

The Hungry Mind: Digital Food Ordering and Emotional Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The emergence of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the way people access and consume food. Online food delivery platforms have become a routine part of daily life, offering convenience, speed, and a wide range of food choices. Their popularity has grown rapidly among adults, particularly those balancing professional commitments, family responsibilities, and busy lifestyles. Although these services have simplified meal acquisition and enhanced consumer convenience, their increasing use has generated interest in understanding the psychological factors that influence food ordering behavior and their potential impact on emotional well-being.

Methodology: This quantitative descriptive correlational cross-sectional study was conducted among 100 young adults in Gurugram, Haryana, using a non-probability convenience sampling technique to assess the psychological correlates of online food ordering behaviour and their impact on emotional well-being. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and standardized rating scales and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study concludes that psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, emotional eating, impulsivity, and social influence are associated with online food ordering behaviour and may adversely affect emotional well-being. The findings support the need for targeted health education and interventions to promote healthier eating behaviours and improve emotional well-being among young adults.

Result: Among 100 young adults, 34% sometimes ordered food online, 48% usually ordered dinner, and 44% preferred fast food. Most participants (46%) spent ₹200–₹500 per order, while 72% reported an increase in online food ordering during the previous year. Moderate emotional eating was observed in 52% (mean = 31.42 ± 7.18), moderate anxiety in 50% (mean = 11.36 ± 4.12), and moderate stress in 56% (mean = 21.84 ± 5.63). Online food ordering behaviour showed a significant positive correlation with emotional eating ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.001$). Significant associations were found with emotional eating ($\chi^2 = 12.84$, $p = 0.002$), anxiety ($\chi^2 = 10.26$, $p = 0.006$), and stress ($\chi^2 = 14.12$, $p = 0.001$).

Conclusion: The study concludes that psychological factors significantly influence online food ordering behaviour among young adults. Higher levels of emotional eating, anxiety, and stress were associated with increased online food ordering, indicating that psychological well-being plays an important role in food purchasing decisions. The significant positive correlation between online food ordering behaviour and emotional eating suggests that emotional factors contribute to unhealthy eating patterns. These findings emphasize the need for targeted health education, counselling, and behavioural interventions to promote healthy eating habits and emotional well-being. Such strategies may help reduce unhealthy online food ordering practices and support healthier lifestyle choices among young adults.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of the internet and mobile technology has played a critical role in facilitating this transformation. In urban and semi-urban areas, where digital infrastructure is more developed, online food ordering has become deeply embedded in everyday life. Busy schedules, long working hours, and increasing professional demands have left many individuals with limited time and energy to cook meals at home. As a result, people are turning to online platforms as a practical solution to meet their dietary needs. This is particularly evident among working adults, students, and young professionals who often prioritize convenience and efficiency over traditional meal preparation.

The appeal of online food delivery services extends beyond convenience. These platforms offer an unprecedented level of variety and choice. Consumers can explore different cuisines, experiment with new dishes, and access food options that may not be available in their immediate surroundings. The ability to customize orders, take advantage of discounts, and track deliveries in real time further enhances the user experience. Such features not only satisfy functional needs but also create a

sense of engagement and satisfaction that encourages repeated use.

The shift toward online food ordering is not solely driven by technological advancements or practical considerations. It is also deeply rooted in psychological processes that influence human behavior. While ordering food online may appear to be a rational decision based on convenience, it is often shaped by underlying emotional and cognitive factors. Human behavior is complex and multifaceted, influenced by internal states such as emotions, thoughts, and motivations, as well as external environmental cues.

In modern society, individuals are increasingly exposed to stress, time pressure, and, in some cases, social isolation. These factors can significantly impact eating behaviors. Food has long been associated with comfort, pleasure, and emotional regulation. In times of stress or negative emotional states, individuals may turn to food as a coping mechanism. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as “emotional eating,” has been widely studied in psychological research. Emotional eating involves

consuming food not out of physical hunger but in response to feelings such as sadness, anxiety, boredom, or even happiness.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative, descriptive correlational cross-sectional research design to assess the psychological correlates of online food ordering behaviour and their impact on emotional well-being among young adults in Gurugram, Haryana. A total of 100 young adults who met the inclusion criteria were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between psychological factors and online food ordering behaviour at a single point in time without manipulating any variables.

Data were collected using a structured socio-demographic questionnaire, a questionnaire on online food ordering behaviour, and standardized rating scales to assess psychological variables such as stress, anxiety, emotional eating, impulsivity, social influence, and emotional well-being. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. The collected data were coded, entered, and analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation and other suitable statistical tests) to determine the association between the study variables.

The findings revealed that psychological factors, including stress, anxiety, emotional eating, impulsivity, and social

influence, were significantly associated with online food ordering behaviour and had a negative influence on emotional well-being. The study emphasizes the importance of developing targeted health education programs and behavioural interventions to encourage healthier eating habits and improve the emotional well-being of young adults.

RESULT

The demographic findings revealed that the majority of the participants were aged 21-23 years (36%), indicating that most respondents belonged to the early adulthood age group. Female participants constituted the majority (58%) of the study sample. In terms of educational status, more than half of the participants were undergraduates (52%), reflecting that the study primarily involved individuals pursuing higher education. Regarding dietary habits, the majority followed a mixed diet (40%). With respect to occupation, students formed the largest group (48%), suggesting that the sample mainly comprised young adults engaged in academic activities. Concerning living arrangements, the majority of participants lived with their families (42%), highlighting family-based living as the most common arrangement. Furthermore, most participants belonged to urban areas (56%), indicating that the study population was predominantly from urban settings. Overall, the findings show that the study sample mainly consisted of urban, female undergraduate students aged 21-23 years who followed a mixed diet and lived with their families.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Variables among Young Adults

N = 100

S. No.	Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Age (in years)	18-20	28	28%
		21-23	36	36%
		24-25	24	24%
		Above 25	12	12%
2	Gender	Female	58	58%
		Male	42	42%
		Other	0	0%
3	Educational Status	Undergraduate	52	52%
		Postgraduate	30	30%
		Diploma	12	12%
		PhD	6	6%
4	Dietary Pattern	Vegetarian	32	32%
		Non-vegetarian	28	28%
		Mixed	40	40%
5	Occupation	Student	48	48%
		Employed	30	30%
		Unemployed	10	10%
		Self-employed	12	12%
6	Living Arrangement	With family	42	42%
		Hosteler/Paying guest	26	26%
		Friends	18	18%
7	Place of Residence	Alone	14	14%
		Urban	56	56%
		Semi-urban	28	28%
		Rural	16	16%

The findings revealed that the majority of participants sometimes ordered food online (34%), indicating occasional use of online food delivery services. Zomato was the most preferred online food delivery application (40%), making it the leading

platform among the participants. Nearly half of the participants usually ordered food during dinner time (48%), suggesting that online food ordering was most common for evening meals. Regarding food preferences, the majority preferred fast food

(44%), highlighting a greater inclination toward convenient and ready-to-eat meals.

In terms of expenditure, the majority spent between ₹200-₹500 per online food order (46%), reflecting moderate spending habits. When feeling tired or exhausted, the largest proportion of participants sometimes ordered food online (36%), indicating that fatigue influenced their food ordering behaviour. Discounts and promotional offers often influenced the majority of participants (34%) in making online food purchases, demonstrating the impact of marketing strategies on consumer

decisions. Similarly, the majority sometimes ordered food late at night (32%), showing that late-night ordering was a common practice.

Furthermore, most participants preferred home-cooked food over online food (68%), despite using online food delivery services. Finally, the majority (72%) reported an increase in online food ordering during the past one year, suggesting a growing reliance on online food delivery platforms among young adults.

Table 2: Pattern and Frequency of Online Food Ordering Behaviour among Young Adults

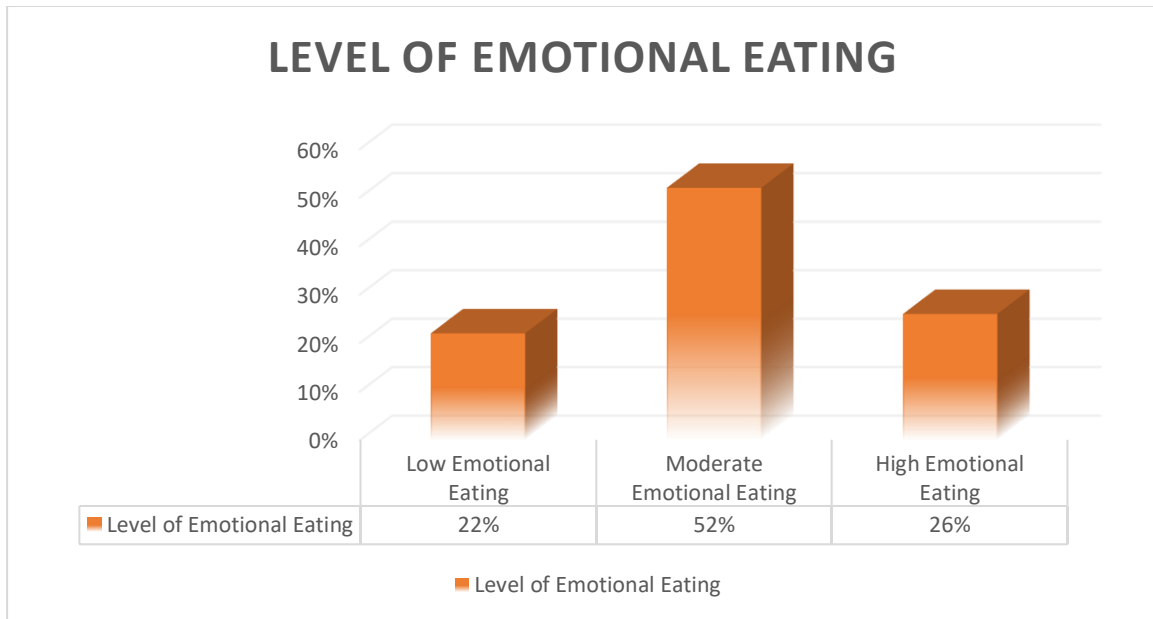
N = 100

S. No.	Variables	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Frequency of ordering food online	Never	6	6%
		Rarely	18	18%
		Sometimes	34	34%
		Often	28	28%
		Very often	14	14%
2	Most frequently used application	Zomato	40	40%
		Swiggy	32	32%
		Both	24	24%
		Other	4	4%
3	Usual time of ordering food online	Breakfast	8	8%
		Lunch	18	18%
		Dinner	48	48%
		Late night	26	26%
4	Type of food ordered most often	Fast food	44	44%
		Traditional/Home-style food	22	22%
		Snacks/Desserts	20	20%
		Healthy food	14	14%
5	Average amount spent per online food order	Less than ₹200	20	20%
		₹200-₹500	46	46%
		₹500-₹800	24	24%
		More than ₹800	10	10%
6	Ordering food when feeling tired/exhausted	Never	8	8%
		Rarely	18	18%
		Sometimes	36	36%
		Often	24	24%
		Always	14	14%
7	Influence of discounts/offers on ordering	Never	6	6%
		Rarely	12	12%
		Sometimes	30	30%
		Often	34	34%
		Always	18	18%
8	Ordering food online late at night	Never	10	10%
		Rarely	18	18%
		Sometimes	32	32%
		Often	24	24%
		Always	16	16%
9	Preference for home-cooked food over online food	Yes	68	68%
		No	32	32%
10	Increase in online food ordering over last one year	Yes	72	72%
		No	28	28%

To determine the level of emotional eating among young adults.

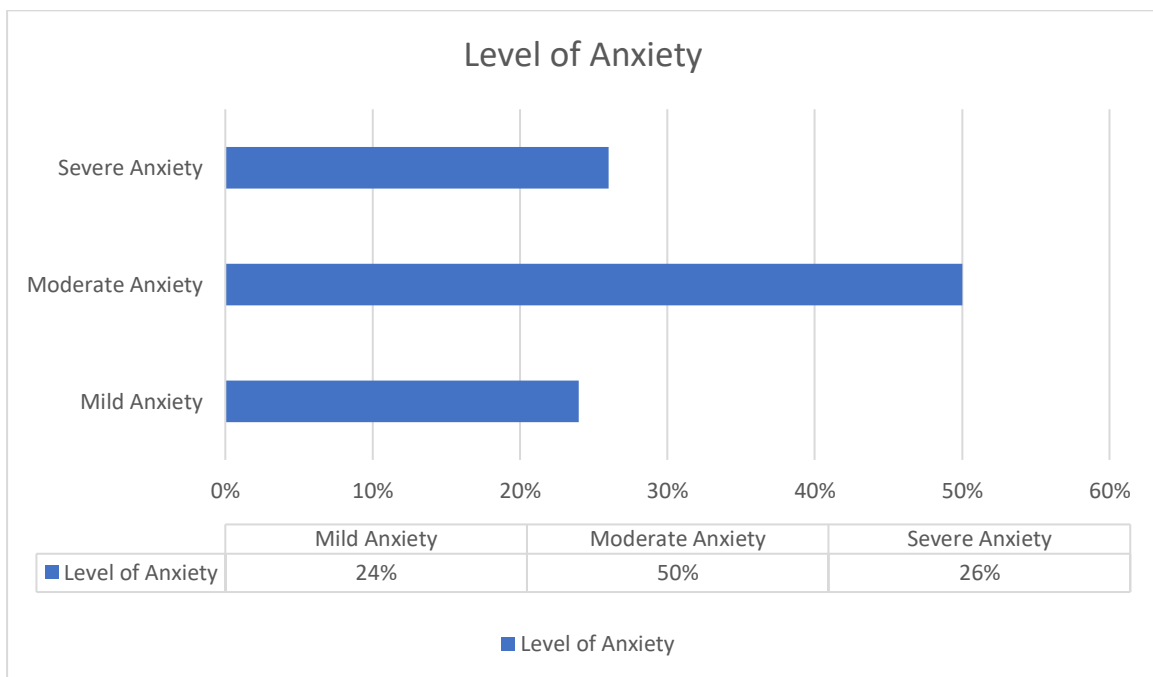
With regard to emotional eating levels, the majority of participants 52 (52%) had moderate emotional eating scores

ranging from 24-37. About 26 (26%) participants were found to have high emotional eating with scores between 38-50, while 22 (22%) had low emotional eating scores ranging from 10-23.



To assess the level of anxiety and stress among young adults.
 With regard to anxiety levels, the majority of participants 50 (50%) had moderate anxiety scores ranging from 8-14. About 26

(26%) participants experienced severe anxiety with scores between 15-21, while 24 (24%) had mild anxiety scores ranging from 0-7.



Distribution of Participants According to Levels of Stress
 With regard to stress levels, the majority of participants 56 (56%) had moderate stress scores ranging from 14-26. About 24 (24%)

participants experienced severe stress with scores between 27-40, while 20 (20%) had mild stress scores ranging from 0-13.

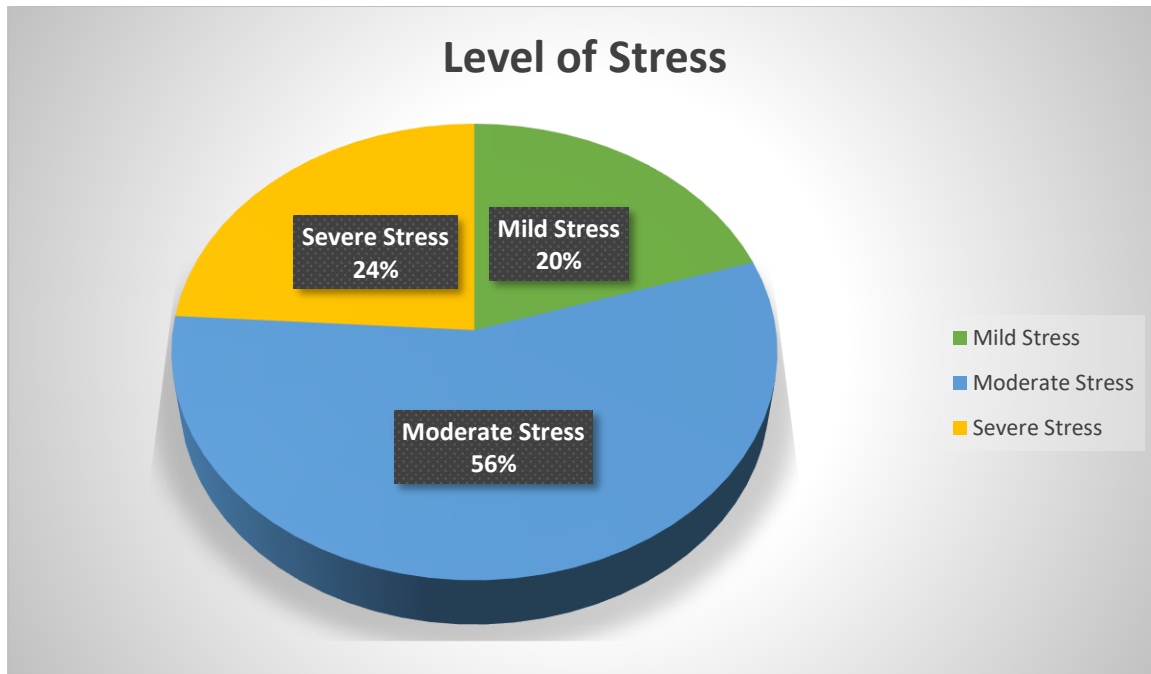


Table 3: The relationship between Online Food Ordering Behaviour and Emotional Eating Patterns among Young Adults N = 100

The findings presented in table reveal the relationship between online food ordering behaviour and emotional eating patterns among young adults. The calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient value was $r = 0.68$ with a p -value = 0.001, which

indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between online food ordering behaviour and emotional eating patterns. The mean score of online food ordering behaviour was 28.64 with a standard deviation of 6.42, whereas the mean emotional eating score was 31.42 with a standard deviation of 7.18.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Online Food Ordering Behaviour	28.64	6.42	0.68	0.001*	Significant Positive Correlation
Emotional Eating Pattern	31.42	7.18			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level

Table 4: Association between Emotional Eating, Anxiety, Stress and Online Food Ordering Behaviour among Young Adults N = 100

With regard to emotional eating, the mean score was 31.42 with a standard deviation of 7.18. The obtained Chi-square (χ^2) value was 12.84 with 4 degrees of freedom, and the p -value was 0.002, which is statistically significant. This indicates that emotional eating had a significant association with online food ordering behavior.

Regarding anxiety, the mean score was 11.36 with a standard deviation of 4.12. The Chi-square (χ^2) value was 10.26 with 4 degrees of freedom, and the p -value was 0.006, showing a statistically significant association between anxiety and online food ordering behavior.

With respect to stress, the mean score was 21.84 with a standard deviation of 5.63. The obtained Chi-square (χ^2) value was 14.12 with 4 degrees of freedom, and the p -value was 0.001, which was highly significant. This finding indicates a significant association between stress and online food ordering behavior.

Psychological Factors	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Chi-square (χ^2) Value	(df)	p-value	Interpretation
Emotional Eating	31.42	7.18	12.84	4	0.002*	Significant Association
Anxiety	11.36	4.12	10.26	4	0.006*	Significant Association
Stress	21.84	5.63	14.12	4	0.001*	Significant Association

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level

DISCUSSION

Objective 1: Pattern and Frequency of Online Food Ordering Behaviour among Young Adults

The present study assessed the pattern and frequency of online food ordering behaviour among young adults. The findings revealed that the majority of participants (34%) sometimes

ordered food online, with Zomato being the most preferred online food delivery platform (40%). Nearly half of the participants (48%) commonly ordered food during dinner time, while 44% preferred fast food. Most participants (46%) spent between ₹200 and ₹500 per online food order. Furthermore, 36% reported ordering food online when feeling tired or exhausted,

34% stated that discounts and promotional offers often influenced their purchasing decisions, and 32% sometimes placed orders late at night. Although 68% preferred home-cooked food over online food, the majority (72%) perceived that their online food ordering had increased over the previous year. These findings are consistent with the study by Yeo et al. (2017), who reported that convenience, time-saving, and ease of accessing food through mobile applications were the primary reasons for using online food delivery services among young consumers. Similarly, the present study found that many participants ordered food when they were tired or exhausted, suggesting that convenience plays a major role in influencing food ordering behaviour.

Objective 2: To Determine the Level of Emotional Eating among Young Adults

The present study assessed the level of emotional eating among young adults. The findings revealed that the majority of participants (52%) had moderate emotional eating, while 26% exhibited high emotional eating and 22% demonstrated low emotional eating. The mean emotional eating score was 31.42 ± 7.18 , indicating that emotional eating was common among the study participants, although severe emotional eating was observed in only about one-fourth of the sample.

These findings are consistent with the study by Elhadidy et al. (2025), which reported that emotional overeating was prevalent among both students and working adults, with most participants exhibiting moderate levels of emotional eating. The authors further observed that emotional eating was associated with unhealthy dietary choices and frequent use of online food delivery services, suggesting that individuals often consume energy-dense foods as a coping mechanism during periods of emotional distress.

Objective 3: To Assess the Level of Anxiety and Stress among Young Adults

The present study assessed the levels of anxiety and stress among young adults. The findings revealed that half of the participants (50%) had s These findings indicate that moderate levels of anxiety and stress are common among young adults and may influence their lifestyle behaviours, including eating habits and online food ordering.

The findings are consistent with the study by Tham et al. (2023), which reported that young adults who frequently used mobile food delivery applications experienced considerable psychological stress related to academic demands, time constraints, and lifestyle changes. The authors observed that convenience, lack of time for meal preparation, and psychological burden contributed to frequent online food ordering and unhealthy dietary practices among young adults.

The present findings are also supported by the systematic review conducted by Giddens et al. (2023), which concluded that both acute and chronic stress significantly influence eating behaviour by altering reward processing, appetite regulation, and cognitive control. Individuals experiencing higher stress levels were more likely to consume highly palatable foods as a coping strategy, thereby increasing the risk of unhealthy eating behaviours.

Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis by researchers examining junk food consumption and mental health found that anxiety and psychological distress were positively associated with increased consumption of fast foods and other unhealthy dietary choices. The review suggested that individuals with higher levels of stress and anxiety are more likely to engage in unhealthy eating behaviours, which may subsequently contribute to obesity and other chronic health conditions.

Objective 4: To Identify the Relationship between Online Food Ordering Behaviour and Emotional Eating Patterns

The present study aimed to identify the relationship between online food ordering behaviour and emotional eating among young adults. The findings revealed a statistically significant association between online food ordering behaviour and emotional eating ($\chi^2 = 12.84$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.002$). Participants with higher emotional eating scores were more likely to exhibit increased online food ordering behaviour, indicating that emotional factors play an important role in influencing food purchasing decisions. This suggests that young adults experiencing emotional distress may use online food delivery services as a convenient means of obtaining palatable foods for comfort or emotional relief.

The findings are consistent with the study by Devoto et al. (2024), which found that emotional eating was a significant predictor of online food delivery use among adults. The researchers reported that individuals with higher emotional eating tendencies were more likely to order food through digital platforms, even after controlling for body mass index and sociodemographic characteristics. The study concluded that emotional regulation difficulties contribute substantially to increased dependence on online food delivery services.

Objective 5: To Find the Association between Psychological Factors and Online Food Ordering Behaviour

The present study aimed to determine the association between psychological factors, namely anxiety and stress, and online food ordering behaviour among young adults. The findings demonstrated a statistically significant association between anxiety and online food ordering behaviour ($\chi^2 = 10.26$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.006$). Similarly, stress showed a highly significant association with online food ordering behaviour ($\chi^2 = 14.12$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$). These findings indicate that young adults experiencing higher levels of anxiety and stress are more likely to engage in online food ordering, suggesting that psychological distress influences food purchasing and eating behaviours.

The findings are consistent with the study by Tham et al. (2023), which reported that psychological stress, busy lifestyles, and time constraints significantly influenced the use of mobile food delivery applications among young adults. The authors observed that participants experiencing greater stress were more likely to rely on online food delivery services because of their convenience and accessibility. The study concluded that psychological burden and lifestyle pressures contribute to increased dependence on online food ordering.

CONCLUSION

The present descriptive study concludes that the majority of young adults in Gurugram, Haryana demonstrated moderate levels of psychological correlates related to online food ordering behaviour, particularly emotional eating, anxiety, and stress. Most participants frequently ordered food online, preferred fast food, and reported increased online food ordering over the past year. Significant associations were observed between online food ordering behaviour and emotional eating, anxiety, and stress, indicating that psychological factors had a considerable influence on food ordering practices among young adults. Significant associations were also found with demographic variables such as age, educational status, dietary pattern, occupation, and place of residence, whereas gender and living arrangement did not show significant associations. The findings highlight that urban residence, student status, mixed dietary habits, and younger age groups were associated with higher psychological correlates. The study emphasizes the need for

awareness programmes and behavioural interventions to promote healthy eating habits, emotional well-being, and responsible online food ordering practices among young adults.

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