which can be elaborated by one of our respondents:

I think maybe they didn't handle it properly. So the pizza looked a bit scrambled eggs inside, and I wasn't really happy with that... it wasn't handled properly in the box.

(Respondent 6)

Poor delivery service is an obstacle in online food delivery that results in damaged product arrival (Saad, 2020). The delivery quality influences the quality of food and the satisfaction of online delivery customers.



In addition, the improper packing of food causes dissatisfaction among the consumers (Devipriya et al., 2020), which negatively affects the condition of the food. Respondent 8 indicated the received food was messed up due to the packaging issue:

... I see the bag is a little bit moist, a little bit humid; just say it's okay; it's the hotness of the food. We went upstairs, and we opened, and they're sort of everywhere. They didn't close the lid. So the food just jumped in the bag.

(Respondent 8)

The factors that lead to bad food conditions could be multiple. For example, the food packing was not handled properly in the kitchen, poor delivery service damaged product arrival or both. Thus, the line of responsibility and ownership in the online food delivery supply chain is unclear, where participants can easily shift the risk and blame to other parties (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). This is indeed problematic for customers because they are confused about whom to apportion responsibility for when a service dissatisfaction occurs and further influences how customers make a complaint. The online food delivery system is a collective process (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). It requires contributions from various parties, including the consumers, the online food delivery companies, the restaurants, and the delivery couriers. They are equally important, playing a pivotal role in providing quality service experience within the online food delivery network (Devipriya et al., 2020).

To conclude, in our research, bad food quality is a common factor resulting in customer's dissatisfaction regardless of missing portions of an order, wrong food delivered, or ruined condition of food. They all increase customer's motivation to file a complaint.

#### *Unprofessional Delivery Man*

Quality delivery is crucial to ensure a proper food arrival. Delivery personnel is the driving force to provide accurate and timely delivery to customers' homes (Devipriya et al., 2020; Saad, 2020). However, an unprofessional delivery man creates a negative

impact on overall online food delivery performance. Our research identified three types of unprofessional behaviors: lack of professional competence, rule violation, and bad manners.

First of all, finding the restaurants can become a hectic task for delivery couriers, same as locating a consumer. In our findings, many respondents found delivery agents were not capable of finding their locations, as Respondent 7 told us:

There's also that problem like he called me many times because he couldn't find my place. But I explained really in detail where and how to access it, but still, he had so many troubles arriving, and that also explained why he took too much time to come... Each time he said he understood and arrived ten more minutes, he called me again. So yeah, that's not good.

(Respondent 7)

Additionally, Respondent 2 down below had similar experiences. She indicated the communication issue was responsible for the problem, which reflects Devipriya et al.'s (2020) findings that the communication problems raised due to the difficulties to converse over the phone.

Sometimes, maybe they can't find your apartment, or they don't know where they're going. Because of that communication error, sometimes your food will go cold because maybe the Foodora driver or delivery person can't find where you live.

(Respondent 2)

The language barrier is another cause of miscommunication. One of our respondents described his experience with a delivery man who could not speak the local language:

In Paris, one delivery guy. He couldn't speak French. So he really tried, but after I suggested to switch in English, to see if he was more convenient and then yeah he was much more

fluent in English so we could communicate... Otherwise, it was very like the rest of the service was really good. But I think that maybe for someone who cannot speak English, it would have been very bad.

(Respondent 7)

The second type of unprofessional behavior is breaking the rules. Due to the COVID pandemic, many online food delivery companies have provided a contact-free delivery option that lets customers request the order be left at their door to reduce the spread of infection and increase the safety for both customers and delivery workers. Nevertheless, we found out many delivery personnel neither follow the regulation nor customer's demand. As illustrated by the following online review and Respondent 5 statement:

I chose to have my food outside the door, yet the driver knocked on the door and came in contact with our eighty-five years old man during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Uber Eats user, Trustpilot)

It was like over the summer of 2020 when the COVID was really bad. It was from a pizza place that specifically advertised no contact delivery. And I even sent them the notes as you can just, you know, knock, and then leave it there, but they kept knocking and knocking and knocking because they wanted me to answer the door. So I had to answer the door. And like grabbing the pizza from them and I was just like it's supposed to be no contact why did you make me come here and go in contact with you, so that was annoying.

(Respondent 5)

Finally, bad manners of delivery man is another cause of customer's dissatisfaction. Since delivery agents are the only physical factors in the whole business, delivery personnel plays a crucial role within the online food delivery network (Devipriya et al., 2020). In our research, we realized that the delivery man's behavior or attitude was not

always professional. Respondent 2 told us his experience of a random encounter with a delivery courier who acted irresponsibly with other customers' food:

... I went out the door, and a delivery driver asked me if we ordered Max. And I told him: No, I did not order Max. And he just left it on the doorstep, like; he left it outside. And I was like, okay, he didn't even bother to go looking for the apartment. Yeah, that's really bad.

(Respondent 2)

In another case, the delivery man showed a very bad attitude to the customer in person. As demonstrated by this online reviewer:

Wrong order delivered, finally got in touch with the driver to let her know and her attitude was disgusting, very unprofessional, and rude. Never again will I use Uber Eats.

(Uber Eats user, Trustpilot)

Indeed, a good relationship between delivery man and customer could lead to the satisfaction of food delivery service while a bad one could negatively impact the overall performance. There is a strong influence of the relationship between consumers and the delivery agents on the delivery system (Devipriya et al., 2020). The delivery workers who provide the only physical contact in the entire process are the backbone of the online food delivery industry (Devipriya et al., 2020). Hence, unprofessional behaviors such as lack of professional competence, rule violation, and bad manners should be improved with skills and education.

### *Technical Issues*

Thanks to technology development in recent decades, online food delivery has gained increasing popularity among modern customers. While technology has enhanced customer service experience dramatically, a number of technical issues have appeared, followed by the ubiquity of using online food delivery applications of consumers.

Indeed, the delivery service is very convenient, but these services are extremely vulnerable to technological problems (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). In our findings, we also observed several technical issues, which mainly emerged during the order service, payment, and monitoring process. For example, one respondent told us that his online food experience is out of control due to a system error:

...We went on the app for some fast foods... and we were very hungry, so we order two burgers each and the fries, nuggets, and soda. And then we received a message. Your order was canceled. This restaurant is closed... Let's order another Wendy's. So we went to another Wendy's on the app, and the order again the same thing... Then we received another message that the restaurant was closed. Then we go, look again at the first Wendy's if it is still open... Let's order again. So we ordered the same thing... So we waited a little bit, and then half an hour later we received our order.... We started eating, and then the door ringed again. Because it's another order, the same thing... I think it's an error, and we started eating and again the third time. There came another order.

(Respondent 8)

Payment problems account for technical issues. As Respondent 3 and an online review stated:

I have a coupon. And I want to use it. But it's stuck in the system. So I've got some difficulties in applying the coupon.

(Respondent 3)

The app is useless and barely functional. Difficult to actually pay, as apparently, it won't accept a card I have already registered.

(Uber Eats user, Trustpilot)

When the information provided by the app is inconsistent with the offline information, which was termed “virtual unreality” by Furunes & Mkono (2019), one example was that the status of the order did not match the updates provided by the online food application:

As the delivery time approached, the tracking app confirmed it was on its way and on time. The delivery time came, and went, and the order status suddenly changed to say the food had been delivered, even though it clearly hadn't...

(Uber Eats user, Trustpilot)

In this case, the customer could not trust the technology-mediated food-service delivery because the virtual unreality created misleading information. Customers expect quality service of websites when making online purchases (Suhartanto et al., 2018). This is particularly important in the online food delivery context, where the real-life interaction between the firms and their customers is fairly limited so that customers rely tremendously on online information and devices.

Additionally, due to the limited contact within the online food delivery context, technology may result in the de-personalization or over-standardization of service (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). In this sense, the technical issues capture customers' perception of insufficient options, limiting customers to a very narrowly defined service specification (Furunes & Mkono, 2019). These experiences clearly fail to meet customers' expectations. The dissatisfaction derived from de-personalized service experience is expressed by the customers:

Horrible. This app deserves no stars... On the menu, it allows you to pick the cheeses and the sauces but none of the toppings (SkipTheDishes and Door Dash both allow you to select from a list of toppings)... The sub arrived, and it just came with the sauces, the meat, and the cheese...

(Uber Eats user, Trustpilot)

In this example, customers complained that the apps offered such limited menus, with no optional extras or room for tailoring the service that customers felt that the service does not pay attention to them as unique customers. Therefore, technology here serves to de-personalize the service by forcing the customer to make extra efforts while the online food delivery company does less in service transaction, which is inconsistent with the customer's expectation.

Overall, customer experiences under the technology-mediated food-service delivery model revealed both positive and negative customer encounters. Technology itself is also a factor in customer dissatisfaction, making the online food delivery service prone to technical failures due to the significance of the digital component in this business and the very limited interactions between customers and service providers. Our findings allow us to identify related technical problems, including payment issues, virtual unreality, depersonalization, and over-standardization, explaining the technical-induced factors motivating customers to be involved in complaint behavior. Customers expect quality service of websites when making online purchases. Thus, the quality of websites is crucial for the online food delivery company to provide a user-friendly shopping experience in digital spaces.

### **Consumer Complaint Behavior in Online Food Delivery**

Consumer complaint behavior is regarding customer satisfaction and customers' behavior when they are dissatisfied with products or services (Kitapci et al., 2019). Customer dissatisfaction is the main trigger of consumer complaint behaviors (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). After finding out what causes customers to complain, what complaint behaviors customers display in online food delivery are studied. From the ten interviews, four kinds of consumer complaint behavior are identified, namely, no action, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from the business, and exit or boycott, according to the theoretical framework of consumer complaint behavior. No action and negative word of mouth are the most common complaint behaviors customers show, followed by voice or seek redress directly from the business. Exit or boycott comes last. These consumer complaint behaviors and the reasons behind each behavior will be presented in the following part.

### *No Action*

No action means that customers do not actively express their dissatisfaction and keep silent when they are dissatisfied with the product or the service (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). According to Chebat et al. (2005), most dissatisfied consumers choose not to complain after a bad experience. Our interview data reflects this phenomenon: eight respondents out of ten had experiences of taking no action and keeping silent when they encountered bad experiences in online food delivery. Those bad experiences are triggered by all the categories we have discovered above, including delivery delay, bad food quality, unprofessional delivery man, and technical issues.

Moreover, Stephens and Gwinner (1998) present that customers who take no action when they have bad experiences with the service provider are usually avoidance type. They simply leave the situation and avoid the problem. When it comes to why consumers do not complain, Ro (2015) presents four dimensions: time and effort, compassionate trust, lack of responsiveness, and social pressure. Time and effort imply that consumers think that they have to invest a great amount of time and effort to express their dissatisfaction to the service provider effectively. Respondent 4 answers straight to the point:

I just gave up on it [complaining]...It was too much time for me to decide...I don't want to take more time on it.

(Respondent 4)

The words from Respondent 4 signifies that customers take no action for their bad experiences in online food delivery because they do not want to invest time and effort. Customers do not think that spending time and effort on complaints is worthy.

Second, compassionate trust signifies that customers trust the service provider and company (Ro, 2015). Some consumers regard themselves as loyal to companies with a good reputation and feel sympathetic to the company when they have a bad experience



with products or services. Respondent 1 encountered a delivery delay but showed sympathy to the delivery man:

For me, 15 [minutes] delay of food delivery is okay, totally fine. Because I feel like it is very hard to be delivered on time, especially when you order during the high max time, like popular ordering time...Yeah, so I didn't expect them to deliver on time. But for me, I would say, under 30 minutes of delay is okay. It's bearable.

(Respondent 1)

The interview with Respondent 1 shows that some customers do not take any action for their dissatisfaction in online food delivery because they understand that mistakes happen, and they feel empathetic to the service provider.

Furthermore, lack of responsiveness is related to consumers' perception of the service provider and company (Ro, 2015). Specifically, consumers sometimes fail to find some staff to talk to, or consumers do not think that their complaints will be taken or valued even though the staff is available. In this case, the perception of lack of responsiveness from customers leads them not to complain. Respondent 6 acknowledged that there was nobody he could complain to, and he did not know that he could complain through the app or website:

I didn't complain. Because, actually, if I was in the shop, I could have complained. But because I took the order, and I opened the order when I was in my room, there was no one I could complain to. Again, I was not aware if I could make a complaint about my food on the app or the mobile website. I had no knowledge of that.

(Respondent 6)

On the other hand, even though Respondent 3 knew how and where to complain, he did not do that because he did not believe that the food delivery platform would help fix the problem:

So, that's because I didn't think that would make any difference. Because if I want to complain, I have to complain about the restaurant itself. So, I don't think they will help if I complain to the platform.

(Respondent 3)

The interviews indicate that some customers do not refuse to take any action for their dissatisfaction or bad experiences in online food delivery. However, they decide to keep silent because either they cannot find any staff they can talk to, or they do not trust that the service provider would take their complaints seriously or help them solve the problem.

The last dimension is regarding the consumer's feelings of social pressure when they have a bad experience with the service provider (Ro, 2015). Complaining usually contains some negative emotions, such as frustration or rage. Some customers would feel inappropriate and uncomfortable if they express those negative emotions to others' faces. Hence, customers will give up complaining in order to avoid embarrassment and an unpleasant moment. Respondent 9 explained that he would rather keep his good personal image than complaining the dissatisfaction:

I don't feel good when I complain or give them [service providers] lower ratings. I don't want other people to think of me as a bad or unreasonable person. I want to keep my good personal image.

(Respondent 9)

The interview demonstrates that some consumers do not want to report their complaints about online food delivery because they care about their personal image. They do not feel comfortable when they voice the dissatisfaction to or in front of others.

### *Negative Word of Mouth*

NWOM, in the context of the consumer, complain behavior refers to the communications between consumers about complaints and advice against a product, service, or company, usually when consumers have an unpleasant experience (Kimmel, 2010). NWOM is a common consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery. Based on our interview data, eight Respondents out of ten shared their bad experiences to family or friends, which is a very high percentage.

Furthermore, customers who express and share their negative experiences and dissatisfaction are usually emotion-focused because they aim to adjust the psychic reaction to the problem to feel better instead of attempting to resolve the problem (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). This is the main reason customers display the behavior of NWOM (Sweeney et al., 2007). Sharing bad experiences can help consumers release their negative emotions, including anger, frustration, and anxiety (Sundaram et al., 1998). As Respondent 9 mentioned:

I told the second one [the bad experience] to my friend. The second one was the soup. It's gone. The soup was gone. ... I told one of my friends because I was a bit upset. I mean, I didn't mean to blame that delivery guy. But when you received food like that, you didn't feel better. You didn't feel well. So I just told my friend to share the bad feeling, to make me feel better.

(Respondent 9)

The interview showed that Respondent 9 told a friend about his bad experience in online food delivery to ease the upset feeling. His story-sharing did not help to fix the problem but did make him feel better mentally.

Furthermore, some respondents admitted that they shared the bad experiences with their friends to find someone who had the same experience as them, so then they can feel better.

It was my friend who introduced me to that particular restaurant and that particular app, so I had to tell him that complaint. And of course, I know he could do little about it, but I just wanted to know if he has got any similar experience like that before. But I was disappointed because he didn't have any experience like that. It was just me. ... It would make things look a bit normal to me if my friend told me that he had the same experience. ... But when he said he didn't have that experience, I think it really made me feel a bit bad, because I asked myself: why me?

(Respondent 6)

When I talked with my friend about this [the bad experience], they said, oh, they had the same experience...Sometimes it's good to know that you're not alone.

(Respondent 3)

The interviews with Respondents 6 and 3 indicate that they shared their negative experiences in online food delivery to gain an emotional resonance to make them feel better. Unfortunately, Respondent 6's friends did not have similar bad experiences; hence the respondent felt worse because he could not get the empathy. On the other hand, Respondent 3 was in a good mood after he figured out that his friend had the same experience. As Akgün et al. (2015) argued, empathy plays a significant role in emotion. Hence, looking for empathy is one reason customers feel better when they have bad experiences in online food delivery.

In addition, two more motivations of NWOM of customers in online food delivery are discovered. First, according to Thøgersen et al. (2009), consumers may use NWOM and share negative experiences with others to seek some advice on solutions to the problem. Respondent 4 said as following:

For the second thing [the bad experience], I was saying to friends, and they were telling me that I can get a refund and report it through the app. I did it and got a refund.

(Respondent 4)

Respondent 4 expressed her bad experiences in online food delivery to her friends and got some advice on reporting through the food delivery app. Finally, she got a refund for the food order. Her behavior of NWOM helped her get the refund.

Second, Sundaram et al. (1998) present that some consumers take part in NWOM communications to prevent others from having the same problem as they have. The motivation of consumers is to share the story of an unsuccessful experience and help others. Respondent 4 told her family about another bad experience in online food delivery to help her family avoid the same problem:

I shared the first one [the bad experience] with my family to tell them not to order from that restaurant because they messed up my food. And they won't order it.

(Respondent 4)

It is clear from the interview that the customer's motivation sharing the bad experience is to warn others not to order food from the same restaurant to prevent the same problem.

Furthermore, NWOM also includes e-NWOM, which refers to the customers who express their dissatisfaction or complaints with a product, service, or company on the internet, usually through social media sites or review websites (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). In the interviews, none of the respondents mentioned that they had spread NWOM online. However, we found out numerous reviews about online food delivery on Trustpilot, an online review platform, when we conducted netnography to collect online reviews data. Many online food delivery users complain about their dissatisfaction with the review websites. Therefore, expressing e-NWOM is one of the consumer complaint behaviors in online food delivery.

Moreover, an additional motivation was discovered by examining online reviews. Verhagen et al. (2013) argue that consumers may disclose their complaints or thoughts regarding bad experiences so as to encourage the company or the service provider to improve their products or services. During the examination on online reviews, one review from a Just Eat user was noticed. The review was not only about complaints of bad experiences but also a suggestion on the customer service:

... I have rated Just Eat at 3 stars, as although there were problems with my order overall, it is a service that works. However, I do think that there does need to be improved with their customer support service.

(Just Eat user, Trustpilot)

The review indicates that the food delivery platform user wants to encourage the company to improve their service by leaving a review about the bad experience in online food delivery on a review website.

#### *Voice or Seek Redress Directly from Business*

Voice or Seek Redress Directly from Business refers to a situation where customers directly report their dissatisfaction to the company or the service provider when they encounter a bad experience with products or services (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). According to the data collected from the interviews, six respondents reported their complaints directly to the service provider in online food delivery. Even though the online food delivery system is constituted by multiple service providers, including food delivery platforms, restaurants, and delivery men (Devipriya et al., 2020), all the voice of the interview respondents was towards the food delivery platforms. In other words, none of the respondents reported their dissatisfaction and complaints to restaurants or delivery men, but all to the delivery platforms.

Moreover, Stephens and Gwinner (1998) argue that consumers who directly voice dissatisfaction to the offending party are problem-focused in the context of consumer complaint behavior. Customers aim to obtain some kind of compensation or refund

when they complain to the service provider (Day & Landon, 1977). In our interviews, respondents talked about the reasons why they reported directly to the food delivery platform:

I want to have compensation. Of course, an apology is nice, but you need to do something about it. ... What they should do is offer me either a coupon or free of charge for my next meal.

(Respondent 2)

I want a refund, refunding the money. Or giving a coupon for the next order. Or like the same order but for free. This type of compensation.

(Respondent 7)

Besides asking for compensation, we also found one of the respondents who aimed for a technical problem solution by reporting his bad experience to the food delivery platform:

I have a coupon, and I want to use it. But it's stuck in the system. So I've got some difficulties in applying the coupon. Then I called customer service to report the problem. After five minutes, they fixed the problem so I can use that coupon.

(Respondent 3)

The interviews demonstrate that claiming compensation and seeking a problem solution is why customers voice their dissatisfaction directly to the food delivery platforms in online food delivery. The compensation customers pursue usually contains refunds, coupons, and free meals.

Furthermore, regarding the channels customers used to report their complaints, Mattila and Wirtz (2004) propose two channels: interactive channel and remote communication. Face-to-face and phone complaining are typical examples of interactive channels. On the other hand, remote communication includes posted letters, emails, or direct

messages. In our interviews, respondents usually voice to the food delivery platforms by phones or emails:

... then, the next morning, we sent an email, we explained everything [the bad experience]. The cancellation wasn't for the cancellation, and they [the food delivery platform] refunded us.

(Respondent 8)

I have a coupon, and I want to use it. But it's stuck in the system. So I've got some difficulties in applying the coupon. Then I called customer service to report the problem. After five minutes, they fixed the problem so I can use that coupon.

(Respondent 3)

The interviews show that phone complaints emails are common channels that customers use to complain about online food delivery. However, due to the feature of e-service of online food delivery, customers cannot face-to-face complain about the food delivery platform.

Moreover, besides the channels mentioned by Mattila and Wirtz (2004), a special complaining channel in online food delivery is discovered – the food delivery official report channel through the app or the website. One of the respondents complained about the bad experience through the food delivery app:

I mean, with the first one [the bad experience], I already said, I just put in the customer service order saying like I was missing an item. ... I'm pretty sure once you have your order delivered, then the status of the order page asked you how your delivery went. And in there you can say something was wrong. And then it gives you further options as to what you can select, and so then I selected that something from my order was missing. And I think I was able to select the specific item, and then it refunded me the item amount and the delivery amount for it too...It was



automated. It wasn't like a person. That's something I was very surprised with that too.

(Respondent 5)

The words from Respondent 5 indicate that the food delivery platform provides an option to report an error. The respondent used the built-in report channel to voice her bad experience.

### *Exit or Boycott*

Exit or boycott refers to a situation where customers voluntarily stop the relationship with their company, product, service, or brand or turn to use other company's products or services (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). Exit or boycott is a common consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery. However, given that online food ordering and delivery systems contain plenty of actors, including food delivery companies, restaurants, delivery men, and food ordering applications (Devipriya et al., 2020), customers do not simply stop using online food delivery service themselves to express exit or boycott. Hence, exit or boycott is involved in two aspects: the food delivery platform and the restaurant where customers order food from, based on the data collected from the interviews.

First, a respondent stopped using the food delivery platform because the delivery man went back on the promise of contactless delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic time:

*After the bad experiences, would you like to use an online food delivery service again, or the same platform, or from the same restaurant? So for Domino's during COVID, no. Probably not going to use them. Contactless delivery is not only for my safety but also for you. I don't trust them anymore.*

(Respondent 5)

It is clear that the delivery man's unprofessional behavior leads the customer to exit the online food delivery platform.

On the other hand, some respondents only stopped ordering food from the restaurant when the delivery was delayed or received the wrong food instead of stopping using the online food delivery platform. Respondent 3 stopped ordering food from the restaurant that always has the problem of long-time delivery:

...when I ordered the food, that was at 6 pm, and they started delivery at 6:30 maybe. But, in the end, I got the food at 9 pm. ... I talked with my friend about this. They said; oh, they had the same experience. Oh, they always cost a long, long time for this restaurant to deliver the food. Yeah. So I never order any food again from this restaurant.

(Respondent 3)

Moreover, Respondent 4 decided not to order the food from the same restaurant anymore because they missed out on the food twice. But she would use the same food delivery platform to order food from other restaurants:

I will not order food from this same restaurant anymore. ... I still use the same platform.

(Respondent 4)

Interestingly, even though Respondent 4 will not order food from that restaurant through food delivery platform anymore, she will still patronize the restaurant in person:

I still like their food. If I go to the place where the restaurant is, I might buy from the restaurant again, like eat in or take away, but not delivery.

(Respondent 4)

Hence, when problems happen during the delivery process, the exit or boycott from restaurants only occurs in the context of online food delivery. Customers will still go to restaurants in-person to dine in or take away.

Furthermore, when it comes to the reasons behind the exit or boycott, Broadbridge and Marshall (1995) argue that the difficulties in solving the problems by the service provider, including long delays and poor services, lead consumers to exit or boycott the company, products, or services. According to the interview content above, poor services provided by unprofessional delivery men, long delivery time, and delivered wrong food cause customers to exit or boycott the online food delivery platforms or the restaurants from which customers order food.

### *Complain to Third-parties*

Complaining to third parties signifies that consumers report their complaints to external agencies, including the government, legal agencies, and consumer protection organizations (Gyung Kim et al., 2010; Istanbuluoglu et al., 2017). However, none of the interview respondents expressed their dissatisfaction and complaints in online food delivery to third parties; as Gyung Kim et al. (2010) claimed, only a small percentage of dissatisfied customers make use of third-party agencies.

Moreover, through the interviews with the respondents, we figured out four reasons why customers who encountered bad experiences in online food delivery do not report their complaints to third parties.

First, one of the interview respondents admitted that she did not know that complaining to third parties is an option:

*Did you complain to any third party, for example, the consumer protection organizations or some legal agencies? Oh, I didn't know that existed.*

(Respondent 2)

Hence, the interview shows that consumers did not voice their dissatisfaction with online food delivery to third parties because they did not realize that was an option.

Second, just like a reason behind no action when customers have bad experiences mentioned by Ro (2015) that some consumers do not believe that their complaints would be valued or taken by the service provider, a respondent claim that he does not trust authorities when it comes to settling disputes in online food delivery:

I think the government committees will be too lazy to take care of that [the complaints]. Right? It was just a food order, and they are busy.

(Respondent 3)

The words of Respondent 3 indicate that dissatisfied consumers in online food delivery do not believe that third parties would value or take their complaints seriously. Hence, they choose not to complain to third-party organizations.

Third, according to Singh (1989), consumers tend to report complaints to third parties when other consumer complaint behavior options cannot be executed. In other words, if consumers have displayed other consumer complaint behaviors and get what they want, they will not report to third parties. Respondent 4 claimed that she did not use third-party options because the problem had already been resolved:

*Did you also tell your complaints or experience to any third party, like consumer organizations or legal agencies? No, because they refunded me. There is no point in going for third parties.*

(Respondent 4)

Hence, under the situation where consumers have tried all other complaint behavior options, or the problem has been already resolved, consumers would not report their bad experiences to third-party organizations.

Finally, consumers do not use third parties because they feel empathy for the service provider. As Ro (2015) points out, some customers choose not to complain when they have bad experiences with products, services, or companies, because they feel

empathetic to the service provider. Moreover, complaining to third parties is the most extreme action (Kitapci et al., 2019), which usually causes serious damage to the company (Gyung Kim et al., 2010). Respondent 5 acknowledged that she did not want the delivery man to be punished and chose not to report him:

I mean, I could have done more. I could have called the regulator to complain about the person. But I think with that since it is on their company website and everything that it's no contact. I think it was just that a specific person may have just not done it, and, you know, people are human, so they forget. I don't feel like calling and having this one person be reprimanded for what could have just been like a simple mistake. ... So I don't think it's worth it to complain about that person specifically.

(Respondent 5)

According to the bad experience of Respondent 5, she did voice the dissatisfaction with the food delivery platform but got no response. Then she had an option to report the delivery man to third parties. But she did not go that far because she showed empathy to the delivery man and did not want him to be punished. Therefore, consumers do not voice their dissatisfaction with third-party agencies because they sympathize with the service provider.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Findings**

Online food delivery has become more and more popular in society, bringing many conveniences to everybody's daily life. Moreover, consumer complaint is a hot topic in service research, as customers usually feel dissatisfied and complain when they encounter mistakes and errors during the service process that cannot be avoided (Matusitz & Breen, 2009; Hart et al., 1990). However, given that the current research on online food delivery lacks the knowledge of consumer complaint behavior, this thesis studies the consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery, coming up with two research questions: 1) what factors cause online food delivery customers to complain about the service experience; 2) what behaviors do customers show when they complain?

#### *Causes for Complaining*

In accordance with the first research question, four factors that cause online food delivery customers to complain are identified – delivery delay, bad food quality, unprofessional delivery man, and technical issues, based on the collected data. As the most common factor, delivery delay refers to the situation where the actual food delivery time exceeds the estimated time provided by food delivery platforms or restaurants. Bad food quality implies that the performance of food does not fulfill customer's needs. It contains three deviations: 1) some delivered food is missed out; 2) the received food does not match what customers had ordered online, and 3) the condition of the delivered food is ruined and not well-presented to customer's hands. Unprofessional delivery man signifies that the bad experiences of customers are caused by delivery men's unprofessional behaviors, which include three different types: lack of professional competence, rule violation, and bad manners. Finally, technical issues indicate that food delivery systems or applications go wrong during the online food delivery service process, such as payment failure, failure to apply coupons, or order status errors. These four types of errors are discovered to cause customers to complain about online food delivery.

Moreover, rule violation in unprofessional delivery man is discovered as a new finding. The COVID-19 pandemic facilitates growing the online food delivery industry while yielding new factors that can lead to customer dissatisfaction, making the industry more prone to service failures. For example, in our research, we identified rule violation as an emerging factor that results in customer complaint behavior in the context of the global pandemic and thus has not been recognized in prior research. Although new regulations, such as contactless delivery, have been implemented to reduce human contact and the spread of the infection, many delivery men failed to follow the rule. As such, consumers feel uncomfortable and concerned about the safety, which encourages them to complain.

### *Consumer Complaint Behaviors*

The results also indicate four types of consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery, namely no action, negative word of mouth, voice or seek redress directly from the business, and exit or boycott, in terms of the second research question. No action implies that customers do not take any action and keep silent when they have bad experiences with the service provider. Moreover, four motivations of no action behavior are identified: time and effort, compassionate trust, lack of responsiveness, and social pressure, which accord with the findings from Ro (2015). Exit or boycott refers to a situation where customers stop using food delivery platforms or stop ordering food from the same restaurant when bad experiences occur. Negative word of mouth means that customers express and share their dissatisfaction with others. Customers share because they want to release negative emotions, gain an emotional resonance, seek advice, prevent others from the same problem, and encourage the service provider to improve. Finally, voice or seek redress directly from business signifies that customer directly reports their complaints to online food delivery platforms. Customers usually say through phones, emails, and official report channels in the mobile applications or website. In addition, customers voice to the delivery platform for problem solutions or compensation, such as refunds, coupons, and free meals.

Furthermore, when it comes to exit or boycott, as one of the consumer complaint behaviors in online food delivery, we found out that due to the multiple service providers, including food delivery platforms, restaurants, and delivery men, in online food delivery, customers may exit or boycott different service providers in different circumstances. For example, customers will boycott the food delivery platform if problems occur on the platform, such as technical issues or during the delivery, such as delivery delay or unprofessional delivery man. On the other hand, customers will stop ordering food from the restaurant if problems take place in the restaurant, such as food is missed out or ruined. Moreover, when problems related to the food delivery process happen, the exit or boycott of restaurants only occurs in the context of online food delivery. Customers will still patronize the restaurants in person to dine in or take away.

Interestingly, complaining to third parties has not been found in online food delivery based on the results. In other words, customers did not complain about their dissatisfaction with online food delivery to any third-party organizations, including the governments, legal agencies, and consumer protection organizations. There could be four reasons behind no third-party complaints. First, customers do not know that complaining to third parties is an option. Second, customers do not trust third-party agencies and do not think that they can help resolve the problem. Third, the problem has already been fixed before customers report to third parties. Fourth, customers feel empathetic to the service provider and do not want them to be punished. Moreover, another potential reason is that the sample size is not large enough to discover the customer who has reported to third parties, which will be further explained in limitation.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research deepens our knowledge of customer complaining behavior in the online food delivery context. Most online food delivery literature concentrated on behavioral intention, service quality, and customer satisfaction and loyalty. This research attempts to understand what causes online food delivery users to complain and examine what complaint behavior do they demonstrate after an unsatisfied experience. Our analysis shows that technology-based online food delivery makes consumption more complicated in a way that customers' experience with the entire process is influenced



by the experience with the online food ordering company, restaurant, and delivery personnel. A bad experience can appear at any stage of this process, followed by dissatisfaction that potentially triggers customer complaint behavior.

However, dissatisfaction does not always lead to complaint behavior. In our findings, dissatisfaction is a necessary, but not sufficient, cause for customers complaining. In this regard, complaining behavior is more complex than a simple reaction to a dissatisfying experience. As a result, customer complaint behavior is a complex and dynamic process where various factors, including the contexts, experience, and customer's evaluation and ability, play important roles in affecting what coping strategies customers adopted in online food delivery servicescape.

Our research contributes to the literature twofold. First, unlike previous research tried to quantify customer satisfaction and loyalty through service quality measurement in online food delivery service (Annaraud & Berezina, 2020; Suhartanto et al., 2018), this studies investigated and identified the negative elements specifically that cause dissatisfaction to understand why customers engage in complaint behavior. We believe that this understanding is crucial as finding the roots of customer dissatisfaction is the key foundation to improve the quality of the service and customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Second, we build our research on the literature of consumer complaint behavior, broadening this knowledge to the digital domain and online food delivery in particular. We realized no action is the most common behavior, followed by NWOM. This finding is different from the Hotel restaurant context where stop patronizing the restaurant most likely happened as well as bad-mouthing (Lam & Tang, 2003). Thus, our research extends on existing knowledge about modern consumer behavior and online food delivery service by examining complaint behavior that belongs to an area where limited prior research is published.

### **Managerial Implications**

Our research also provides three primary insights as well as recommendations for management executives. First, service quality management should be in place to ensure seamless delivery. We realize online food delivery business model is a complex food

supply chain network with multiple service participants (the digital ordering companies, the restaurants, and the delivery couriers). Consequently, the fragmented system means that accountability for the service performance is split amongst each of the service providers and not always clear for customers to tell. Customers find it difficult to make attribution and file a complaint, making the service recovery highly problematic. Thus, it is of importance for online food delivery companies to rethink the service design and the cross-sector collaboration of the service delivery chain. Those companies should not only define themselves as technology companies but rather aim to improve their services to satisfy customers and expectations.

Second, strategic complaint management is necessary to incorporate into the business development. Complaints themselves are detrimental to the service providers, but appropriate recovery strategies can convert disappointment into satisfaction. The companies need to improve the accessibility of the complaint system and be more responsive, timely to cope with customer's complaints. While the physical service interaction is fairly limited in online food delivery service, the personalized service experience should not be neglected, especially in terms of rectifying the service mistakes. As such, we suggest that online food delivery companies should truly understand what makes customers unsatisfied, how customer express their dissatisfaction, and provide satisfactory recovery solutions following customers' expectations.

Third, proper human resource management with delivery personnel and restaurant staff is highly recommended. In our findings, three out of four factors that lead to customer dissatisfaction (bad food quality, delivery delay, and unprofessional delivery man) are relevant to service actors. Delivery couriers are frontline employees in the online food delivery network, and thus the training for communication and improving connections with customers are highlighted. Besides, food quality standards should be the same for both in-store diners and online food delivery users. The kitchen staff should prepare food in a standardized way. Essential training for both delivery personnel and restaurant employees increases the likelihood of satisfying consumers and improving employees' sense of empowerment.

## **Limitations**

Even though this research contributes a new finding to consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery and suggestions to the online food delivery industry, there are some notable limitations of this research.

First, the research sample size is not large enough, especially for the second research question: consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery. Complaint behaviors - reviews, the data, therefore, were mainly collected from the interviews. In order to generalize consumer complaint behaviors in the general context of online food delivery, instead of focusing on a single market or country, relatively large sample size and diverse respondents are needed. We made sure that the respondents are spread worldwide as much as possible, but only ten respondents were recruited. Hence, more respondents may be needed to demonstrate more different kinds of complaint behaviors and motivations behind the behavior.

Second, when it comes to methods of collecting data, we used a review website Trustpilot as the platform to examine online reviews about online food delivery. Even though it is one of the biggest and most popular review websites worldwide, it only runs the business in 47 countries. The online reviews may not be able to reflect the options of online food delivery users from the rest of countries and regions as we aim to study consumer complaint behavior in general instead of focusing on a specific region or area.

Finally, the previous research on online food delivery has lacked. Online food delivery is regarded as an emerging business. Even though it has drawn attention to scholars, not much research on online food delivery has been done. Particularly, there was no research about consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery before. Moreover, previous research is significant to the study as it provides a theoretical foundation to the research question (Bryman, 2012). Hence, the research lacks the theory support of online food delivery. On the other hand, it provides plenty of opportunities for future research to study consumer complaint behavior in online food delivery, as this new topic creates a huge research gap.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on our research limitation in terms of sampling, we specified the research into neither a particular country nor a market. Instead, we collected our data from different parts of the world. Future research can focus on consumer complaint behavior from a single country with more respondents to better understand a specific market and their customers because customers from a particular place may show a similar pattern of complaint behavior. Moreover, the correlation between factors causing customers to complain and certain compliant behaviors can also be studied in the future. Following this, we suggest future research should also deepen the knowledge about how to deal with different complaint behaviors and provide recovery solutions accordingly to manage dissatisfaction more efficiently. Additionally, we believe that the theoretical framework of consumer complaint behavior in the online environment is lacking. Future research should attempt to address and fill the research gap.

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## Appendix I

### Interview Guides

#### Introductory questions

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Nationality
  
2. Do you usually cook at home, or eat out, or order food delivery?

#### Questions related to online food delivery

3. Have you used online food delivery service before?
  - How often do you use it?
  - Why do you use it?
  - How do you use it? (Platform, apps, websites)
  
4. In this kind of online food delivery service, what quality do you focus on the most? For example, the delivery timing, the attitude of the delivery guy, the use of online food delivery application.
  
5. Can you talk about the normal procedure of using online food delivery? (What did you usually do when you use online food delivery service?)
  
6. Have you ever had any bad experiences with online food delivery?
  - What was the bad experience?
  - How did you feel at that moment?
  - In your opinion, what/who caused the bad experience and why?
  
7. What did you do after having a bad experience?

8. Did you do anything to express your dissatisfaction?
  - If no: Why not?
  - If yes: What encouraged you to do so? Why did you engage in a complaint?
  
9. Did you boycott or decided to stop using that delivery platform or ordering food from that restaurant? (Why?)
  
10. Did you tell others, including your family, friends, colleagues, about your dissatisfaction? (Why?)
  
11. Did you share your dissatisfied experience online, such as the Online Food Delivery review section? (Why?)
  - If yes,
    - o Did the company reply to you?
    - o How did they make up for you?
    - o How did you feel after that?
  - Do you think telling others (including online) can help others avoid the same problem?
  - Do you think that this is a good way to relieve your negative feelings, such as depression and anger?
  - Do you think that you can get advice from others to deal with the problem?
  
12. Did you complain to the service provider directly? For example, you call the restaurant, the delivery guy... (Why?)
  - If yes,
    - o How did they respond to you?
    - o How did they make up for you?
    - o How did you feel after that?
  - Do you think this is a good way to resolve the problem?

13. Did you file your complaint to any third-party such as consumer organizations or legal agencies? (Why?)

- If yes,
  - o How did they respond to you?
  - o Was your concern or problem resolved?
  - o How did you feel after that?
- Do you think reporting to the third-party would help resolve the problem?

14. Did you have any other way to complain about your dissatisfaction?

15. What kind of compensation you are looking for after a failed or dissatisfied service?

16. After the bad experience, would you like to use online food delivery service again? (Why?)

17. Do you have anything that you want to add regarding the above questions?