

ENHANCING FOOD SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES: A CASE STUDY ON CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PRODUCT IMPROVEMENT IN LITHUANIA

Eimantas Kamienas

Greta Gruodė

Rūta Valentukevičiūtė

Vilniaus kolegija / Higher Education Institution, Lithuania

Abstract

A willingness to improve customer satisfaction is one of the main aims of small businesses in the competitive market. This study explores the food subscription service industry - a relatively novel business model in Lithuania - focusing on how consumer feedback can be used to drive continuous service improvement. Based on a detailed literature review and conducted research, the paper outlines key transformations in the online food service sector, highlighting evolving consumer expectations, innovative business models, and the critical role of service quality. Based on quantitative research (consumer survey), the aim is to identify the main factors determining consumers' decisions to choose these services, needs and feedback for developing actions to be implemented for service improvement.

Key customer expectations include flexible menu customization, improved quality assurance, and competitive pricing through loyalty programs or extended subscriptions. These insights underline the need for a client-centered approach in adjusting service to the current needs.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the study contributes to the limited existing research on the meal subscription service sector, aligning with frameworks related to full-cycle meal delivery systems. Practically, the findings offer valuable guidelines for small enterprises aiming to enhance customer engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

Keywords: food subscription, online delivery, service improvement, OFDS, service personalization

INTRODUCTION

Research topicality and problem. The online food delivery service (OFDS) sector has experienced significant expansion, with the global market reaching approximately USD 380.43 billion in 2024 and projected to grow steadily through 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). This growth is driven by evolving consumer expectations for convenience, flexibility, and digital accessibility (Alden et al., 2023; Statista, 2024). Within this transformation, the development of subscription-based delivery models especially in ready-to-eat segments presents both new opportunities, operational challenges (Choi et al., 2023; Intuition & Systems Consulting LLP, 2024). However, while much literature addresses technical and logistical aspects of delivery services, less attention has been paid to quality, customer satisfaction, value perception for enhancing consumer experience (Ni Nyoman et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2024). Scholars have identified various OFDS structures (Bhatt, 2023; Mangi, 2024; Khalid, 2024), despite clear market segmentation and innovation, customer satisfaction and loyalty remain complex, influenced by service improvements such as perceived value, trust, quality, and ease of use (Gadiman & Mohamed, 2024; Ni Nyoman et al., 2021). The rise of subscription-based food services reflects changing consumer preferences for convenience, personalized experiences. In Lithuania, a small competitive market, local businesses face the challenge of sustaining customer satisfaction to remain viable.

The aim of the research. The aim of the study is to analyse the behaviour and choice of consumers using or interested in food subscription services. Understanding how businesses can improve their service models to better align with customer expectations is crucial for long-term success. This paper aims to explore the current changes of the evolving sector, identifying key market drivers and opportunities for service improvement.

Research methodology. A quantitative survey methodology was employed, targeting both current and potential customers through a structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of 407 respondents, whose feedback was statistically analysed to identify prevailing trends, challenges, and areas for service improvement.

Research results. Findings indicate several service bottlenecks, particularly logistical issues such as inconvenient delivery schedules and premature package drop-offs. Respondents emphasized the importance of menu personalization, ingredient quality, and meal variety.

Originality/Value of the article. This research stands out by addressing a largely underexplored area within food service innovation and new business models in it. By integrating empirical analysis with theoretical perspectives, it identifies specific consumer drivers, behaviour patterns, and improvement opportunities which are filling the gaps in the scientific literature. The study also provides both scientific value and practical relevance for stakeholders seeking to develop food subscription services in emerging markets.

Future research could explore deeper behavioural motivations behind consumer loyalty and how these may differ across demographic segments or income levels. The lack of empirical studies on subscription-based models in this region, underscores the importance of continuing research into how digitalization and consumer trends reshape local food service design. Moreover, experimental studies could measure the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as loyalty programs or personalized menu options.

The online food subscription market is transforming the way consumers access and experience food services. However, despite its rapid growth, challenges such as customer retention, service customization, and market competition remain.

The concept of service sector has been extensively explored in academic literature, emphasizing its role in economic development, consumer satisfaction, and business sustainability. Unlike tangible products, services are characterized by intangibility, perishability, and customer interaction (Pigatto et al., 2017), which influence their delivery and consumption (Chen et al., 2009). As a sub-sector of the broader service industry, the food service sector has undergone significant transformations, particularly with the rise of digitalization (Driver et al., 2021) and willingness to use technologies instead of face-to-face interactions (Cai and Jun, 2003). Moreover, changing consumer preferences, like: proper nutrition (Kowalczyk et al., 2021), prioritizing sustainability (Shih et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021), emphasis on perceived quality (Turčínková & Stávková, 2009), need to consume more vegetables (Fraser et al., 2023) and finally socio-economic influence like pandemic, which highlighted the need of safe packaging (Récky et al., 2023) or high inflation impact on rising transportation costs and wages (Kornher et al., 2024; Adjemian et al., 2024).

To understand the development of food subscription services, it is first necessary to examine the fundamental attributes of services and the transformation of food service businesses in the recent scientific literature.

The global online food delivery market was valued at approximately USD 380.43 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.0% between 2025 and 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). This expansion is largely fueled by technological advancements, rapid urbanization, evolving consumer preferences, and the widespread use of digital platforms and smartphones. Online Food Delivery Worldwide statistics show that the number of users is expected to reach 2.5bn by 2029 and the user will be approximately 28.2% in 2025 in the online meal delivery market (Statista, 2024).

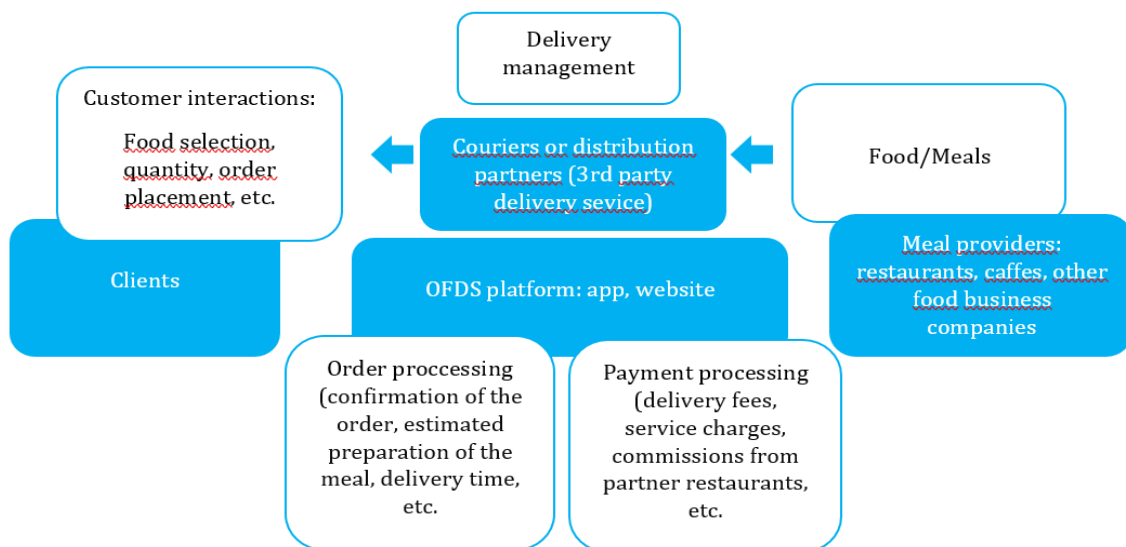
The online food delivery market is experiencing notable growth in the United States, China, and Europe. A key distinction among these regions lies in market structure: the US and China are dominated by a few (2-4) major third-party delivery platforms, whereas Europe features a more fragmented market/area, with a combination of local and international companies competing for limited market share. Despite the expansion, the market remains intensely competitive, with numerous players striving for market dominance, while profitability continues to pose a challenge for many businesses (Statista, 2024).

Online food delivery is convenient, easy to manage and popular. According to Alden et al. (2023), “internet food delivery services are a desirable option for consumers who are busy

since they provide a variety of advantages, such as convenience, accessibility, and flexibility”. Online food delivery recently divided into different business models. It is necessary to note, online food delivery service (OFDS) could be organized as one-time food order or subscription-based food delivery business model, which is also divided into 2 services: meal-kit delivery and ready-to-eat food delivery. In general, the “subscription business model is a strategic approach to commerce that focuses on providing customers with continuous access to products or services in exchange for regular payments” (Intuition & Systems Consulting LLP, 2024).

Based on the authors Bhatt (2023) and Mangi (2024) there are 3 essential types of on-demand food delivery applications or business models nowadays – *The Platform to Consumer or Order Only* business model; *The Delivery Service Aggregators Apps or Order With Delivery* business; *The Full-Stack Food Delivery* business model, but the author Khalid (2024) in addition to the three models already mentioned (Order only model, Order and Delivery model and Fully Integrated model), also distinguishes extra 4th one – Meal-Kit Delivery business model, which means, that instead of ready-to-eat food, food business company create innovative recipes and deliver quality ingredients to their customers (1 fig.). Choi et al. (2023) describes Meal-kit delivery service as one of the latest options being offered in the foodservice market, it is a process in which a retailer sends a customer a meal box containing proportioned ingredients and recipes with step-by-step directions on how to prepare them. Whereas the subject of this article is the delivery of prepared food to the customer, the Meal-kit delivery business model will not be analysed in the scope of the article.

Typical food delivery scheme is given below, the fundamental differences between the business models are responsibility for distribution and roles between online food delivery participants. In general, the automated food delivery service is an outcome of the coordination between platforms, food delivery drivers, and restaurants (Gadiman, Mohamed, 2024).



1 fig. Food delivery system (created by authors)

Source: Bhatt (2023) and Mangi (2024)

Based on Khalid (2024) the typical food delivery business model includes the same or very similar processes – operating of partnerships, order placing, order, delivery and payment management. As well, OFDS include such participants/stakeholders such as clients, food providers (restaurants, cafes, other food businesses), partners for distribution, digital platform (app or site owners), which link all objects and processes into one system/unit. It’s critical important to note, that applying different models of OFDS, some differences are emphasized – in the case of Order Only business model, the food logistics are out of the hands of digital app

owners, they just link customers with various food businesses, while, Order With Delivery business model means that the owner of the application takes the order of the end-user and provides/organizes food delivery to the customer or The Full-Stack Food Delivery business model include the entire food chain – food business company is responsible for the full cycle – from food production to delivery to the customer's doorstep, usually including the ownership of food platform (app or website).

Various factors influence and drive the adoption of online food delivery services, and they remain largely consistent regardless of the specific business model - whether it involves one-time orders of prepared meals or a subscription-based system. Additionally, consumers are more inclined to embrace new technology when they perceive that the benefits outweigh the associated costs (Hwang & Kim, 2019; Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021; Shankar et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly boosted and accelerated the market's expansion as well. According to latter reasons, customers are using online meal delivery services more and more frequently, high-speed internet connectivity has made online ordering seamless and accessible. (Statista, 2024).

Different authors analyse various online food delivery market drivers – some of them could be applied as factors affecting the intention to use OFDS, others – mainly characterizing and assuring the quality moments of OFDS. Starting with authors Gadiman & Mohamed (2024) and Gunden & Morosan (2020) identify the common following components affecting the intention to use OFDS as social influence, hedonic motivation/utilitarian browsing, behavioural intention to use, price value/price savings orientation, but authors Gadiman & Mohamed (2024) allocates additional/extra aspects as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, habit, trust, which is mentioned by authors Ni Nyoman et al., (2021) as well, and risk.

Among the critical/key factors, some researchers tend to agree, that product (Ni Nyoman et al., 2021), perceived value, service quality/perceived quality (Ni Nyoman et al., 2021; Alden et al., 2023) and additionally perceived ease of use, customer satisfaction (Alden et al., 2023) are important shapers/formers of OFDS and that could lead to loyalty and customer satisfaction.

OFDS evaluation based on qualitative parameters vary depending on different perspective evaluation the authors Ni Nyoman et al. (2021) divide into 2 sections – food quality (variety, taste, healthiness, freshness, presentation, etc.) and e-service quality (data security, easy to use, apps or website reliability, informative, transaction safety, enjoyment, apps or website visualization), while Alden et al., (2023) base through these categories, which already are mentioned previously – customer satisfaction (enjoyment of online ordering systems, discount or point systems for every order, availability of food, customer ratings, payment methods and human interaction), perceived quality (order conformance, politeness and friendliness of messengers and administrative staff, cleanliness of food box, a good condition of received ordered food, and inexpensive delivery charges); perceived ease of use (simplicity of use, navigation, overall performance, hedonic appeal, cost to purchase and time savings) and perceived value (convenience, design, trustworthiness, price, and a wide range of food options (Ham & Arif, 2021).

Extra OFDS quality elements may include efficient order processing, reliable delivery time, competitive pricing, a user-friendly website or app interface, and strong customer service (Dsouza & Sharma, 2021), although the authors Priyadharshini et al. (2024) state, that convenience is a key attraction, other aspects of the customer experience also influence overall satisfaction of service quality, including delivery speed, food quality, app or website usability, order accuracy, customer support/service as well, the personalization of service.

Prioritizing these essential factors can enable businesses to establish a competitive edge and cultivate a loyal customer base in the online food service industry.

Service improvement

Building upon the analysis of food delivery business models and the key drivers influencing service consumption, it is essential to explore approaches for service improvement. Successful organizations focus on continuously improving service quality and ensuring their offerings meet or exceed customer expectations (Teeluckdharry et al., 2024). Improving services in specific ways can increase customers satisfaction, encourage them to return, and help the business to grow (Magodi et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2023).

To enhance services effectively, businesses must focus on key areas that directly impact customer satisfaction and operational success. This section explores four essential strategies for service improvement: optimizing service delivery and customer service, tailoring services to Customer Preferences with personalization, refining Pricing Strategies to add value, and maintaining high Quality Standards while improving food/menu. These 4 areas are also explored in qualitative research in the section below.

1. Improving service delivery and customer service. Efficient service delivery ensures that customers receive their orders accurately and promptly, while exceptional customer service fosters loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Different strategies were analysed in the literature for reaching this goal: Alden et al. (2023) highlights perceived ease of use of a platform and fast delivery as an important part of customer satisfaction. Wu et al. (2024) examines how various aspects of service quality in online food delivery impact consumer satisfaction and their intention to reuse the service with one of the most important results being staff training. Bonfanti et al. (2023) suggested these management strategies for meeting customer expectations in online food ordering and delivery services (OFODSs): “customer reassurance, flexibility, continuous improvement, customer education, adaptation to customers' requirements and monitoring of exceptions”.

2. Customer Preferences and Personalization. Personalization is the action of designing and producing in ways that resonate with customer preferences (Chandra et al., 2022). Pérez-Troncoso et al., (2021) investigate factors influencing individuals' valuation of personalized nutrition (PN) services and consumer segments. For service improvement and personalization, the study highlights the importance of tailoring offerings to these distinct consumer segments to effectively meet their specific preferences and willingness to pay. Casaca & Miguel (2024) study emphasizes that personalization has significantly enhancing customer satisfaction. By adjusting services and products to individual preferences, businesses can improve customer experiences, increase engagement, and foster loyalty. However, the study also highlights challenges such as technological implementation and data privacy concerns.

3. Pricing Strategies and added value. Importance of discounts, promotions, and referral programs is high because customer perceive better value for money and it could even increase their loyalty (Trebigka, 2023). It is a common practice in food industry and was analysed in various researches: Steenhuis et al. (2011) research study how various pricing strategies influence consumer food choices, emphasizing the importance of value perception in purchasing decisions e.g. price reductions/increases, the ‘buy one get two’ strategy, bonus systems are seen as a promising approach because sales promotions form an important part of the marketing mix. Trebigka et al. (2023) study shows that Customers often use price as an indicator of product quality, especially when they have limited information to make a judgment. Meanwhile Hawkes (2009) review finds that sales promotions lead to significant sales increases over the short-term but does not necessarily lead to changes in food-consumption long-term. Overall adopting various pricing strategies could balance affordability with quality for different customer segments.

4. Quality aspects. The food industry is the dominant sector in most developed economies, and businesses operating within it face numerous regulatory, consumer, and market demands, requiring them to establish strong quality management systems (Psomas et al., 2018).

Consistently improving the quality of services and delivering services that match or exceed the customers' expectations is at the core of every successful organization (Teeluckdharry et al., 2024, Magodi et al., 2022). Wu et al. (2024) divided and analysed service quality into seven categories: reliability, assurance, security, maintaining food quality, system operation, traceability, and perceived service value. Results emphasized these measures to improve service quality: staff training, improved after-sales service, system optimization for users' satisfaction and intention to reuse service. Ling et al. (2024) research results showed that food industry companies should focus on food quality and customer relationship strategies to enhance satisfaction and customer retention. Suchánek et al. (2016) revealed the importance of surveys and other forms of feedback for quality assurance: manufacturers who lack essential information about customer satisfaction will struggle to improve and maintain product quality over time.

By addressing these factors, businesses can create more engaging, efficient, and customer-centric service experiences for sustained operational success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines the currently understudied factors that drive consumers / potential consumers of food subscription services to choose food subscription services. There is also a lack of data on consumer feedback and its impact on service improvement and long-term consumption habits in this business market.

The aim of the Research is to analyse the behaviour and choices of consumers using or interested in food subscription services. Based on quantitative research - a consumer / potential consumers survey - the aim is to identify the main factors determining consumers/potential consumers decisions to choose these services, as well as to assess the regularities of their feedback and the possibilities for improving services.

Research objectives:

1. To identify the main consumer/potential consumer motivations that encourage consumers to choose food subscription services and the key obstacles that consumers face; to analyse consumer satisfaction and feedback and assess which consumer/potential consumer behavioural habits encourage consumers to choose food subscription services.

2. To provide recommendations to service providers on how to better adapt services to consumer needs.

The study was conducted using a quantitative consumer survey method. Respondents were given a structured questionnaire focused on consumer/potential consumer needs analysis, satisfaction assessment, and feedback mechanisms. The collected data was analysed using statistical methods to identify key trends, issues and possibilities for future improvement.

Survey population of Research – residents of Lithuania cities, where the food subscription service is provided. The target group of the survey is ~ 400 respondents. The survey used purposive sampling by place of residence. Sample – 407 respondents. In order to achieve the goal/objective of the Investigation/Research an interactive electronic Questionnaire was developed (using closed and open questions, assessment/rating scales).

The first filter of the Question – in the survey was allowed to participate the residents of Vilnius City, Vilnius District, Kaunas City, Kaunas District Municipalities. Guiding Questions were also used based on experience – they have or not experience in food subscriptions and to distinguish those who have experience with food subscription services. Cronbach's alpha, which for a well-designed questionnaire should be greater than 0.7. After checking the internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha, the results of the statistical analysis of the data show that Cronbach's alpha = 0.78 and Cronbach's alpha = 0.81.

Sampling and selection. According to the data of the Registry Center in 2024 (<https://www.registrucentras.lt/>) 984492 residents/inhabitants over the age of 18 lived in

Vilnius city, Vilnius district, Kaunas city and district Municipalities. According to Paniotto's formula, with a margin of error of 5%, a sample of 384 was calculated (with a confidence interval of 95%).

The link of the Questionnaire without prejudice to the principles of personal data protection, was distributed from 2th April to 19th May 2024. Over 900 Questionnaire links are distributed, and 444 questionnaires were completed (rate about 48%). After the initial review of the data, Questionnaires that were not completed by residents of the surveyed area of residence, Questionnaires that raised suspicions about duplicate responses (completeness of the Questionnaire, consistency and duration of the survey - incomplete or carelessly completed questionnaires (e.g. the same numbers are marked in all the charts of the Questionnaire, etc.), were removed and not included in the further data analysis). The results of the survey are calculated from a total sample of 407 respondents (75 respondents with experience of food subscription service with a margin of error of 10%). Limitations – disproportionate representation of the selected regions, higher proportion of women completing the Questionnaire.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of a qualitative research survey. In order to enhance the clarity of the research report, the graphs and charts are color-coded based on the respondents' experience with the food subscription service:

1. **Blue** represents the responses of all participants in the study (sample size: 407).
2. **Yellow** represents the responses of those who have not used the food subscription service (sample size: 332).
3. **Green** represents the responses of food subscription service users (sample size: 75).

The analysis of the survey results is structured into the following sections: demographics, overall sample data, and data specific to food subscription users (1 table).

Table 1. Respondents by different aspects (N=407 (in all), N=75 (food subscription users))

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Age</i>		<i>Average monthly income (in hand)</i>		<i>% of food subscription consumers</i>
	<i>%</i>		<i>%</i>		<i>% in all</i>	
<i>Female</i>	73	18-21	25	Over 3501 EUR	8	24
<i>Male</i>	26	22-29	22	From 2501 to 3500 EUR	11	27
<i>Other</i>	1	30-39	28	From 1501 to 2500 EUR	22	31
		40-50	18	From 1001 to 1500 EUR	21	17
		51-65	5	To 1000 EUR	38	1
		over 65	2			

Source: compiled by the authors based on the quantitative research (survey) results

The results reveal notable disparities in food subscription service usage across gender, age, and income groups. Although females comprise the majority of respondents (73%), they are underrepresented among food subscription users (24%), whereas males (26% of respondents) slightly exceed their proportional representation with 27% of users. The majority of respondents are young adults, with the 30–39 age group being the largest (28%). Income appears to be the most decisive factor: higher earners are significantly more likely to use food subscription services. Specifically, individuals earning over 1500 EUR monthly account for 41% of all respondents but represent 82% of subscribers. In contrast, the lowest income group (to 1000 EUR), despite forming 38% of the sample, constitutes only 1% of users. This

highlights a strong correlation between income and the affordability or perceived value of such services.

Data in the overall sample

This sub-section includes introductory questions on dietary habits, the principles of healthy eating and their importance, the factors that would encourage the choice of a food subscription service and the possible prices, and the choice of food kits. Responses with no experience of a food subscription service (yellow graphs) and food subscription users experience (green graphs) in Figure 2 are presented.

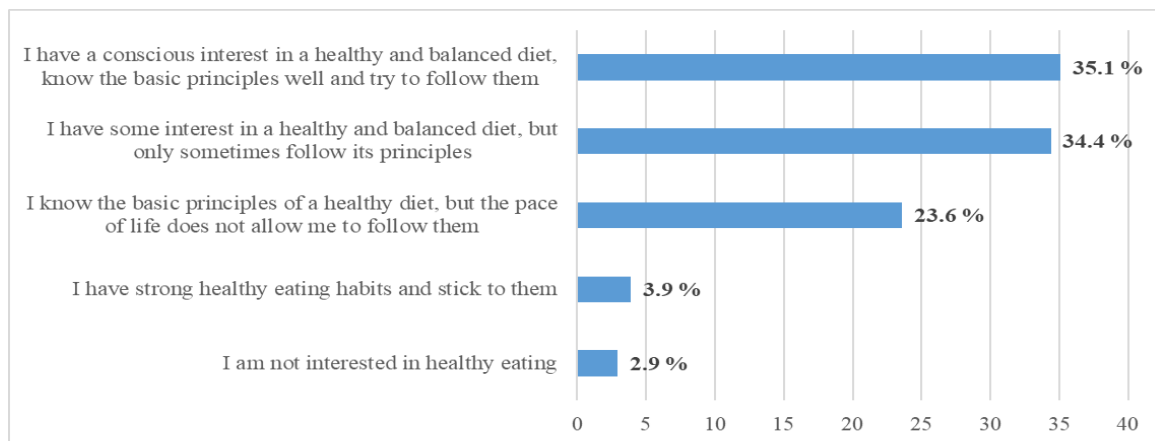


Fig 2. Healthy eating habits most relevant to the respondents, % (N=407)

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

The survey results show (Figure 2) that the majority of respondents (35.1%) express a clear and active interest in maintaining a healthy and balanced diet and are aware of the basic principles and trying to follow them. Closely followed by 34.4% who show some interest but only occasionally follow healthy eating practices - highlighting a population that is generally health-conscious but not always consistent. A significant portion (23.6%) understands the basics of healthy nutrition but feels unable to follow them due to the fast pace of life, suggesting that lifestyle barriers are a major obstacle. Only a small minority (3.9%) report strong, well-developed habits of healthy eating and an even smaller group (2.9%) express no interest in healthy eating at all. These results emphasize a clear gap between knowledge and practical application, with most people valuing healthy eating but struggling to integrate it into their daily routines.

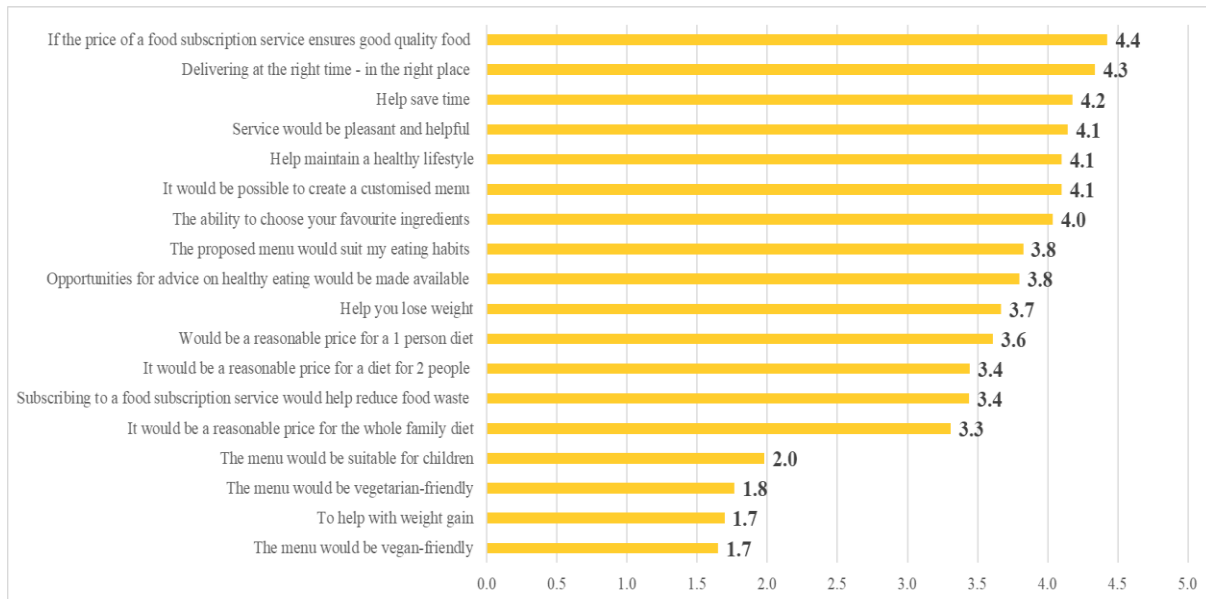


Fig 3. Distribution of respondents by what would encourage them to use a food subscription service (min1, max5) (N=332)

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

Figure 3 highlights that the most compelling factors encouraging respondents to use a food subscription service are ensured good quality food at a reasonable price (4.4), timely and accurate delivery (4.3), and the ability to save time (4.2). These top-rated motivators reflect a strong emphasis on quality, convenience, and reliability. Other influential factors include a pleasant service experience (4.1), support for a healthy lifestyle (4.1), and menu personalization (4.0–4.1). In contrast, considerations such as child-friendliness, vegetarian or vegan options, or support for weight gain received the lowest scores (1.7–2.0), suggesting they are niche concerns. Overall, the results show that most people find encouraging convenience and good service more than special diet options.

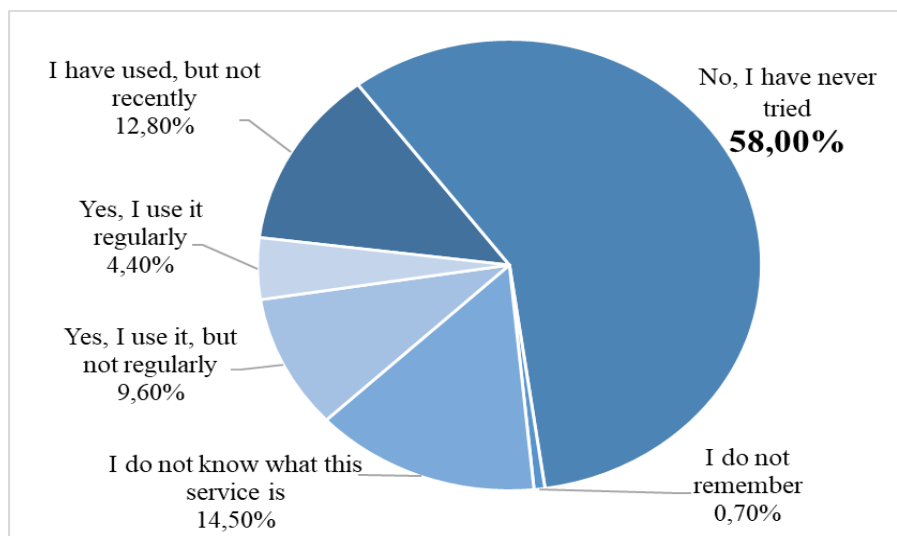


Fig 4. Distribution of use of food subscription services (7pack, Slimfood, Fitnetfood, Cityrush, Betterfood, etc.) over the last 2 years, % (N=407)

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

The 4 figure illustrates respondents' engagement with meal subscription services, revealing several key insights. The dominant majority (58.0%) have never tried such services,

indicating a significant gap in market penetration. Additionally, 14.50% do not even know what the service is, highlighting a lack of awareness that may be limiting usage. In contrast, only 4.40% use the service regularly, while 9.60% use it irregularly, suggesting that active users make up a relatively small segment. Notably, 12.80% have used the service in the past but not recently, implying challenges with user retention. The minimal percentage of those who do not remember using it (0.70%) confirms overall clarity in respondent awareness. These findings suggest that to increase adoption, efforts should focus on raising awareness, improving customer retention, and enhancing the perceived value of the service.

However, it is important to note that 14.5% of respondents have not heard of the existence of a food subscription service on the market (of which 15.1% are women and 11.4% are men (Pearson Chi-Square $p < 0.05$, 0.031)) (2 Table; Annex 1).

2 table. Chi-Square Tests

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
<i>Pearson Chi-Square</i>	19,823 ^a	10	,031
<i>Likelihood Ratio</i>	18,089	10	,053
<i>N of Valid Cases</i>	407		
a. 9 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,02			

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

61.8% of respondents with experience of food subscription are women (statistically significant difference Pearson Chi-Square $p = 0.002$) (3 Table; Annex 1).

3 table. Chi-Square Tests

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
<i>Pearson Chi-Square</i>	12,854 ^a	2	,002
<i>Likelihood Ratio</i>	13,044	2	,001
<i>N of Valid Cases</i>	407		
a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,81			

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

Analysis of food subscription service users results

According to the survey, this is the typical social portrait of a food subscription user: a woman belonging to the 30-39 age group (59.6% of women belong to this age group) and living in Vilnius (62.7% of the food subscription users in the study are women, 66% of the food subscription female users live in Vilnius); with a university degree (85.1% of women in this group); average monthly income of more than €1500 (74.5% of women earn more than €1500) (Annex 2); consciously interested in a healthy and balanced diet, with a good knowledge of the basic principles and a desire to follow them (55.3%) (Annex 2).

There is a statistically significant correlation between the income received by food subscription users and their attitudes towards dietary principles. Respondents who reported that they earn the highest income are consciously interested in a healthy and balanced diet and try to follow its principles (66.7%). In contrast, only 1 user of food subscription service indicated that he/she has no interest at all in healthy eating (Annex 3).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of meal subscription services, the graph below provides an analysis of the factors that determine or could potentially determine the use of such services.



Fig 5. Assessment of actual experience with food subscription services (N=75) and hypothetical experience of non-users (N=332) (min1, max5)

Source: quantitative research (survey) results

The comparative analysis of actual users (N=75) and potential users (N=332) of food subscription services highlights a consistent trend: actual users rate their experiences more positively across nearly all criteria (5 fig.). Key strengths noted by users include “Help save time” (4.8 vs. 4.2), “Delivering at the right time - in the right place” (4.5 vs. 4.3), and the “Pleasant and helpful service” (4.5 vs. 4.1). Notably, actual users find the service more supportive for a healthy lifestyle and better aligned with their eating habits. Interestingly, non-users show more scepticism in aspects such as vegetarian menu adaptation (1.8 vs. 3.7) and weight gain support (1.7 vs. 2.3), pointing to a gap in perceived inclusivity or flexibility. The difference in average scores suggests that actual experience tends to exceed non-users’ expectations, indicating a potential to increase adoption through better communication of real user benefits.

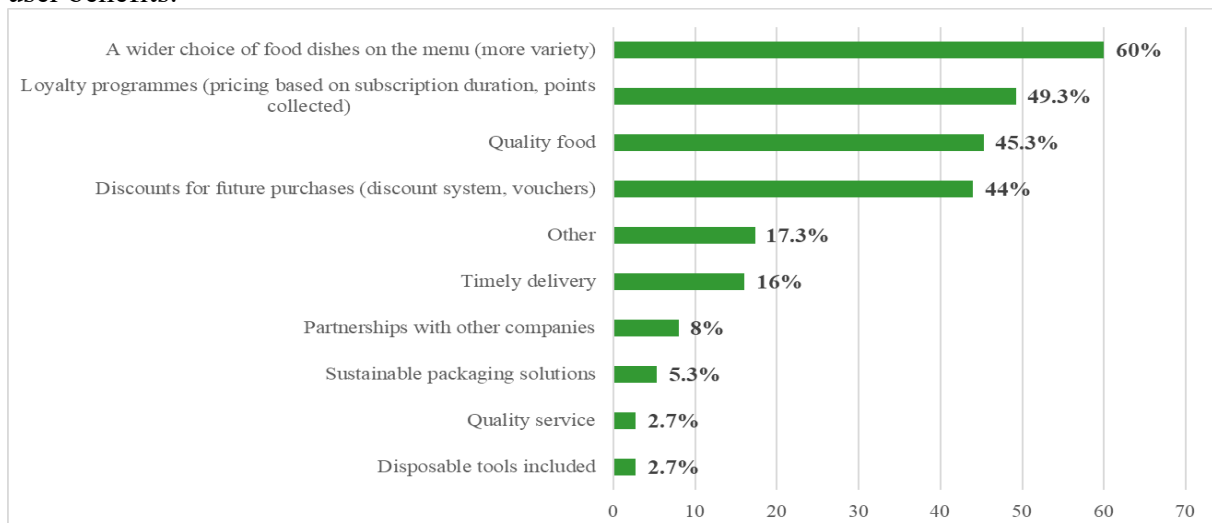


Fig 6. Factors that encourage food subscription users to remain loyal customers, % (N=75)

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

The bar chart (6 fig.) highlights the key factors that would mostly encourage consumers to use meal subscription services, is a wider variety of food dishes on the menu, selected by

60% of respondents. Following factors are loyalty programmes (49.3%), high food quality (45.3%), and discounts for future purchases (44%), all these aspects point to strong consumer interest in value-driven and personalized offerings. In contrast, logistical and environmental aspects - such as timely delivery (16%), partnerships with other companies (8%), sustainable packaging (5.3%), and the inclusion of disposable tools (2.7%) - received significantly less attention. These results suggest that for potential growth, providers should prioritize expanding menu options and implementing pricing incentives with good food quality. Less attention to operational or sustainability features could mean, that consumers don't find them very important or don't see how they make a difference in the food subscription service case.

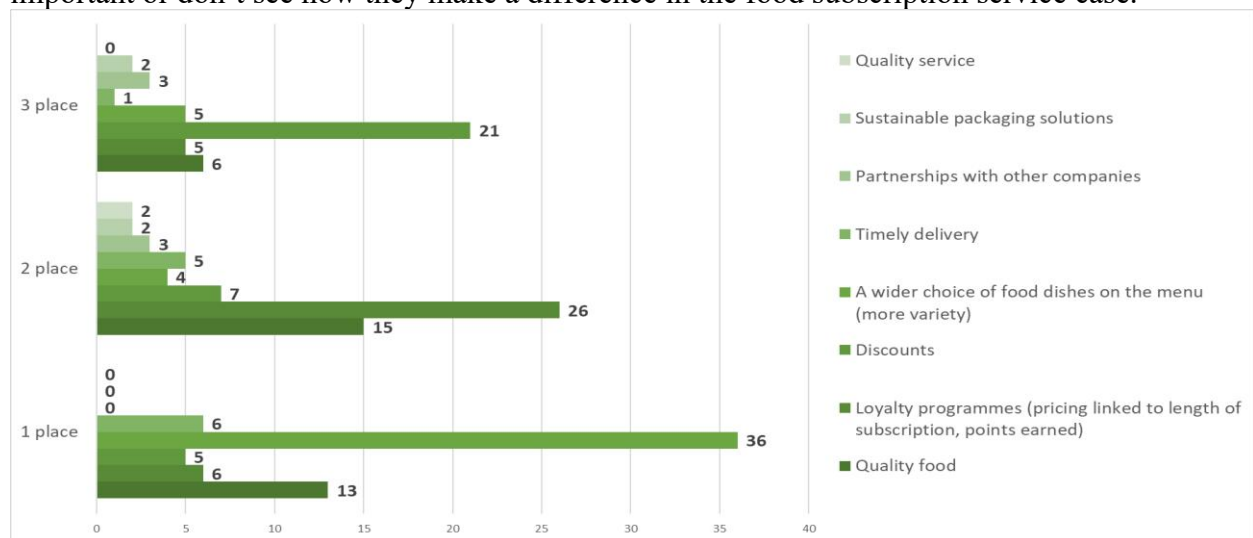


Fig 7. Factors that encourage food subscription users to remain a loyal customer, in order of preference (N=75)

Source: quantitative research (survey) results

The data from Figure 7 reveals that a wider choice of food dishes (more variety) is the most influential factor in encouraging loyalty among food subscription users, with 36 respondents ranking it as their top priority. This is followed by quality food (ranked first by 13 users) and loyalty programmes (ranked first by 6 users), indicating that both product quality and reward systems play a crucial role in retention. Quality service and timely delivery are more frequently ranked second (26 and 15 users respectively), showing their importance as supporting factors rather than primary drivers. Less significant motivators include partnerships with other companies and sustainable packaging solutions, which were rarely ranked first or second. Overall, menu variety, food quality, and customer incentives are the leading factors that sustain customer loyalty in the food subscription market.

When asked for recommendations on how to further meet customer needs - 40 suggestions were received. The responses are divided into 2 categories: Service Experience & Delivery and Product & Food Quality. All the data are presented in Tables 4, 5 below. Citations unchanged.

4 table. Recommendations for improving Service Experience & Delivery (N=75)

The category	Sub-categories	Citations
Service Experience & Delivery	Improving service delivery and	It's inconvenient to have to get the cooler bag ready to hand in. Disposable bags would be better
		Improve customers services
		I don't think a call at the end of the subscription is necessary, unless you can offer a personalized discount....>
		I would like to see the possibility of withdrawing from a parcel machine

	<i>customer service</i>	It is a little annoying that the arrival times given for the option are not in line with reality.
		I'm concerned that food is often delivered at 4 a.m. and left out for hours, raising safety issues - especially with items like yogurt or juice - and think couriers should better respect requested delivery times
	<i>Personalization of the service</i>	Choice of which products not to add
		<...some dishes we never eat and always throw away. It would be great if there was an alternative for each dish and you could somehow mark which dishes to always replace with others.
		Choose from a weekly menu of suggested dishes
		<...it would be good to be able to take some things out of the basic package.
		<... I don't eat a certain product and the receptionist hasn't found any way to help me. For example, instead of a lunch box, I could have two breakfasts or dinners. In fact, that is the only reason why I changed a company to a competitor. <...more flexibility...>
	<i>Pricing Strategies and Value for Money</i>	<... offer e.g. a 6-month continuous subscription, but at a much cheaper monthly price. More discounts
		Favourable offer plans, lower prices for longer-term bookings
		Inform the customer that there is another food subscription customer within a 50 m radius, so 10% discount would be applied
		To reduce costs, company could try some kind of collaboration
		Increased discounts when booking plans for more than 1 person
		Retaining existing customers with a better discount system, the possibility of redeeming loyalty points at a discount, as currently points cannot be redeemed

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

Customer feedback reveals a strong desire for enhanced delivery logistics, improved personalization, and more competitive pricing strategies. Respondents commonly criticized unreliable or inconvenient delivery practices - such as early morning drop-offs and misaligned courier timings - raising concerns about food safety and customer inconvenience. Suggestions included using disposable bags and enabling collection from parcel lockers to increase flexibility. In terms of personalization, customers expressed frustration at the inability to exclude or replace unwanted dishes, with several indicating this inflexibility as a reason for switching to competitors. Lastly, comments on value for money focused on offering better subscription discounts, enhancing the loyalty program, and exploring cost-sharing strategies (e.g., proximity-based deliveries). Overall, these insights point to a need for individualized offerings and pricing innovation to better meet customer expectations.

5 table. Recommendations for food/menu improvements and quality aspects (N=75)

<i>The category</i>	<i>Sub-categories</i>	<i>Citations</i>
Product & Food Quality	<i>Improving food/menu</i>	We would very much appreciate a vegan menu (no fish or animal products)
		Less sauces, more quality plain food
		Do not use prawns in non-vegetarian menus
		Less sugary breakfasts, less basic food like a sandwich
		More lettuce with food, more protein
		More variety of dishes. Wider menu. More snacks
		Veg. plan without prawns, a lot of people don't like prawns, prawns are more of a carnivore's dessert
		<... some products are universally disliked. I appreciate the removal of onions
		Time to update the menu! Or at least keep introducing new dishes
		I get bored of food when I eat from the same company for a month. If red meat for lunch, I certainly don't need red meat for dinner. I really want variety.

		There used to be more gluten, now it's replaced by soup
		Don't repeat meals in the same week
		I don't really like peppers, and company add a lot of them. The lettuce leaves look bad, they take too long to stand and they look unsightly
	<i>Quality aspects</i>	The food may be healthy, but it doesn't taste good. <... lot of cheap rice or other cheap cereals and not many meat or fish dishes...>.
		Doesn't like soups, constantly spilling
		Improving the quality of food, fewer weird sauces, just plain tasty food. Fish is dry and unpalatable, breakfast dishes could be simpler with fewer ingredients, but then there would be more of them and a more consistent taste
		Reduce fat in meals
		it's clear to customers who have been using your services for a long time that you've dropped ingredients from the dishes and replaced them with cheaper ones.

Source: compiled by the authors based on quantitative research (survey) results

Customer feedback on product and food quality reveals a strong demand for greater variety, improved ingredient quality, and customization to dietary preferences. A notable number of respondents request a vegan or vegetarian menu free of fish and prawns, with emphasis on simpler, healthier meals - less sugary, less fatty, and with fewer artificial sauces. Many express dissatisfaction with repetitive menus and low-quality substitutions, such as replacing gluten-rich dishes with soups or using cheap cereals over meat and fish. Frequent comments show frustration with meal repetition within the same week, and a call for more frequent updates and innovation in the menu. Overall, insights point to a need for higher quality ingredients, diverse offerings, and greater responsiveness to dietary needs.

In summary, the survey of 407 respondents (75 users of food subscription services) identifies clear trends in demographics, dietary habits, service preferences, and areas for improvement. Food subscription users tend to be higher earners (over €1500/month), aged 30–39, well-educated, and health-conscious women, mostly living in capital of the country. Income is the strongest predictor of service usage, with lower-income individuals don't represent the typical client profile. Key motivators for using food subscription service include food quality, timely delivery, and time savings. Suggested improvements include better delivery logistics, flexible menu customization, clearer pricing incentives, and higher food quality, pointing to opportunities for growth through personalization and operational improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The findings provide valuable insights of factors influencing consumer engagement with food subscription services in Lithuania. This study aimed to identify key satisfaction drivers and develop actions to be implemented for service improvement. Results demonstrate that consumer satisfaction in food subscription services relies on 4 interrelated dimensions: service delivery, personalization, price-value ratio, and food quality.
2. By focusing on the Lithuanian food subscription market, the study identified specific operational weak points - such as untimely delivery and limited menu flexibility - as well as high-impact loyalty drivers like discounts and customization. These findings directly respond to the initial research aim of improving consumer-oriented practices in food subscription models. Study also showed that those who do not use food subscriptions would be most encouraged to start using the service by good food quality, delivery at the right time and in the right place, time saving, pleasant and helpful service, the opportunity to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and the opportunity to create an individual menu (personalization). These findings support earlier literature suggesting that consumer satisfaction and loyalty in online food delivery services (OFDS) are significantly influenced by perceived value, service quality, and personalization (Ni Nyoman et al., 2021; Alden et al., 2023; Casaca & Miguel

- (2024) and Chandra et al. (2022); Priyadharshini et al. (2024)). Food quality remains the key factor influencing customer satisfaction (Ni Nyoman et al. (2021), Priyadharshini et al. (2024) and Wu et al. (2024)) - therefore, it is recommended to regularly update the menu, broaden the meal variety and ensure that all ingredients meet high-quality standards.
3. Moreover, while Steenhuis et al. (2011) and Trebicka et al. (2023) emphasized pricing strategies, this research contributes by showing that long-term discounts and loyalty programs are not just incentives but essential components in customer retention.
 4. There is a clear positive correlation between income and probability of using food subscription services. Survey results underscore that middle-to-high income, health-conscious women aged 30–39 are the primary users of food subscription services, which confirms global trends linking meal subscription uptake with health awareness and disposable income (Ni Nyoman et al., 2021; Alden et al., 2023).
 5. Digital food services should focus on diversity and flexibility. In small markets like Lithuania, combining technology-driven personalization with value-conscious pricing could distinguish a brand in a competitive environment. The study highlights a path for future improvement: customer-centric innovation, based on customer feedback and socio-cultural context.

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Annex 1
Use of food subscription service by gender

Use of food subscription service by gender (1)

			Your gender			Total
			Other	Female	Male	
In the last 2 years, have you used a food subscription service provided by different companies (e.g. 7 Pack, Slimfood, Fitnetfood, Cityrush, Betterfood etc.)	I have used/used, but haven't used recently	Count	0	34	19	53
		%	0,0%	11,4%	18,1%	13,0%
	No, I've never tried	Count	1	183	51	235
		%	33,3%	61,2%	48,6%	57,5%
	I don't remember	Count	0	3	0	3
		%	0,0%	1,0%	0,0%	0,7%
	I don't know what this service is	Count	2	45	12	59
		%	66,7%	15,1%	11,4%	14,5%
	Yes, I use it, but not regularly	Count	0	24	15	39
		%	0,0%	8,0%	14,3%	9,6%
	Yes, I use it regularly	Count	0	10	8	18
		%	0,0%	3,3%	7,6%	4,4%
Total	Count	3	299	105	407	
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: quantitative research (survey) results

Use of food subscription service by gender (2)

			Your gender			Total
			Other	Female	Male	
In the last 2 years, have you used a food subscription service provided by different companies (e.g. 7 Pack, Slimfood, Fitnetfood, Cityrush, Betterfood etc.)	No	Count	3	231	63	297
		%	1,0%	77,8%	21,2%	100,00%
		% within Your gender	100%	77,3%	60,0%	73,0%
	Yes	Count	0	68	42	110
		%	0,0%	61,8%	38,2%	100,0%
		% within Your gender	0,0%	22,7%	40,0%	27,0%
Total		Count	3	299	105	407
		%	0,7%	73,5%	25,8%	100,0%
		% within Your gender	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: quantitative research (survey) results

Annex 2

Food subscription users by territory, education, average monthly net income

Food subscription users by territory

			Place of residence				Total
			Kaunas city	Kaunas district	Vilnius city	Vilnius district	
Gender	Female	Count	13	1	31	2	47
		% within Your gender	27,7%	2,1%	66,0%	4,3%	100,0%
		% within Place of residence	76,5%	33,3%	64,6%	28,6%	62,7%
	Male	Count	4	2	17	5	28
		% within Your gender	14,3%	7,1%	60,7%	17,9%	100,0%
		% within Place of residence	23,5%	66,7%	35,4%	71,4%	37,3%
Total		Count	17	3	48	7	75
		% within Your gender	22,7%	4,0%	64,0%	9,3%	100,0%
		% within Place of residence	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: quantitative research (survey) results

Food subscription users by education

			Education						Total
			Higher college education	University degree (Bachelor's)	University degree (Master's)	Higher/secondary education	Unfinished higher education (studying)	Unfinished secondary/secondary education	
Gender	Female	Count	4	13	27	1	1	1	47
		% within Your gender	8,5%	27,7%	57,4%	2,1%	2,1%	2,1%	100,0%
		% within Education	66,7%	44,8%	79,4%	50,0%	50,0%	50,0%	62,7%
	Male	Count	2	16	7	1	1	1	28
		% within Your gender	7,1%	57,1%	25,0%	3,6%	3,6%	3,6%	100,0%
		% within Education	33,3%	55,2%	20,6%	50,0%	50,0%	50,0%	37,3%
Total		Count	6	29	34	2	2	2	75
		% within Your gender	8,0%	38,7%	45,3%	2,7%	2,7%	2,7%	100,0%

	% within Education	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
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Source: quantitative research (survey) results

Food subscription users by average monthly net income

			Average monthly net income					Total
			To 1000 EUR	From 1001 to 1500 EUR	From 1501 to 2500 EUR	From 2501 to 3500 EUR	Over 3501 EUR	
Gender	Female	Count	1	11	15	10	10	47
		% within Your gender	2,1%	23,4%	31,9%	21,3%	21,3%	100,0%
		% within Average monthly net income	100,0%	84,6%	65,2%	50,0%	55,6%	62,7%
	Male	Count	0	2	8	10	8	28
		% within Your gender	0,0%	7,1%	28,6%	35,7%	28,6%	100,0%
		% within Average monthly net income	0%	15,4%	34,8%	50,0%	44,4%	37,3%
Total		Count	1	13	23	20	18	75
		% within Your gender	1,3%	17,3%	30,7%	26,7%	24,0%	100,0%
		% within Average monthly net income	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: quantitative research (survey) results

Annex 3

Food subscription users by territory, education, average monthly net income

Food subscription users profile based on approach about healthy food (by net income)

			<i>Your average monthly net income</i>					
<i>Statement about healthy eating best describes you</i>			<i>More than 3501 EUR</i>	<i>To 1000 EUR</i>	<i>From 1001 to 1500 EUR</i>	<i>From 1501 to 2500 EUR</i>	<i>From 2501 to 3500 EUR</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>I have a conscious interest in a healthy and balanced diet, know the basic principles well and try to follow them</i>	Count	12	0	4	13	6	35
		%	34,3%	0%	11,4%	37,1%	17,1%	100%
		Net income	66,7%	0%	30,8%	56,5%	30,0%	46,7%
	<i>I have some interest in a healthy and balanced diet, but only sometimes follow its principles</i>	Count	4	0	3	9	5	21
		%	19,0%	0%	14,3%	42,9%	23,8%	100%
		Net income	22,2%	0%	23,1%	39,1%	25%	28%
	<i>I am not interested in healthy eating</i>	Count	0	0	0	0	1	1
		%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
		Net income	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	1,3%
	<i>I have strong healthy eating habits and stick to them</i>	Count	0	0	0	1	3	4
		%	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%	100%
		Net income	0%	0%	0%	4,3%	15,0%	5,3%
	<i>I know the basic principles of a healthy diet, but the pace of life doesn't allow me to follow them</i>	Count	2	1	6	0	5	14
		%	14,3%	7,1%	42,9%	0%	35,7%	100%
		Net income	11,1%	100%	46,2%	0%	25%	18,7%
Total		Count	18	1	13	23	20	75
		%	24%	1,3%	17,3%	30,7%	26,7%	100%
		Net income	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: quantitative research (survey) results