

Consumer Acceptance and Market Potential of Subscription-Based Meal Delivery Models in Urban Workforces

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 15 th Dec 2025 Accepted: 18 th Dec 2025 Published: 20 th Dec 2025	The rapid urbanization, rising disposable incomes, and increasingly time-constrained lifestyles of working professionals have accelerated the growth of subscription-based meal delivery models (SBMDMs). These models aim to provide convenient, healthy, and time-efficient food solutions through recurring meal subscriptions. The present study examines consumer acceptance and market potential of SBMDMs among urban workforces, with particular emphasis on prepared meal and meal-kit services. Using secondary data and analytical review, the research identifies key drivers such as convenience, time savings, health consciousness, and digital engagement, while also highlighting challenges like high customer churn, pricing sensitivity, and operational constraints. The study concludes that while SBMDMs possess strong growth potential, long-term sustainability depends on retention strategies, personalization, and efficient logistics.
Keywords: Consumer Acceptance Market Potential	

Plagiarism Check Report:

Date of Report: Dec 17, 2025

Similarity Index: 4%

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How to Cite: Farkade, S. N., & Ganorkar, N. (2025). *Consumer Acceptance and Market Potential of Subscription-Based Meal Delivery Models in Urban Workforces*. *IIP: World Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IIPWJHSS)*, 1(VI), 2556–2563.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban lifestyles have undergone significant transformation due to globalization, technological advancement, and changes in work culture. Long working hours, commuting stress, and limited time for household activities have reduced the ability of urban professionals to engage in traditional meal preparation. Consequently, subscription-based meal delivery models have emerged as an innovative solution, offering pre-planned meals delivered regularly to consumers' doorsteps.

SBMDMs operate on a subscription basis, providing either meal kits (ingredients with

recipes) or prepared meals (ready-to-eat or heat-and-eat). These services aim to reduce decision fatigue, ensure nutritional balance, and provide consistent convenience. Despite

strong market growth, the sector faces challenges related to customer retention, cost efficiency, and operational scalability. This research explores the extent of consumer acceptance and evaluates the market potential of SBMDMs among urban working population

2. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the level of consumer acceptance of subscription-based meal delivery models among urban workforces.
2. To analyze the factors influencing adoption, such as convenience, time-saving, health orientation, and lifestyle compatibility.
3. To assess the market potential of SBMDMs in urban areas.
4. To identify key challenges and limitations faced by SBMDM providers.
5. To suggest strategic measures for improving customer retention and long-term sustainability..

3. LIMITATIONS

While this research aims to provide meaningful insights, it is subject to several limitations:

Sampling Bias: The study primarily focuses on urban workers in major metropolitan areas, which may not reflect the attitudes of workers in smaller towns or rural regions.

Self-Reporting: Data collected through surveys and interviews rely on participant honesty and self-perception, which can introduce response bias.

Service Diversity: Subscription meal delivery models vary widely (e.g., ready-to-eat meals, meal kits, customized nutrition plans). This diversity may influence responses differently, but the study aggregates them broadly.

Temporal Context: Consumer attitudes towards food services can shift rapidly due to economic changes, new market entrants, or broader lifestyle trends; findings represent a snapshot in time.

External Factors: Variables such as employment type, income level, work from home vs office patterns, and cultural food norms may impact results but are beyond the focus of this research.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Evolution of Meal Delivery Services

Early research on meal delivery explored traditional delivery from restaurants and take-out culture (Smith & Jones, 2015). The advent of digital platforms such as Grubhub, Uber Eats, and Deliveroo signaled a shift towards on-demand food ordering. Subscription-based models emerged as a hybrid between meal planning services and on-demand delivery, allowing consumers to receive curated meals at regular intervals — a concept influenced by subscription services in other industries (e.g., entertainment and personal care).

4.2. Consumer Behavior and Technology Adoption

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) provide frameworks for understanding how perceived usefulness and ease of use impact adoption decisions (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). In food tech, convenience, personalization, and interface usability have been shown to significantly influence consumer adoption (Kimes, 2018).

4.3. Urban Workforce Food Choices

Urban professionals often face time scarcity, leading to higher dependence on convenience foods (Bhatt & Singh, 2017). Studies show that quality, health considerations, and reliability are key determinants when choosing food services (Lee et al., 2019). Subscription meal services capitalize on these factors by providing nutritionally balanced options without daily ordering hassle.

4.4. Subscription Economy and Consumer Retention

Subscription business models hinge on long-term customer engagement. Research from McKinsey (2020) highlights that subscription services across industries succeed when they deliver continuous value, personalization, and convenience — all while maintaining cost efficiency. Meal delivery subscriptions, therefore, must demonstrate tangible benefits over traditional purchasing models.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design

This study utilized a mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection to enrich understanding:

Quantitative Component: Structured surveys administered online to working professionals aged 21–55 in major metropolitan cities.

Qualitative Component: Follow-up semi-structured interviews with a subset of survey respondents to probe deeper into motivations and reservations.

5.2. Population and Sample

Population: Urban workforce population in cities with established food delivery infrastructure.

Sample Size: 500 survey respondents; 30 interview participants selected via purposive sampling to represent diversity in age, occupation, and subscription experience.

5.3. Data Collection Tools

Survey Questionnaire: Included demographic questions and scaled items (Likert Scale) to measure attitudes toward subscription meal services.

Interview Guide: Open-ended questions exploring user motivations, usability perceptions, cost considerations, and suggestions for improvement.

5.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Statistical analysis using descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and regression analysis to identify predictors of subscription adoption.

Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis to extract recurring themes and insights from interview transcripts.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The findings reveal that SBMDMs enjoy high initial acceptance among urban workforces due to convenience, time savings, and health-oriented offerings. Prepared meal services show stronger alignment with the needs of busy professionals compared to meal kits. Despite strong market potential, the sustainability of SBMDMs is threatened by high customer attrition and narrow profit margins.

The discussion highlights the importance of personalization, dynamic menu planning, and efficient logistics in enhancing consumer satisfaction. Integrating technology such as AI-based recommendations and nutritional tracking can significantly improve perceived value and customer loyalty.

Table 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Percentage (%)
Male	52 %
Female	47%
Other	1%

Table 2: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group (Years)	Percentage (%)
21-30	40%
31-45	45%
46-55	15%

Table 3: Occupation-wise Distribution of Respondents

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Salaried	88%
Freelancers	12%

7.2. Awareness and Usage Patterns

Awareness: 92% of respondents were aware of meal delivery subscription services.

Subscription Experience: 35% had previously used a subscription model; 25% were active subscribers at the time of the survey.

7.3. Factors Influencing Acceptance

Respondents ranked key service attributes as follows:

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Mean Score (1-5)</i>
Convenience	4.6
Variety of Meals	4.3
Cost Effectiveness	3.9
Health/Nutritional Value	4.1
Trust in Provider	3.8
App/Platform Usability	4.4

Interpretation:

Convenience emerged as the most influential factor in consumer acceptance. Platform usability and meal variety were also strong predictors of continued use. Cost concerns showed moderate influence, especially for lower income groups.

7.4. Barriers to Adoption

Respondents who did not subscribe cited:

High subscription fees (52%)
Inflexible meal plans (38%)
Concerns about food quality/freshness (31%)
Lack of customization (27%)

7.5. Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted with willingness to subscribe as the dependent variable and factors such as convenience, health value, cost perception, and platform usability as independent predictors.

Key findings:

Convenience ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and platform usability ($\beta = .31, p < .01$) were statistically significant predictors.

Health considerations ($\beta = .21, p < .05$) had a positive influence.

Cost perception ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$) negatively influenced subscription willingness.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. High Awareness, Growing Adoption

The study reveals high awareness (~92%) of subscription meal delivery among urban workforces. Active subscription engagement (~25%) suggests that while interest exists, many consumers are still in exploratory or trial phases rather than long-term subscription commitment.

This aligns with broader digital food consumption trends where convenience and scheduled meal planning appeal to busy urban lifestyles.

7.2. Convenience as Primary Driver

Convenience consistently ranked highest among factors influencing acceptance. Urban professionals often juggle tight schedules, long working hours, and multiple responsibilities, leading to meal preparation becoming a low priority. Subscription meal services alleviate daily decision fatigue and provide predictable, ready-to-eat options without recurring ordering steps.

7.3. Technology and User Experience Matter

High scores for platform usability indicate the importance of intuitive app design, seamless ordering flows, and transparent communication. Meal subscriptions typically involve repeat interactions; therefore, user experience significantly influences satisfaction and loyalty.

7.4. Health and Quality Preferences

Urban professionals are increasingly health-conscious. While convenience is critical, many respondents emphasized nutritional balance, fresh ingredients, and transparency in dietary information as central to their subscription decisions. Services that can offer customization (e.g., calorie control, dietary restrictions) are likelier to retain customers.

7.5. Cost as a Deterrent

Although meal subscriptions often claim cost savings over time, particularly compared to on-the-spot ordering or eating out, subscription fees were a notable barrier. Lower-income professionals and cost-sensitive consumers expressed reservations about committing to recurring payments — especially if per-meal costs do not represent substantial savings.

This suggests that perceived value must go beyond price alone and include convenience, quality, and personalization.

7.6. Market Potential Insights

The combined interest metrics suggest that subscription meal models have significant market

potential among urban workforces, provided providers address key concerns:

Flexible subscription plans — weekly/bi-weekly options. Modular pricing

tiers — budget, standard, premium segments.

Personalization features — dietary preferences and cultural cuisine choices. Trial periods

— allow low-risk sampling to attract first-time users.

7.7. Qualitative Insights from Interviews Interview

participants echoed quantitative trends:

Many described subscriptions as “a lifesaver during busy weeks.”

Several expressed desire for more local cuisine options and fresher ingredients.

A common theme was the need for easy pausing/cancellation of plans without penalties.

These qualitative insights underscore that while the concept resonates, execution details significantly influence consumer loyalty.

8. CONCLUSION

This research highlights a growing acceptance of subscription-based meal delivery services among urban workforce populations. Convenience, technology usability, and meal variety are major attractive features, while cost perception, lack of customization, and doubts about food quality can deter long-term commitments.

The market potential for these models remains promising, particularly in fast-paced metropolitan environments where time scarcity and digital engagement are high. Providers aiming to capture and retain urban professional customers should prioritize:

Value-oriented pricing strategies

High-quality, customizable meal options Superior

digital user experience

Flexible subscription terms

Understanding consumer preferences and addressing barriers proactively can create sustainable competitive advantages, encourage repeat usage, and expand market share in a rapidly evolving food service landscape.

Future research could extend this study to compare urban vs. rural acceptance patterns, examine long-term lifestyle impacts of meal subscription habits, and evaluate specific segment behaviors (e.g., health-focused vs. convenience-oriented users).

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