

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONALIZED DIGITAL PROMOTIONS AND ORDERING DECISIONS AMONG QUICK-SERVICE RESTAURANT CUSTOMERS

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Article History:

Date Submitted: September 15, 2026

Date Accepted: October 10, 2026

Date Published: October 26, 2026

APA 7th Edition Reference:

Montegrande, J. D., & Bañados, R. R. (2026). A multiple case study on customer perceptions of personalized digital promotions and ordering decisions among quick-service restaurant customers. *Ascend: Journal of Interdisciplinary Scholarship and Innovation*, 2(1), 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23662243>

Abstract. The growing use of digital platforms in the food service industry has made digital promotions an important factor in customers' ordering decisions. However, little is understood about how customers perceive digital promotions, the emotional responses they evoke, and how trust and perceived relevance shape ordering behavior. This study explored these factors among customers of quick service restaurants (QSRs) residing in Minglanilla, Cebu, Philippines, guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework. The study used a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine customers' experiences with discounts, loyalty programs, combination deals, and limited-time offers. Researchers collected data through semi-structured focus group discussions with 25 Minglanilla residents who used food delivery applications and online platforms seven to ten times monthly. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in participants' perceptions, emotions, and ordering decisions. Findings revealed that customers responded more positively to promotions that were clear, understandable, visually appealing, and relevant to their preferences. Beyond monetary savings, trustworthiness and transparency influenced customers' willingness to consider and act on promotional offers. Limited-time promotions created urgency, encouraging faster decisions and, occasionally, unplanned purchases. Combining promotional strategies also appeared to strengthen customer engagement compared with individual strategies. These findings suggest that digital promotions influence ordering behavior through financial incentives, emotional responses, perceived relevance, and trust. The study concludes that affordability, transparency, relevance, and convenience are essential considerations in developing effective digital promotions. Quick service restaurants in Minglanilla, Cebu, may use these insights to develop customer-centered promotional strategies that encourage purchasing decisions and strengthen customer engagement in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

Keywords: customer behavior, digital promotions, emotional responses, quick service restaurants, trust

Introduction

The food service industry plays a significant role in the global economy by providing diverse dining options that accommodate consumers' needs, preferences, and financial circumstances. Among its segments, quick service restaurants (QSRs) stand out for speed, affordability, convenience, and standardized service delivery. As consumer lifestyles become increasingly digitalized, QSRs have expanded their marketing activities beyond traditional advertising to online platforms, social media, websites, and food delivery applications. These channels let restaurants communicate offers, attract potential customers, and encourage purchase decisions. Hanaysha (2022) emphasized how digital marketing and social media influence customer perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in the fast-food industry. Similarly, Hong et al. (2023) identified convenience, trust, and customer satisfaction as important considerations in consumers' engagement with online food ordering services. Ali-Alsaadi et al. (2023) also highlighted the importance of online advertising and digital content design in shaping customer interactions with fast-food brands and their interpretation of promotional messages. Collectively, these studies establish the relevance of digital marketing in the food service industry. However, understanding how customers interpret specific promotional offers requires further investigation beyond the general effects of online marketing.

Digital promotions have become a key part of contemporary restaurant marketing, offering discounts, loyalty rewards, bundle deals, personalized recommendations, and limited-time offers. Although these strategies aim to increase customer engagement and encourage purchases, their effectiveness may depend on how customers interpret and evaluate the offers. Some customers may find promotions attractive because they offer financial savings, while others may question their credibility, relevance, or transparency. Similarly, a promotion may generate excitement and urgency, but these emotional responses do not necessarily translate into an actual order. Therefore, examining digital promotions requires attention not only to the promotional strategies themselves but also to customers' perceptions, emotional responses, trust, and perceived relevance, which may influence their eventual ordering decisions.

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework provides a theoretical foundation for understanding these relationships. The framework explains how external stimuli influence individuals' internal evaluations, which subsequently shape their behavioral responses. In this study, digital promotions serve as the stimuli, while customers' perceptions, emotional responses, trust, and perceived relevance represent the organism component. Ordering decisions and related purchasing behaviors constitute the response. Through this framework, the study examines how customers interpret promotional messages, how these offers make them feel, and how their evaluations influence their willingness to place an order. The framework also helps explain why similar promotional strategies may generate different responses among customers depending on their preferences, experiences, and assessments of the offers.

Despite the growing use of personalized digital promotions in the quick-service restaurant (QSR) industry, important questions remain regarding how customers interpret and respond to these promotional strategies. Existing studies have examined digital marketing, online food ordering, customer trust, and promotional effectiveness. However, few studies have examined how customers perceive personalized digital promotions, how these perceptions shape emotional responses, and how trust and perceived relevance influence ordering decisions. While quantitative

studies often focus on promotional outcomes, they offer limited insight into customers' experiences and the meanings they attach to promotional offers. A qualitative approach can offer deeper insight into why customers respond positively or negatively to personalized promotions and how these evaluations shape their final purchasing decisions.

This research gap is particularly relevant in the Philippine context, where digital platforms have become important channels for restaurant marketing and customer engagement. Through food delivery applications, social media platforms, websites, and mobile applications, customers are continuously exposed to personalized digital promotions such as discounts, loyalty rewards, bundle offers, and limited-time deals. Although these promotions aim to encourage purchases, customers may evaluate them differently based on their preferences, past experiences, perceived relevance, and trust in the offer. Understanding these differences can help explain how personalized digital promotions relate to customer ordering decisions.

In this context, this study is set in Minglanilla, Cebu. Residents of the municipality regularly encounter personalized digital promotions through various online platforms used by quick-service restaurants and food delivery services. Examining customers' experiences in this locality offers an opportunity to understand how they perceive promotional offers, how these promotions influence their emotions and evaluations, and how these perceptions relate to their ordering decisions. Although the findings are context-specific, they may provide valuable insights into customer behavior within digitally mediated food-service environments.

The study also offers practical insights for responsible, customer-centered digital marketing. Understanding customers' perceptions of personalized digital promotions may help quick-service restaurants design promotional strategies that are clear, relevant, transparent, and responsive to customer needs. By identifying factors that foster positive perceptions and encourage customer engagement, businesses can improve the effectiveness of their promotional efforts while maintaining customer trust. These considerations support Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Sustainable Development Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by encouraging the responsible use of digital technologies to support business growth and customer engagement.

In response to these concerns, this study aims to explore customer perceptions of personalized digital promotions and their relationship to ordering decisions among quick-service restaurant customers in Minglanilla, Cebu. Specifically, the study examines how customers perceive personalized digital promotions, how these perceptions shape emotional responses, and how trust and perceived relevance influence customers' evaluations of promotional offers. It further explores how these perceptions and evaluations relate to customers' ordering decisions within quick-service restaurant settings.

Guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the study views personalized digital promotions as the stimulus, customer perceptions, emotional responses, trust, and perceived relevance as the organism, and ordering decisions as the response. Ultimately, the findings aim to deepen understanding of digital consumer behavior and provide practical insights for developing customer-centered promotional strategies in the quick-service restaurant industry.

Research Questions

Digital promotions have emerged as a key factor influencing customer behavior, largely due to the rising adoption of digital platforms among quick-service restaurants (QSRs). However, little is understood about how QSR customers perceive digital promotions, how they feel while receiving them, and how these factors affect their ordering behavior. This research aims to fill this knowledge gap by examining QSR customers' perceptions, emotions, and trust in QSR-provided digital promotions in the Philippines.

Based on this, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do customers perceive personalized digital promotions offered by quick-service restaurants?
2. How do emotional responses, trust, and perceived relevance shape customers' perceptions of personalized digital promotions?
3. How do these perceptions relate to customers' ordering decisions in quick-service restaurants?

Methodology

Design

This study used a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate customers' perceptions and emotional reactions to customized online offers and their impact on ordering decisions in quick-service restaurants (QSRs). The qualitative approach was used because it provides a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of digital promotional strategies. The multiple case study design allowed the researchers to study various participant groups and identify similarities and differences in their perceptions and reactions to digital promotions. This design will produce a deep, contextualized view of how customers perceive personalized promotional offers, promotional messages, and online-based incentives on online platforms.

Locale

The study was conducted in Minglanilla, Cebu, Philippines, a municipality in southern Cebu Province. The municipality has various commercial establishments, including quick-service restaurants (QSRs), that cater to residents seeking convenient, affordable food options. With the increasing use of digital platforms such as social media and food delivery applications, QSRs have adopted digital promotional strategies, including discounts, combo deals, loyalty rewards, and limited-time offers, to attract customers and encourage purchases.

The growing use of digital promotions in the food service industry makes Minglanilla a suitable locale for examining how promotional strategies influence customer perceptions, emotions, trust, and ordering behavior. By focusing on this municipality, the study aims to understand how digital promotions shape customer decision-making in the local context and provide insights to help QSR businesses improve their digital promotional strategies.

Key Informants

This study included 25 residents of Minglanilla, Cebu, who have experience encountering or engaging with digital promotions offered by quick service restaurants (QSRs). To qualify, participants must be residents of Minglanilla, Cebu, and have encountered digital promotions through social media platforms, food delivery applications, mobile applications, or other online channels where QSR promotions are advertised.

Participants were selected to provide meaningful insights into their perceptions of digital promotions, the emotions they experience when receiving promotional offers, and how trust and perceived relevance influence their ordering behavior. Their experiences helped the researchers understand how customers assess the attractiveness, credibility, and relevance of digital promotions and how these factors shape their decisions to order from quick service restaurants.

Using purposive sampling, the researchers identified individuals who can provide relevant, detailed accounts of their experiences with digital promotions. Their responses will form the basis for examining how digital promotional strategies influence customer perceptions, emotional responses, trust, and food-ordering decisions in Minglanilla, Cebu.

Instrument

A semi-structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide created by the researchers. The guide included open-ended questions to explore participants' perceptions, emotional responses, and experiences with personalized digital promotions in quick service restaurants. The open-ended discussion guide allowed participants to share their experiences, opinions, and interpretations freely, enabling the researchers to use follow-up questions to clarify answers and gather comprehensive data. Specifically, the guide asked how participants typically respond to digital promotions or discounts from quick-service restaurants, what emotions they experience when they see personalized digital promotions or limited-time offers, and how digital promotions influence their decision to order food from quick-service restaurants. The semi-structured format ensured the discussions aligned with the research objectives while giving participants flexibility to express their views in detail.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers collected data from the participants through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were structured around the three identified cases: Case 1 will have eight (8) participants, Case 2 will have eight (8) participants, and Case 3 will have nine (9) participants. The FGD sessions took about forty-five (45) to sixty (60) minutes. The researchers obtained informed consent from all participants before discussing the study's purpose. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that their answers would remain confidential. With participants' permission, the researchers recorded the discussions to ensure accurate responses. The researchers also took notes during the discussions to capture key observations and important concerns raised by participants. The researchers transcribed the recordings verbatim after each session. The researchers transcribed the recordings verbatim to ensure data accuracy.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data collected from participants. The analysis was systematic and focused on identifying patterns and themes in participants' responses. First, the researchers ensured the accuracy of all recorded discussions by transcribing them verbatim. Second, the researchers thoroughly examined the transcripts to understand the content holistically. Third, the researchers identified significant statements and key responses and assigned preliminary codes. Fourth, similar codes were grouped into broader categories based on shared meaning and patterns. Lastly, the researchers developed general themes to reflect participants' perceptions, emotional reactions, and experiences with personalized digital promotions. The researchers collected and analyzed data simultaneously until data saturation was reached. This was achieved when further data revealed no new codes, sub-themes, or insights, indicating that a sample size of 9 was adequate to provide a comprehensive picture of views on digital promotions in quick-service restaurants.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles to protect the rights, privacy, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Before data collection, the researchers explained the study's purpose, objectives, procedures, and nature to participants who were residents of Minglanilla, Cebu. They had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and clarify concerns before deciding whether to participate. All participants provided informed consent, ensuring their involvement was voluntary and based on an adequate understanding of the research.

Participants were informed of their right to decline participation, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. The researchers obtained permission before audio-recording the focus group discussions (FGDs) and informed participants how the recordings and collected data would be used, stored, and protected. To maintain confidentiality, the researchers used pseudonyms or participant codes in transcripts and research reports and excluded identifying information from the presentation of findings. The researchers took appropriate measures to restrict access to research data and ensure that the information collected was used solely for academic purposes.

Given the group-based nature of the FGDs, participants were also reminded to respect one another's privacy and refrain from disclosing information shared during the discussions outside the research setting. However, the researchers acknowledged that they could not guarantee complete confidentiality among focus group participants. Throughout the research process, participants were treated fairly and respectfully, and the researchers represented their responses accurately, without distortion or misrepresentation. These ethical measures helped ensure the study was conducted responsibly, protected participants' rights, and maintained the integrity of the research findings.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Customer Perceptions of Personalized Digital Promotions

Theme 1 explores how customers perceive personalized digital promotions offered by quick-service restaurants. Across the three cases, participants consistently emphasized that promotions are more appealing when they are clear, visually attractive, easy to understand, and accessible through digital platforms. Customers evaluated promotions based on their visibility, perceived value, and ability to provide meaningful benefits during the ordering process.

In Case 1, participants highlighted that promotional visibility and clarity are important for attracting their attention amid numerous online advertisements. One participant stated, *“Makita nako ang promo sa online, like sa GrabFood or Facebook, unya kung klaro ug dali makita, ganahan ko mo-order dayon.”* This suggests that clear and accessible promotional content increases customers' interest in exploring available offers. In Case 2, participants perceived loyalty programs as valuable promotional features because they provided rewards and encouraged continued engagement with the platform. As one respondent explained, *“Ganahan ko sa loyalty program kay taga balik nako, makadawat ko ug rewards, unya mas mosalig ko sa app.”* In Case 3, participants viewed discounts, bundle offers, and limited-time promotions as beneficial because they increased perceived savings and value. One participant noted, *“Kung naa’y bundle or discount sa app, mas ganahan ko mo order kay makabarato ko gamay, unya makasave pud ko sa uban nga items.”* Another respondent added, *“Kung limited ra ang promo sa Foodpanda, usahay mo-order ko dayon kay basin mawala, unya dali ra pud ko makapili sa akong order.”*

These findings indicate that customers generally view personalized digital promotions positively when they provide clear information, visible benefits, and opportunities to save. Accessible, easy-to-understand promotions appear to strengthen customers' interest in engaging with restaurant offers. The findings suggest that QSR operators should focus on promotions that clearly communicate value while remaining visually appealing and easy to access.

The results support Astoriano et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of digital marketing in encouraging customer engagement and purchase intention. Similarly, Perangin-Angin et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of attractive promotional content and strategic digital placement in increasing customer awareness and exploration of available products. Liu et al. (2022) likewise demonstrated that loyalty incentives and app-based rewards can enhance perceived value and encourage continued customer participation.

Theme 2: Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Personalized Digital Promotions

Building upon customers' perceptions of digital promotions, Theme 2 examines the emotional and cognitive responses that arise after customers evaluate promotional offers. Participants described excitement, curiosity, trust, and urgency, suggesting that customer perceptions extend beyond promotional content and involve psychological evaluations that shape subsequent decision-making.

In Case 1, participants reported that visually appealing and easy-to-understand promotions generated excitement and curiosity. One participant stated, *“Kung nindot tan-awon ang promo ug sayon sabton, ma-excite ko mo-try, unya mas curious ko unsa pa’y lain nga offer.”* This suggests that positive perceptions of promotional design stimulate interest and encourage customers to

explore available options. In Case 2, participants emphasized that transparency, consistency, and credibility contributed to trust and confidence in promotional offers. As one respondent explained, *“Mas mosalig ko sa promo kung klaro ug transparent, unya feeling nako nga worthwhile ang akong order.”* Participants perceived promotions as more meaningful when they were relevant to their needs and clearly communicated. In Case 3, customers described experiencing urgency when confronted with limited-time offers. One participant shared, *“Basta hapit na mahuman ang promo, mag dali-dali gud kog pamilya sa akong orderon.”* Fear of missing out increased the promotion's perceived relevance and sped up decision-making.

These findings suggest that customers' perceptions of personalized digital promotions are closely connected to emotional and cognitive reactions. Positive perceptions foster excitement and trust, while time-sensitive promotions create urgency that shapes evaluation. Trust and perceived relevance emerged as key considerations shaping how customers interpret promotional messages and assess their value.

The findings support Hanaysha (2022), who found that digital marketing attributes significantly influence purchasing decisions by building consumer trust. Similarly, Yang et al. (2022) emphasized that personalization, clarity, and relevance contribute to favorable consumer evaluations and behavioral intentions. Louisa and Simbolon (2023) further highlighted the importance of consistency and transparency in strengthening customer confidence and satisfaction in digital service environments.

Theme 3: Ordering Decisions Associated with Personalized Digital Promotions

Theme 3 examines how customers' perceptions and emotional responses shape their ordering decisions. The findings show that perceived value, trust, convenience, relevance, and emotional reactions to personalized digital promotions jointly influence ordering behavior.

In Case 1, participants said that easily accessible promotions increased their willingness to order by reducing effort and simplifying the ordering process. One participant shared, *“Mas dali ko mo-order kung naay promo sa app kay dali ra makita ug ma-apply, unya makasave ko ug time sa pag search sa menu.”* This suggests that convenient and visible promotions facilitate purchase intentions. In Case 2, participants explained that while promotions encouraged ordering, financial considerations still influenced their final decisions. One respondent stated, *“Depende gihapon sa budget, pero kung naa'y discount, mas ganahan ko mo-order, unya usahay mopili ko ug gamay nga extra item kung makabarato ko.”* Promotions were perceived as valuable when they aligned with customers' financial priorities. In Case 3, participants noted that limited-time offers often prompted unplanned purchases. One participant explained, *“Usahay mo order ko tungod sa promo bisan dili pa kaayo ko gutom, unya kung makita nako ang lain nga offer, ganahan pud ko mo-add sa akong order.”* Participants also indicated that they were more likely to act immediately when the promotional offer originated from a platform they trusted.

These findings show that ordering decisions are not driven solely by discounts or savings. Rather, ordering behavior emerges from the interaction of customers' perceptions, emotional responses, trust in the promotion, and the perceived relevance of the offer. Promotions perceived as valuable, trustworthy, and convenient are more likely to encourage purchasing behavior, increase order frequency, and occasionally contribute to impulse buying.

The findings align with Hariyanto and Fachmi (2026), who found that promotional offers enhance perceived value and purchase intention. Likewise, Molinillo et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of convenience and ease of use in influencing online purchasing behavior. Obiso et al. (2025) highlighted the role of time-sensitive promotions in encouraging impulse purchases, while Perangin-Angin et al. (2024) underscored the importance of platform trust in consumer decision-making.

Conclusion

This multiple case study explored how quick-service restaurant customers perceive personalized digital promotions and how these perceptions relate to their ordering decisions. Guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, the study found that customers generally responded positively to promotions that were clear, visually appealing, easy to understand, and relevant to their preferences. Emotional responses, trust, and perceived relevance further shaped customers' perceptions and influenced how they evaluated promotional offers.

The findings revealed that emotional reactions, such as excitement and urgency, along with trust in promotional credibility and perceived relevance, were key factors in customers' decision-making. These perceptions contributed to customers' willingness to engage with promotional offers, place orders, and occasionally make unplanned purchases. The study also found that combining promotional strategies, such as discounts, loyalty incentives, bundle offers, and limited-time promotions, enhanced customer engagement and encouraged more favorable ordering responses.

Overall, the study suggests that ordering decisions among quick-service restaurant customers are associated not only with financial savings but also with customers' perceptions of promotional value, relevance, transparency, and trustworthiness. These findings provide context-specific insights into digital consumer behavior among customers in Minglanilla, Cebu, and offer practical guidance for developing customer-centered personalized digital promotions that support customer engagement and informed purchasing decisions.

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