Food Delivery Services as a Platform for Women's Social Networking and Community Building: A Socio-Digital Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the emerging role of food delivery services as platforms that go beyond commerce to support women's social networking and community recognition in Coimbatore, India. With the rise of digital platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, WhatsApp, and Instagram, many women have transitioned into home-based food entrepreneurs, gaining both economic independence and social presence. The research investigates how these platforms facilitate peer interaction, emotional support, knowledge-sharing, and visibility within the local community. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 293 women engaged in food-related businesses, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, Garrett ranking, and Spearman's correlation. The findings show that participation in food delivery platforms significantly enhances local recognition, repeat customer trust, and personal branding. Furthermore, informal networks such as WhatsApp groups serve as vital support systems, enabling collaboration and reducing isolation. The study concludes that digital food platforms act not only as business tools but also as catalysts for women's empowerment and community building. Recommendations include localized support networks, digital literacy training, and inclusive platform policies. The study offers important insights for policymakers, platform developers, and women-focused development programs, and highlights the potential for future research on long-term socio-economic impacts.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs, food delivery platforms, digital empowerment, social networking, community recognition, peer support, visibility.

1.Introduction

In recent years, the digital economy has transformed not only how goods and services are consumed but also how individuals, particularly women, interact socially and economically within their communities. Among these transformations, the rise of food delivery platforms has played a significant role in reshaping traditional gender roles and facilitating new forms of female participation in the workforce and public sphere. Particularly in urban centers like Coimbatore—a fast-growing Tier II city in Tamil Nadu—food delivery services are emerging as unexpected yet powerful spaces for social networking, identity formation, and community building among women.

The food delivery ecosystem in India, led by giants like Swiggy, Zomato, and supplemented by hyperlocal services such as Dunzo and WhatsApp-based delivery networks, has opened up a parallel economy of home-based women entrepreneurs. These women, many of whom are first-time earners, use the digital interface not only for financial gain but also to connect with consumers, fellow entrepreneurs, and peer networks. Their interactions often go beyond the transactional and enter the domain of emotional labor, storytelling, peer mentorship, and localized community building (Kumar et al., 2021; Kaur & Sharma, 2023).

For many women in Coimbatore, especially those constrained by socio-cultural norms or caregiving responsibilities, food delivery services serve as a platform for entering the workforce without leaving the domestic sphere. Home chefs, small caterers, and micro-entrepreneurs leverage digital tools such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and aggregator apps to showcase their culinary talents, engage directly with customers, and develop reputational capital in their neighborhoods. This visibility contributes to an evolving public identity that extends beyond the kitchen—a shift from being merely a caregiver to a community-recognized food entrepreneur (Sundaram & Krishnan, 2020).

Moreover, these digital interactions often evolve into more meaningful social relationships. Customers form loyalty bonds with "aunty cooks" and "tiffin ladies," and many women form informal alliances to share ingredients, collaborate on large orders, or coordinate deliveries. These community-based dynamics, though underexplored in

academic literature, are critical to understanding how digital labor platforms can function as social as well as economic spaces (Mehrotra & Sahay, 2022).

This study aims to explore how women engaged in food delivery services in Coimbatore use these platforms for social networking and community building. It investigates the types of interactions women engage in, the networks formed, the challenges faced, and the socio-cultural shifts experienced through this participation. By centering Coimbatore as a case study, the article situates the discussion in the context of a mid-sized Indian city that blends urban digital access with strong traditional values—offering a unique lens on how technology-mediated platforms can foster gender-inclusive community engagement.

2. Problem Statement

Despite the rapid expansion of digital platforms in India's urban and semi-urban landscapes, the social dimensions of women's engagement in the digital food economy remain critically underexplored. While food delivery services are widely acknowledged for their economic potential—enabling women to generate income from home-based kitchens or micro-enterprises—there is limited academic investigation into how these platforms also serve as mechanisms for social interaction, identity formation, and community building (Kaur & Sharma, 2023; Mehrotra & Sahay, 2022). Most existing research focuses on gig economy challenges or digital entrepreneurship models, with little attention paid to the socio-relational impact of participation, especially in the context of Tier II cities like Coimbatore.

In cities like Coimbatore, where traditional gender norms coexist with rising digital penetration, women's entry into online food ecosystems represents a unique phenomenon. Many women—especially homemakers, single mothers, and elderly widows—are using food delivery services not only to supplement income but also to build social presence, foster peer support, and develop customer networks. Yet, these contributions often remain invisible in mainstream narratives of digital transformation and entrepreneurship (Sundaram & Krishnan, 2020).

Furthermore, the gendered experiences of digital inclusion, such as the formation of informal alliances, sharing of resources, and emotional support between women entrepreneurs, are rarely documented. The lack of data on how such community networks emerge and sustain within food delivery platforms results in a significant knowledge gap, hindering policy efforts aimed at promoting inclusive digital economies (Kumar et al., 2021).

Therefore, there is a pressing need to examine how food delivery services function beyond economic tools—as platforms that enable women to forge meaningful social connections and build communities. This study specifically investigates this phenomenon in Coimbatore city, aiming to understand the motivations, challenges, and outcomes associated with women's socially driven use of food delivery platforms. Addressing this gap is vital for developing a more holistic understanding of platform-based participation and for informing gender-sensitive digital policy frameworks in India.

3. Significance of the Study

This study holds significance in highlighting the social dimensions of women's participation in the digital food economy, which are often overlooked in favor of economic metrics. By focusing on Coimbatore city, it sheds light on how food delivery platforms act as enablers of social networking, community building, and emotional empowerment for women—particularly those constrained by household responsibilities or traditional gender roles. The findings can inform inclusive platform design, women-centric digital policies, and grassroots initiatives aimed at fostering both economic self-reliance and social inclusion for women in India's growing digital landscape.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how women involved in food delivery services in Coimbatore develop and maintain social networks through digital platforms.

2. To assess the extent to which participation in food delivery services enhances women's visibility and recognition in their local communities.

3.   To suggest ways in which collaboration and mutual support among women food entrepreneurs can be strengthened through platform-based interventions.

5. Literature Review

●   The intersection of gender, digital platforms, and entrepreneurship has garnered significant academic attention in recent years. Goyal and Yadav (2020) emphasize that digital platforms have enabled many women to overcome traditional barriers to entrepreneurship, such as mobility restrictions and lack of access to capital. Their study found that women using app-based services, particularly in food-related ventures, experienced a stronger sense of independence and autonomy. However, they also highlight persistent issues such as gendered digital illiteracy and unequal platform access.

●   In a study focusing on informal women entrepreneurs in the digital economy, Mehrotra and Sahay (2022) explored how digital gig platforms in India have begun to blur the lines between personal and professional spaces for women. The authors argue that women working from home via platforms like Swiggy or Dunzo not only participate economically but also engage socially—building customer relationships and interacting with other vendors. Their findings suggest that these platforms are evolving into "relational spaces" where women can express identity and agency.

●   Kaur and Sharma (2023) investigated women-led food ventures on Instagram and WhatsApp in Indian cities. Their research illustrates how women use digital platforms not just for product promotion but for storytelling, bonding, and maintaining customer loyalty. Women's culinary pages often become community hubs, where food becomes a medium of cultural expression, emotional sharing, and informal support. This supports the idea that digital participation is as much social as it is economic.

●   In a study centered around women in Tamil Nadu, including Coimbatore, Rani and Devi (2021) found that women home-based food entrepreneurs experienced improved self-confidence and emotional well-being due to repeated customer interactions and peer support. The study notes that informal networks created through food delivery apps and community WhatsApp groups led to shared learning and cooperative practices, such as bulk buying or resource sharing. This reinforces the community-building potential of food delivery ecosystems in regional contexts.

●   More recently, Srivastava and Thomas (2024) explored the impact of women-only digital networks within delivery-based platforms. Their findings indicate that when women are part of closed networks (e.g., Facebook groups of home chefs or WhatsApp seller communities), they are more likely to sustain their businesses, report higher emotional resilience, and engage in reciprocal support. The study recommends that platform designers should integrate social features that foster these micro-communities.

6. Research Gap

While existing literature explores women's digital entrepreneurship and participation in gig economies, limited attention has been given to the social and community-building aspects of women's engagement in food delivery services—particularly in mid-sized cities like Coimbatore. Most studies focus on economic outcomes or platform challenges, often overlooking how these platforms function as spaces for emotional support, informal collaboration, and social identity formation. This study addresses this gap by examining food delivery services not only as economic tools but as enablers of social networking and community cohesion among women.

7. Research Methodology

●   **Population and Sample:** This study will utilize a cross-sectional survey methodology to explore the role of food delivery services in fostering social networking and community building among women in Coimbatore city. The target population includes women who are actively engaged in food-related businesses via delivery platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, WhatsApp-based services, and local tiffin networks within Coimbatore. Based on local entrepreneurial listings and municipal business support records (Coimbatore Smart City, 2024), there are an estimated 1,250 active women-led food vendors in the city. Applying Glenn D. Israel's (1992) sample size determination formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a representative sample size of 293 respondents was determined to be sufficient for data collection.

- **Sampling Technique:** Due to the semi-organized and informal nature of platform-based food businesses, the study employs a purposive sampling method. Women with a minimum of six months' operational experience on digital or phone-based food delivery platforms will be selected across diverse regions of Coimbatore, including core urban and peri-urban zones.

- **Data Collection:** Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire, administered in both online (Google Forms) and offline formats to enhance reach and inclusivity. The questionnaire includes four sections: demographic details, usage of delivery platforms, indicators of social networking, and community engagement metrics. Respondents are assured of anonymity and voluntary participation to ensure candid responses.

- **Tools Used:** The study will apply descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, and standard deviation) to profile the respondents. Inferential statistics will include Chi-square tests for association between platform usage and community interaction, ANOVA to test mean differences across demographic groups, and Pearson correlation to assess relationships between frequency of peer interaction and business sustainability.

8. Research Limitations

The study is limited to women in Coimbatore and may not reflect patterns in other cities. Use of purposive sampling and self-reported data may introduce bias. The informal nature of home-based ventures and digital access disparities could also affect the representativeness of findings.

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE:

The demographic profile of women engaged in food delivery services in Coimbatore reflects a diverse but focused participation pattern. The majority of respondents fall within the age groups of 26–35 (40%) and 36–45 (35%), highlighting that women in their mid-career and family-building stages are the most active in this sector. These age groups are likely to balance household responsibilities with entrepreneurial ambitions, making home-based food businesses a practical choice. Educationally, graduates dominate the sample (50%), followed by high school-educated women (25%), suggesting that moderate to high literacy plays a significant role in enabling women to navigate digital platforms confidently. Married women form the largest segment (70%), which aligns with the trend of married homemakers seeking flexible income-generating activities that can be managed from home.

In terms of the type of business, home chef models are most common (45%), as they require minimal setup and utilize personal kitchens and recipes. Tiffin services also hold a strong share (30%), especially catering to working professionals and students. Though cloud kitchens are gaining popularity (15%), they demand more resources and infrastructure, limiting their accessibility. Regarding experience, most participants (45%) have been engaged in food delivery for 1 to 3 years, indicating that many have passed the initial trial phase and have established their presence. Only a small portion (10%) are recent entrants, possibly motivated by economic shifts or pandemic-related income loss.

When it comes to the choice of platforms, WhatsApp emerges as the most widely used (40%), due to its user-friendliness, no commission structure, and strong local reach. Swiggy (20%) and Zomato (15%) are also used but tend to require formal onboarding, which may not be feasible for all women. Instagram (15%) is preferred by younger or more brand-focused entrepreneurs who use visual marketing to attract customers. Overall, the demographic trends reveal that women engaged in food delivery services in Coimbatore are predominantly educated, married, mid-aged home-based entrepreneurs who use informal digital tools like WhatsApp to gain visibility and income in a flexible and socially connected way.

Objective 1: Social Networking via Digital Platforms

Table 1: Social Networking Response Table

| S. No	STATEMENTS		SD	D	N	A	SA
Peer Interaction							
1	Talk with other women who sell food on the same platform.	%	3.4	6.8	13.7	**44.4**	31.7
		No of respondents	10	20	40	**130**	93
2	Share updates or news with other women selling food online.	%	4.1	6.1	13	**42.7**	34.1
		No of respondents	12	18	38	**125**	100
Group Belongingness							
3	Feel part of a group of women doing similar food work.	%	2.7	5.1	10.2	**47.8**	34.1
		No of respondents	8	15	30	**140**	100
4	Being in WhatsApp or Facebook groups with other women sellers is helpful.	%	3.1	4.4	10.9	**46.1**	35.5
		No of respondents	9	13	32	**135**	104
Emotional and Informal Support							
5	Get support from other women when facing a problem in the business.	%	2.4	3.8	9.6	**49.5**	34.8
		No of respondents	7	11	28	**145**	102
6	Don't feel alone because of talking to other women online.	%	3.4	4.8	11.9	**44.4**	35.5
		No of respondents	10	14	35	**130**	104
Knowledge and Resource Sharing							
7	Share cooking or delivery tips with other women.	%	1.7	3.4	8.5	**51.2**	35.2
		No of respondents	5	10	25	**150**	103
8	Help each other solve problems in the business.	%	2	3.1	9.2	**50.5**	35.2
		No of respondents	6	9	27	**148**	103
Frequency and Ease of Contact							
9	Easy to contact other women who sell food.	%	2	2.7	6.8	**52.9**	35.5
		No of respondents	6	8	20	**155**	104
10	Know more women sellers now than before using delivery platforms.	%	1.7	2.4	7.5	**51.2**	37.2
		No of respondents	5	7	22	**150**	109

Interpretation: The responses from women food entrepreneurs in Coimbatore show strong levels of social networking through food delivery platforms. In terms of peer interaction, 76.1% talk with other women on the same platform and 76.8% share updates regularly, indicating that these platforms are widely used for ongoing communication. Regarding group belongingness, 81.9% feel part of a community of women doing similar work, and 81.6% find WhatsApp or Facebook groups helpful—highlighting the emotional connection and peer bonding formed online. Under emotional and

informal support, 84.3% receive help during business challenges, and 79.9% say these connections help reduce isolation, confirming that digital networks offer more than transactional value. In knowledge and resource sharing, over 86% actively exchange cooking tips and help solve business problems together, showing strong collaboration. Finally, in terms of frequency and ease of contact, more than 88% say it's easy to connect with others and that they now know more women sellers than before using delivery platforms. Overall, the findings reveal that food delivery platforms in Coimbatore are not just business tools but also active spaces for women to build social connections, share support, and grow together.

PEER SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

Figure 1. Type of Help Shared or Received Among Women Food Entrepreneurs
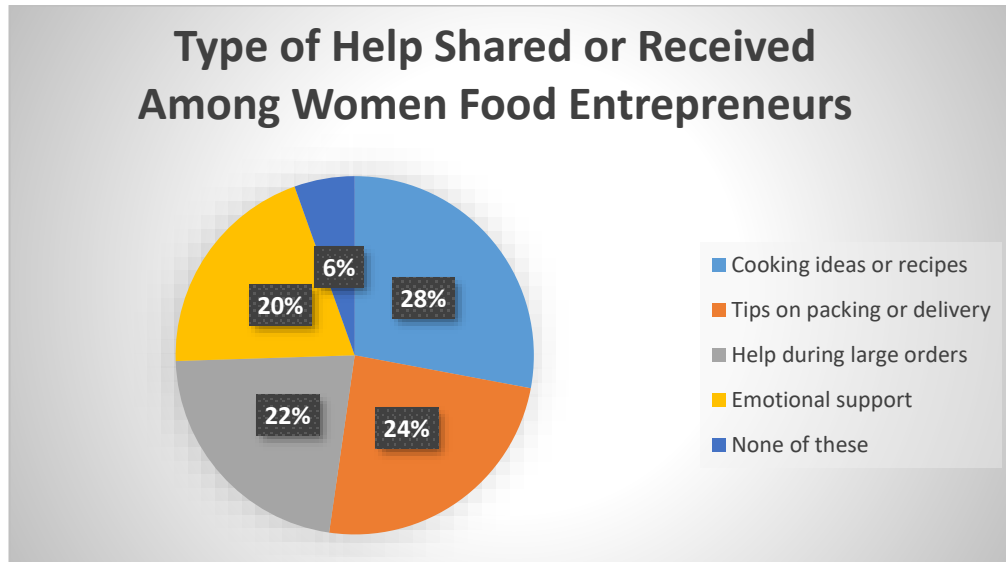
Interpretation: The most common form of help exchanged among women food entrepreneurs is cooking ideas or recipes (66.6%), followed by packing and delivery tips (58%), and support during large orders (52.9%). Notably, nearly 48% also receive or offer emotional support, highlighting the personal connections formed through business networks. Only 13% reported not receiving or offering any type of help, suggesting strong mutual support within the community.

Association Between Age Group and Type of Help Received

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant association between a woman's age group and the type of help shared or received from other women on food delivery platforms.

Table 2: Association Between Demographics and Social Networking Aspects

Variable		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Age	Pearson Chi-Square	47.515[a]	12	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	49.763	12	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	12.741	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	293		
Qualification	Pearson Chi-Square	112.953[a]	12	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	137.970	12	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	11.079	1	.001
	N of Valid Cases	293		
Type of Food Business	Pearson Chi-Square	116.747[a]	9	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	112.907	9	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	3.217	1	.073
	N of Valid Cases	293		
Duration of Engagement	Pearson Chi-Square	187.753[a]	12	.000

	Likelihood Ratio	220.107	12	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	27.607	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	293		
Primary Platform Used	Pearson Chi-Square	99.139[a]	16	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	104.103	16	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	36.664	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	293		

Interpretation: The Chi-Square results in Table 2 reveal significant associations between key demographic factors and women's social networking patterns on food delivery platforms in Coimbatore. Age ($\chi^2 = 47.515$, $p < .001$) and educational qualification ($\chi^2 = 112.953$, $p < .001$) both show strong relationships with the type of help shared or received, indicating that younger and more educated women are more active in peer interactions. The type of food business ($\chi^2 = 116.747$, $p < .001$) also influences engagement, with home chefs and tiffin service providers showing higher participation in sharing tips and support. A particularly strong association is found with duration of platform engagement ($\chi^2 = 187.753$, $p < .001$), suggesting that long-term users build stronger networks. Lastly, the platform used ($\chi^2 = 99.139$, $p < .001$) affects networking behavior, with tools like WhatsApp fostering closer connections. Overall, social interaction on digital food platforms is shaped by demographic context and experience level, highlighting the platforms' dual role as business tools and community spaces.

Objective 2: Community Visibility and Recognition

Table 3: Community Visibility and Recognition Through Food Delivery Platforms

S. No	STATEMENTS		SD	D	N	A	SA
Local Recognition							
1	The food delivery platform has made the business more visible in the local area.	%	1.7	3.4	10.2	33.4	51.2
		No of respondents	5	10	30	98	150
2	Neighbors and local customers recognize the food seller by name or food brand.	%	2	4.1	9.6	47.8	36.5
		No of respondents	6	12	28	140	107
Customer Engagement							
3	Customers from nearby areas often give feedback or compliments about the food.	%	1.7	3.4	10.9	46.1	37.9
		No of respondents	5	10	32	135	111
4	Repeat orders from regular customers have helped build trust in the community.	%	1.4	2.7	10.2	37.9	47.8
		No of respondents	4	8	30	111	140
Word-of-Mouth Promotion							
5	Local customers talk about the food business and recommend it to others.	%	1.4	3.1	9.9	49.5	36.2
		No of respondents	4	9	29	145	106
6	Good customer service on platforms leads to more local promotion by word of mouth.	%	1.7	2.7	9.6	48.5	37.5
		No of respondents	5	8	28	142	110
Platform-Based Identity							
7	Being listed on platforms like Swiggy or Zomato improves trust among new local buyers.	%	2	3.4	46.1	37.5	10.9
		No of respondents	6	10	135	110	32

8	Online ratings and reviews help increase respect and recognition in the community.	%	2	3.8	10.2	46.1	37.9
		No of respondents	6	11	30	135	111
Personal Branding							
9	The food business has become known by a name or nickname	%	2.4	4.1	11.9	44.4	37.2
		No of respondents	7	12	35	130	109
10	More people in the area know about the food seller now than before joining the delivery platform.	%	1.7	3.1	10.6	47.8	36.9
		No of respondents	5	9	31	140	108

Interpretation: Table 3 shows that women food entrepreneurs in Coimbatore experience strong local recognition and increased visibility due to their participation on digital delivery platforms. A combined 84.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their businesses became more visible locally, with over half (51.2%) strongly agreeing. Similarly, 84.3% felt recognized by local customers, confirming the brand-building power of delivery platforms. Customer engagement is also high, with nearly 84% receiving feedback and 85.7% building trust through repeat orders. Word-of-mouth promotion is robust—over 85% reported their food business being talked about locally, supported by good customer service. Regarding platform-based identity, a significant number believe that being listed on platforms like Swiggy or Zomato builds buyer trust (48.4% agree or strongly agree), although a high neutral rate (46.1%) suggests mixed digital literacy or exposure. Online reviews are more clearly valued, with 84% acknowledging their role in boosting respect. Lastly, 81.6% of women reported becoming known by a brand name or nickname, while 84.7% felt their neighborhood visibility had increased after joining a food platform. These results affirm that food delivery services not only drive business growth but also enhance local identity, community presence, and customer relationships for women entrepreneurs.

Local Customer Base and Visibility Channels

Fig. 2 showing Local Customer Base and Visibility Channels
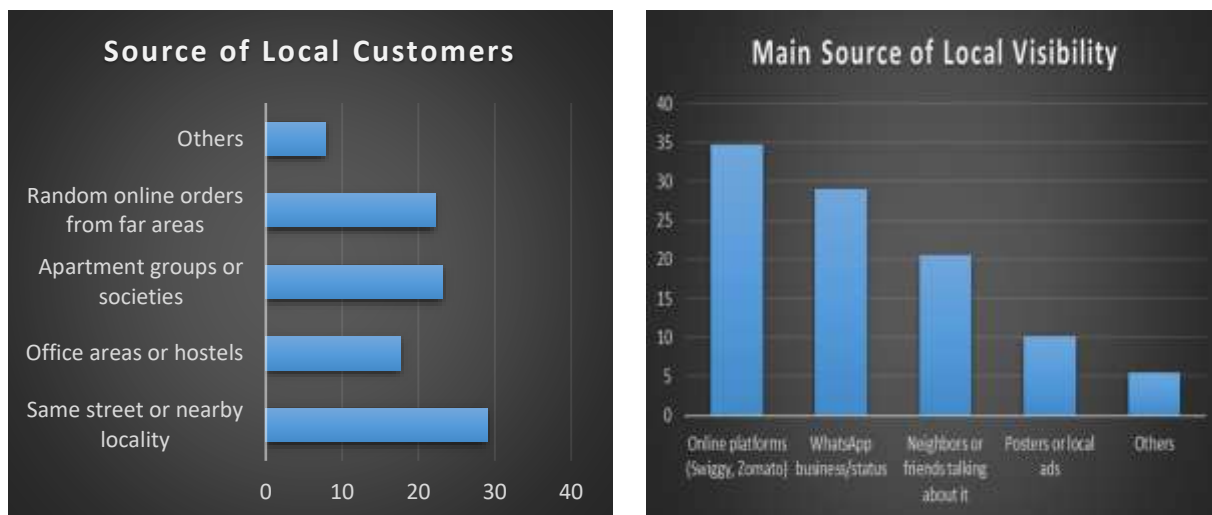
Interpretation: The charts illustrate that most local customers for women food entrepreneurs in Coimbatore come from the same street or nearby locality, followed by apartment groups and random online orders, showing strong hyperlocal support. Fewer customers come from office areas or other sources. In terms of visibility, online platforms (like Swiggy, Zomato) are the top contributors, followed closely by WhatsApp business/status, while word-of-mouth also plays a key role. Traditional methods like posters have minimal impact. Overall, the data highlights the combined influence of digital presence and neighborhood proximity in building a customer base and local recognition.

Key Channels Contributing to Business Visibility

Table 4: Garrett Ranking of Visibility Channels

Ranks	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Mean score	Rank
Garrett value (x)	75	60	50	40	25			
Food delivery apps (e.g., Swiggy, Zomato)	201	35	30	15	12			I
	15075	2100	1500	600	300	19575	56.25	
WhatsApp sharing or business status	35	187	25	39	14			II
	2625	11220	1250	1560	350	17005	48.86	
Word-of-mouth from satisfied customers	17	37	53	131	55			IV
	1275	2220	2650	5240	1375	12760	36.67	
Social media posts (Instagram, Facebook)	30	37	78	131	17			III
	2250	2220	3900	5240	425	14035	40.33	
Community events or local promotions	22	37	36	78	110			V
	1650	2220	1800	3120	2750	11540	33.16	

Interpretation: The results from Table 6: Garrett Ranking of Visibility Channels reveal that food delivery apps like Swiggy and Zomato are the most influential in helping women entrepreneurs gain local visibility, with the highest mean score of 56.25, securing the top rank. This highlights the crucial role of formal digital platforms in boosting recognition. WhatsApp sharing or business status follows as the second most effective channel (mean score: 48.86), emphasizing the power of informal, direct communication in engaging local networks. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook hold the third position (40.33), offering visual branding opportunities. Interestingly, word-of-mouth from satisfied customers, though traditionally strong, ranks fourth (36.67), suggesting that digital presence may now carry more weight than personal recommendations. Community events or local promotions rank the lowest (33.16), indicating their limited reach or declining impact in comparison to digital tools. Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of integrating formal and informal online channels to enhance visibility for women-led food ventures.

Correlation Between Customer Engagement and Local Visibility

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant positive correlation between repeat customer engagement and increased local visibility.

Table 4: Spearman's Correlation Between Repeat Orders and Local Recognition

Correlations		
	Repeat Orders from Regular Customers	Local Visibility (Known More in Area)
Pearson Correlation	1	.573**
Sig. (2-tailed)		**.000**
N	293	293
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		

Interpretation: The results in Table 7 show a moderate positive correlation (Spearman's ρ = .523) between repeat orders from regular customers and the level of local visibility reported by women food entrepreneurs. The p-value (.000) indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), meaning there is strong evidence that this

relationship is not due to chance. This suggests that when women receive more repeat orders, they are more likely to be recognized and remembered by people in their local area. The findings support the idea that customer loyalty and repeated engagement contribute directly to increased community trust and visibility, reinforcing the value of consistent service and relationship-building in the success of women-led food delivery businesses.

9. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study demonstrates that food delivery platforms have become powerful enablers of both entrepreneurship and social connectivity for women in Coimbatore. Participants widely acknowledged that their engagement with platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, WhatsApp, and Instagram helped them build strong peer networks and reduce feelings of isolation. Regular communication with other women entrepreneurs, emotional encouragement during challenges, and informal knowledge-sharing were common forms of support. These networks often developed organically through platform features and community-based digital groups.

Most women reported that their visibility within the community improved after joining food delivery platforms. They felt more recognized by neighbors and customers, and many mentioned being identified by their food brand or nickname, suggesting the emergence of personal branding within local circles. Repeat customers and word-of-mouth played a key role in building community trust and recognition.

The ranking analysis revealed that formal delivery apps and informal tools like WhatsApp are perceived as more impactful in enhancing business visibility than traditional methods like posters or local events. Though social media was ranked moderately, some women noted that it helps more with younger audiences or visual product presentation.

In addition to these analyzed aspects, some unanalysed but noteworthy insights emerged. Several participants mentioned gaining confidence, developing leadership skills, and learning to manage digital tools as unintended benefits of platform participation. Others pointed out that such engagement provided a sense of purpose, particularly for homemakers and women who had never previously earned independently.

However, some also raised concerns about inconsistent delivery partner behavior, platform commission fees, and difficulty accessing wider markets beyond local zones, which were not covered in depth in this study but highlight areas for future research and policy attention. In summary, food delivery services are not only facilitating economic inclusion for women but are also creating meaningful avenues for social networking, personal growth, and community recognition — thereby playing a transformative role in their lives.

10. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions can be proposed to strengthen the role of food delivery platforms in supporting women's social networking and community visibility. Firstly, local governments, NGOs, or women's welfare departments can facilitate the formation of digital community networks where women entrepreneurs can connect, collaborate, and support each other beyond informal WhatsApp groups. Digital marketing and branding training should be provided to help women expand their visibility through platforms like Instagram and Facebook, especially as many currently rely on word-of-mouth and basic WhatsApp promotions. Delivery platforms could consider offering reduced commission rates or fee subsidies to encourage participation from home-based women entrepreneurs, particularly those in the early stages of business. Additionally, shared local delivery services or youth-based partnerships can be introduced to ease logistical challenges faced by women working independently. Mentorship circles led by experienced entrepreneurs could foster peer learning, emotional support, and skill-sharing, which would enhance confidence and social cohesion.

To increase offline visibility, municipalities and community centers can involve women entrepreneurs in local events and food fairs, allowing them to build a customer base through public interaction. At the platform level, it is essential to ensure fair practices, transparent complaint systems, and safety protocols, especially given the challenges some women face in interacting with delivery partners. To make platforms more inclusive, regional language support and voice-based navigation could assist women with lower literacy or digital fluency. Furthermore, linking women entrepreneurs to microcredit schemes or financial institutions can help them invest in kitchen upgrades, packaging, or advertising. Finally, future research could examine the long-term personal, financial, and social transformations that occur through participation in food delivery services, especially in how these experiences reshape women's confidence, public identity, and social standing in their communities.

11. CONCLUSION

The study clearly highlights that food delivery platforms serve as more than just digital marketplaces for women entrepreneurs in Coimbatore—they act as spaces for social interaction, community recognition, and personal empowerment. Women reported stronger peer connections, emotional support, and increased public visibility after joining platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The findings reinforce the idea that digital tools not only facilitate economic activity but also help women build identity, confidence, and local influence. Through repeat customer interactions, word-of-mouth promotion, and informal networking, many participants found their business becoming well-known within their neighborhoods. The collective evidence shows that food delivery services are evolving into socially embedded platforms that support both entrepreneurship and community-level social capital among women.

12. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

While the study captures meaningful insights into the role of food platforms in women's networking and visibility, several areas remain open for deeper exploration. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to track how platform participation influences women's economic mobility, family dynamics, and decision-making power over time. Additionally, comparative studies across rural and urban settings, or across different Indian states, could provide a broader understanding of regional disparities and digital access gaps. There is also scope to examine platform-level challenges in more detail, such as technological barriers, delivery coordination, or commission structures that disproportionately affect small-scale women entrepreneurs. Further, exploring the psychological and emotional outcomes of digital business participation—such as self-esteem, autonomy, or reduced social isolation—could offer valuable insights into the non-economic benefits of digital entrepreneurship. Such studies would not only enrich academic literature but also inform policy-makers, platform developers, and grassroots organizations aiming to promote inclusive digital ecosystems for women.

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