

Note

Mail-Order (Online) Food Delivery Service User Types Based on Interviews With Mothers

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In the pursuit of maintaining consumer loyalty, food retailers are offering different purchase and delivery options to consumers in addition to shopping at the regular store. One of these options is to purchase foods from a catalogue or online site for home delivery. Purchasing food other than at the regular store is a purchase channel choice for the consumer, which is part of planning the shopping journey. Research about purchase channel selection in the context of a multichannel setting is scarce. The current analysis is based on interviews with mothers who have small children about using mail-order (online) food delivery service. The research focuses on the food category only and contributes to understanding consumers' purchase channel selection.

The first part of the research note provides a short literature overview. The second part explains the interview sample selection and research method. The third part develops user types based on mail-order (online) food delivery service usage frequency. The final part of the research note is for concluding remarks.

Literature Review

The important factors for online food purchase seem to be related to product and channel attributes. The product-related attributes refer to items that are easier to purchase online or that can be purchased only online. Channel-

related attributes refer to convenience, price, risk, perceived purchase value, and previous experience with the channel. Perceived purchase value relates to satisfaction with the available assortment and satisfaction with the service experience (Gensler & Verhoef, 2012; Ishii & Kikumori, 2018).

As previously stated, research about purchase channel selection in a multichannel context is scarce. The National Supermarket Association of Japan has compiled a comparative overview of the merits and demerits of online and actual store food shopping (Table 1). Online food shopping offers the benefits of avoiding crowded stores and saving time on going to the actual store; these relate to the store or shopping conditions. For the actual store, the shopping pleasure is mentioned in the context of feeling the seasonal offers, selecting products, and promotions; these are related to the actual product or shopping journey.

Table 1 Merits and Demerits of Online and Actual Store Food Shopping

	Online	Actual store
Merits	Can order anywhere Save time by not going to the store Can order 24 hours a day Can buy items that are not available at the store Can avoid crowded stores Can see comments left by other buyers	Can have products immediately Pleasure of shopping for actual products Pleasure of shopping for seasonal products Pleasure of shopping for products on promotion Can check the actual product Can directly ask questions of the store personnel
Demerits	Time difference from order to delivery Troublesome to actually receive the order Pleasure of shopping is lacking Freshness and quality of order is uncertain Shipping fee Member registration is troublesome	Have to go to the store Store opening hours Limited assortment Same shopping time means crowded store

Source: The National Supermarket Association of Japan, 2018, p. 85.

As we have seen from the previous literature, the research tends to be divided between online only or offline only purchase channels. However, with current trends in shopping behaviour, the retail formats and purchase channels are starting to blend. Nonstore shopping formats are becoming an extension of offline shopping (Lehdonvirta, 2012).

Previous analysis has shown that there tends to be high online purchase rates for categories that have a wide online assortment and for products that can be purchased directly from the producer. Additionally, the convenience of home delivery for heavy and bulky products, like beverages, seems to be an important factor for a high online purchase rate as shown in Table 2 (Bachmann & Watanabe, 2020).

The current research focuses on the purchase channel selection in the context of a multichannel setting and focuses on the food category only. The analysis is based on interviews with mothers who have small children. The semi-structured one-on-one interviews provide structure to the interview flow while at the same time allowing the flexibility to probe the respondents

Table 2 Possible Reasons for High Online Purchase Rate

Category	Possible reasons for higher than average online purchase rate
Beverages	Lower price on case purchase Home delivery
Alcohol	Wider assortment than average supermarket Can buy directly from producer Online product description offers more/better information compared to actual store
Oils, fats, condiments	Wider assortment than average supermarket
Fruits	Can buy directly from producer
Other cooked food	Can buy directly from producer (for example cooked eel, frozen seafood)
Cereals	Wider assortment than average supermarket Can buy directly from producer Lower price on higher purchase volume

Source: Bachmann & Watanabe, 2020, p. 20.

for in-depth answers.

Research Overview

The research method employed consisted of one-on-one interviews based on a previously defined questionnaire. Although the basic structure of the interview was predefined, the interview format itself was free and allowed individual approaches to be used to understand the reasons for the food purchase channel selection.

For interviewee selection, the objective was to gain a homogeneous sample of respondents in terms of age, gender, marital status, family size, and location. The homogeneous sample of respondents allows to analyse the interview data across respondents.

Urawa City Elementary School Soccer Club mothers agreed to participate in the interview for a participation fee in the form of a 2000 yen gift card. The 15 participants were mothers who did the main food shopping for the family. Their children went to the same public elementary school. All interviewees had households with at least one child aged between 9 and 12; the participants were 35-50 years old. Previous research has indicated that location is one of the factors that impacts the purchase channel selection. The interviewees lived within walking distance of the same elementary school; therefore, they had a similar distance and access to the same offline stores as well as mail-order (online) food delivery service.

The interview's basic structure covered following topics:

- Cooking habits: time spent on cooking, ingredients used, preferences or requirements when selecting food products, and so on
- Food shopping routine: number of stores frequented, reasons for selecting those stores, shopping frequency, differentiation between bulk and fill-up shopping trips, and so on
- Different purchase channels used for different food categories
- Online food purchase history and experience, perception, and preferences

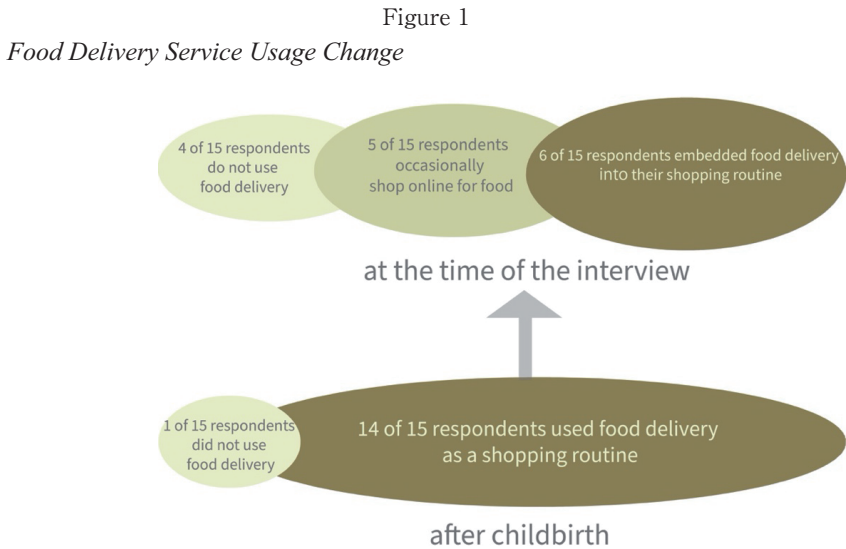
Analysis

Change in Food Purchase Channel Selection Related to Childbirth

The interviews indicated that the age of the child tended to be an important factor that influenced purchase channel selection for food. Fourteen respondents used food delivery services as part of their weekly shopping routine after childbirth. The mothers started to adjust their shopping habits as soon as they had more free time or according to the changes in their daily routines when the child entered kindergarten or elementary school.

Based on their mail-order (online) food delivery service usage frequency at the time of the interview, I was able to identify three user types. The first type does not use online food shopping and delivery, the second type shops for food occasionally online, and the third type uses mail-order (online) food delivery frequently as part of their shopping routine.

The change in mail-order (online) food delivery usage from the time of childbirth until the time of the interview is shown in Figure 1.



Source: Author.

The following is an overview of the three user types based on their comments during the interview. The nonuser type reverted to food shopping at the regular, offline stores as soon as the child entered kindergarten. The main concern about using the food delivery service was that the product description was not sufficient to make educated purchase decisions. For example, it was hard to estimate if 200 grams of meat would be sufficient to cook a meal for a family of four. For vegetables, it was not clear whether the pack consists of 4 smaller or 3 bigger onions. Also, the freshness of the food was a concern.

The occasional user type used regular food delivery service after childbirth but changed the weekly food shopping routine to the regular, offline stores as soon as the child entered kindergarten. They tended to frequent different purchase channels and stores for different shopping trip objectives. They shopped for big value packs at the offline discounters as well as online. They shopped at a wide assortment of offline supermarkets to add variety to the daily menu. They shopped occasionally at online specialty stores, as they like the rich product information and menu suggestions. They also made purchases from online stores that deliver directly from the producer.

The frequent user type has embedded a regular delivery service into their weekly food shopping routine. They liked having bulky items, like eggs, rice, and milk, delivered to their home.

Comments About Mail-Order (Online) Food Delivery Service From the Interviewees

Below are the comments about mail-order (online) food delivery service, grouped by nonuser, occasional user, and frequent user. The comments in Japanese are from the interviews and underneath each comment is an English translation.

Mail-Order (Online) Food Delivery Service User Types Based on Interviews With Mothers

User type	Comments about online food shopping
Nonuser	<p>1 オンラインで「おすすめ商品」の食品見るけれども、でも、食品は、何となく「自分の目で見て買いたい」ということがあるので、買ったことはないですね。</p> <p>I look online for food “special items”, but I still want to select food products myself, which is why I have not used online food shopping.</p>
Nonuser	<p>2 オンラインでは、写真と実物が同じなのかどうか分からない。あとは、新鮮な物が届くのかどうか心配。それと、書いてあるところもあるのですが、それほど詳しく書いていないところが多くて、何が入っているのか、中に添加物などが、どのぐらい入っているのか、それが心配なのですね。</p> <p>With online, I cannot be sure if the photo and actual product are the same. Also, I am concerned that the products delivered may not be fresh. The product description is available, but it is not so detailed, like what are the ingredients, the contents; one cannot be sure.</p>
Nonuser	<p>3 実物を見たほうが、自分で「ああ、これ、おいしそうだな」と思えます。</p> <p>Looking at the actual product, I can decide if this product is tasty or not.</p>
Nonuser	<p>4 ネットスーパーを、子供が小さいときに利用したことはあるのですが、結構時間がかかるのですね。意外に、見るために。慣れるまで時間がかかったから、途中で、もうやめてしまったのです。</p> <p>I used net-super when the children where small, but it takes too much time, even for looking for the products to buy. After a while you may become used to it, but I stopped using the service.</p>
Occasional user	<p>5 おいしい物のお取り寄せなどは、時々するけれども。例えば、北海道のイクラがおいしかったときに取り寄せなどはするけれども。それはするけれども、普段の買い物をインターネットで買ったりはしない。</p> <p>Sometimes I only buy tasty products online directly from the provider, like fish roe from Hokkaido, but regular, daily food products I do not buy online.</p>
Occasional user	<p>6 ミカンなど……。それは、年に1回ぐらい、友達が、例えば、デコポンなど「熊本のみかんが、おいしいよ」と言ったら、それをまとめて買う。何キロか。それを（友達と）分けて買ったりする。</p> <p>For example, when my friend said that Kumamoto tangerines taste so good, we purchased several kilos and divided them among us but only once per year.</p>
Occasional user	<p>7 食品はネットで、本当に、そのように形の決まったビールなどの飲み物以外は、本当に見ないかも、そう言われると。</p> <p>For food products online, only products that have fixed size, like</p>

		beer or softdrinks; other products we do not even look at online.
Occasional user	8	<p>楽天だと、まず飲料。飲み物は、お酒なども買う。家まで運んでくれるから。</p> <p>From Rakuten, we buy drinks. They deliver to our home.</p>
Occasional user	9	<p>味噌を家で作っていて、その材料は毎年買っている。新豆、新しい豆が出るから、それをネットで頼む。麴もネットで頼む。</p> <p>I make miso at home and purchase the ingredients for that online every year and fresh beans online. I also buy yeast online.</p>
Frequent user	10	<p>結構メインでパルシステムで大量に買っていて、それで足りない物をスーパーで買い足している感じですかね。(パルシステムでは)時々、野菜なども、少し傷んでいる物もくるから、そのようなときは電話して、値引いてもらう。</p> <p>Main food purchase is from the Pal system and I additionally buy at the supermarket if needed. Sometimes the fresh produce delivered is slightly off; then I call and get the price reduced.</p>
Frequent user	11	<p>重いものを生協で買って、軽いものを買って帰るようにして。お米やお醤油などの調味料系は生協にすると、持って帰るのが楽だからということ。オンラインで食品……インターネットでは情報は見るけれども、買うまではしていない。どこの銘柄がいいかや、旬がいつか、などは見たりします。</p> <p>I buy heavy items at the Coop, and I buy other products myself on the way home. I order rice and soya sauce-like seasoning from Coop; then it is easier for me. Food products online…only look at the product information, but I have not purchased online. I look for information like which brand is good and when is the season.</p>
Frequent user	12	<p>ただ、野菜などは、やはり目で見て買いたいから、結局、日用品やお米など、持ち帰るときに重たい物は、なるべくネットスーパーで定期的を買っていますね。元々、お酒は、それこそアイワイネットスーパーで買っていたのですが、やはり欲しいものがないときもあって。そこから「どうしても欲しい」となったときに、ヤフーで主人が注文し始めたということが、多分、きっかけです。そこから定期的に「なくなる前に、また注文」という、最近の流れに。食品としては、あまり使わない。アイワイネットスーパー以外では使わないですね。</p> <p>Yes, but for fresh produce, it is better to see yourself what you are buying, so only daily groceries and rice, products that are heavy, I order regularly from net-super. At first, we were buying drinks from IY net-super, but then they did not have what we wanted to buy, and my husband found the product from Yahoo. After that, we started ordering regularly online. For food products, we use only IY net-super.</p>

Frequent user	<p>13 卵, お米, 牛乳は生協で届くようにして、それ以外は土日に一気に買ってしまうかな、一週間分。オンラインで食品というのか、あれはある、テレビショッピングで、いいなと思って、それをオンラインで申し込んだことはあるけれども。けれども、例えばテレビショッピングのオンラインで見て、同時に楽天のサイトでも同じものを見た。お酒は、そうだね。それこそ5、6年前まではネットで買っていた、オンラインで。ワインはネットで検索したほうが、何だろう、少しお得なものが付いてくるなど。あとは、情報量がすごい。</p> <p>Eggs, rice, milk get delivered from Coop. I buy all others on the weekend for the whole week. Online for food products, after seeing them on the TV shopping, then ordered them online. Looked for wine online, some additional thing was also delivered, so that feels like good value. And a lot of information is provided.</p>
Frequent user	<p>14 買い物は、メーンは生協の配達。けれども、野菜などは買い足しているね。キャベツなどは買い足している。生協を始めたのは、もう十何年……。働いていれば、お買い物に行く時間がないので。10年ぐらい前からかな。牛乳、納豆、お豆腐。あとは、調味料類ね。お醤油や油など、重たいもの。あとはトイレトペーパー、ティッシュペーパー。</p> <p>15 あとは、重たいジャガイモ、タマネギ。</p> <p>Main food is delivered by Coop. But I buy fresh produce additionally. Started using Coop more than 10 years ago. There is not time to go food shopping when you are working. Milk, natto, tofu. Then soya sauce-like seasoning, cooking oil. Heavy items. Toilet paper, tissue paper. Also, potatoes, onions.</p>
Frequent user	<p>15 買い物は宅配。1週間に1回の宅配と、あとは土日に買い出し。生協……。子供が生まれるときに、なかなか外に出られないから。それで始めた。コープは、もう……。15年ぐらい。重いものなど、毎週毎週使うもの、牛乳やジュースやヨーグルトや卵など、そのような決まったものは、結構、定期的に頼んでいて。あとは、冷凍食品のようなものを生協で頼むことが多いですね。半分下ごしらえをしてあるものなどがあるので、それは便利で、よく使っている。コープで、産地直送のようなものを頼んでいれば、何が来るのか分からないので、それで足りなくなったものを、料理をしようと思ったときになかったものを、オーケーで買ったり、帰りに買い物をして帰ったり、そのような感じでした。</p> <p>Main food purchase is by delivery. Once per week delivery, and I additionally buy on the weekend. Started Coop after childbirth, cannot go outside; that is how I started using Coop. Already 15 years. For heavy products, that we use week after week, milk and juice and yoghurt and eggs, these kinds of fixed products. Then frozen foods. They have half-prepared products—these are convenient; I</p>

	use them frequently. Coop delivers directly from the producer; I do not know what will be delivered. If not delivered and need them for cooking, then I buy them at an OK store on the way home.
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Overview of the Common Characteristics of the Three User Types Based on Households With Children

Table 3 provides an overview of the identified consumer types across the interview main questions. Consumers who do not use mail-order (online) food delivery tend to cook family meals from raw ingredients. This also relates to their need for frequent shopping at different stores.

All three user types have experience with Coop weekly delivery service. Coop is the oldest mail-order (online) delivery service provider in Japan. Most of the respondents referred to Coop as the service that their mothers used. So, it is kind of a habit or custom that the Coop service is used after the childbirth. Coop offers free delivery until the child is 3 years old.

For the negative side of the mail-order (online) delivery service, the following points were mentioned most often:

- delivery wait time and delivery fee
- insufficient product information concerning the ingredients, content, and so on
- want to see the actual product for fresh items

For the positive side of the mail-order (online) delivery, the following points were mentioned:

- specialised retailers offer detailed product information and menu suggestions
- heavy and bulky items are delivered to the home
- variety in ready-to-heat assortment

There are positives and negatives for both service-related and product-related attributes. These indicate possible areas for improvement to retain delivery service users beyond the limited few year period after childbirth.

Table 3 Overview of Three Consumer Types Crossed With the Interview Main Questions

User Type	Cooking habits	Grocery shopping frequency	Usually used offline supermarkets	Reason for selecting these supermarkets	Experience with mail-order (online) food delivery	Perception of online food shopping—product related	Perception of mail-order (online) food delivery service
Nonuser Do not use mail-order (online) food delivery	Cook from raw ingredients	At least 3 times per week; although may have main shopping trip on weekend, make several fill-up trips during the week	Frequent ~3 stores that either have parking lot for bulk shopping on the weekend or are on the way of weekly routine (e.g. close to the train station)	Distance to the store so as to save time; value perception in terms of balance between price and assortment	Coop weekly delivery	Product information is not sufficient; want to see the actual product as do not know the product volume/size	Do not want to pay the delivery fee; waiting for delivery is inconvenient
Occasional user Occasionally use mail-order (online) food delivery	Cook from raw ingredients but also use frozen, ready-to-heat and prepared foods	Weekend is main shopping trip (by car), with fill-ups on the weekdays	Frequent more than 2 stores of which one is a discount; parking lot is required	Value perception in terms of balance between price and assortment	Coop weekly delivery; specialty stores with wide variety, directly from producer	Want to see the product; specialised retailers provide detailed product description that makes selection easy	Shopping at actual store is quicker; waiting for delivery is inconvenient; only buy online when product information is sufficient
Frequent user Frequently use mail-order (online) food delivery	Cook from raw ingredients but use also frozen, ready-to-heat and prepared foods	Use weekly home delivery, online purchase for bulk items; additional grocery shopping either on weekend or weekday	Shop at supermarkets that are on the way during weekly routine (e.g. close to the train station)	Value or convenience, as on the way of weekly routine, and no extra effort needed	Coop weekly delivery, net-super; specialty stores with wide variety, directly from producer	Variety in ready-to-heat assortment; specialised retailers provide detailed product description that makes selection easy	Negotiate price reduction when fresh food quality does not meet standards

Source: Author.

Summary and Discussion

The three user types are distinguished based on the frequency of using mail-order (online) food purchase and delivery service. The interview data indicate that consumers are adjusting their purchase habits by considering convenience, saving time, cost of delivery, prices and assortment. After childbirth, food home delivery was the preferred option for most of the mothers. The convenience of the service outweighed the possible downfalls, like minimum purchase value for free delivery, not being able to select the fresh products, and waiting for the delivery. As the child got older, the mothers started adjusting their purchase habits and channel selection.

Some mothers embedded regular weekly food delivery into their shopping routine, while others reverted partially or completely back to the offline shopping channels. The mothers who reverted completely back to the offline shopping channel tended to prepare family meals from raw ingredients, as compared to preparing meals from ready-to-heat or frozen foods. The mothers who embedded food delivery service into their weekly shopping routine seemed to be more experienced in using the service options that are not widely advertised, like calling for price discounts in case the fresh product quality being questionable. This service option may be not known to everybody.

Variety seeking seems to make a difference in mail-order (online) food delivery adoption. The mothers who kept using food delivery service tended to look for more variety in the ready-to-heat items for their daily menu. They tended to shop at online specialty stores that offer a wide assortment in one specific category and provide detailed product descriptions as well as menu options. This, in total, enhances the whole shopping experience from product selection to consumption.

The current research shows that consumers prefer a food delivery service after childbirth and, based on their experience, revert either partially or completely back to offline shopping channels. This time period is critical for

Mail-Order (Online) Food Delivery Service User Types Based on Interviews With Mothers delivering to consumers the purchase experience that meets their expectations.

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