

Optimising Your Meals—Sitting Down with dotfood

“Time moves slowly when you’re hungry and even slower when you’re waiting for food delivery...”

dotfood is a new online food delivery platform operating inside the MIT campus. Developed by third years *Soumith Ganji* and *Parthiv Menon*, the product as a whole aims to make ordering food from restaurants and food courts within MIT hassle-free. The MIT Post sat down with the creators of this service to talk about the app’s past, present, and future.

dotfood is a new online food delivery platform operating inside the MIT campus. Why did you feel the need for such an app?

Soumith: What happens nowadays in MIT, especially in the peak hours after 9:30 – 10, you have to call the place a minimum of 5 to 10 times, for your line to get connected. And for restaurants like MFC, even ten is less. I know people who’ve called 50 times. To eliminate this very need of continuous calls and waiting, we came up with the platform called dotfood.

Who did you get in touch with while trying to bring this idea to life? What are the organizations involved in the development of this app?

Soumith: I spoke to the managers of FC2, Apoorva, and The Kitchen. There is no third-party organisation as such. We have a direct contract with them.

Parthiv: We also talked to all the restaurant owners and managers about signing a contract with them regarding how the app would function and the kind of deal that we would strike with them over a span of 30 days, for now.

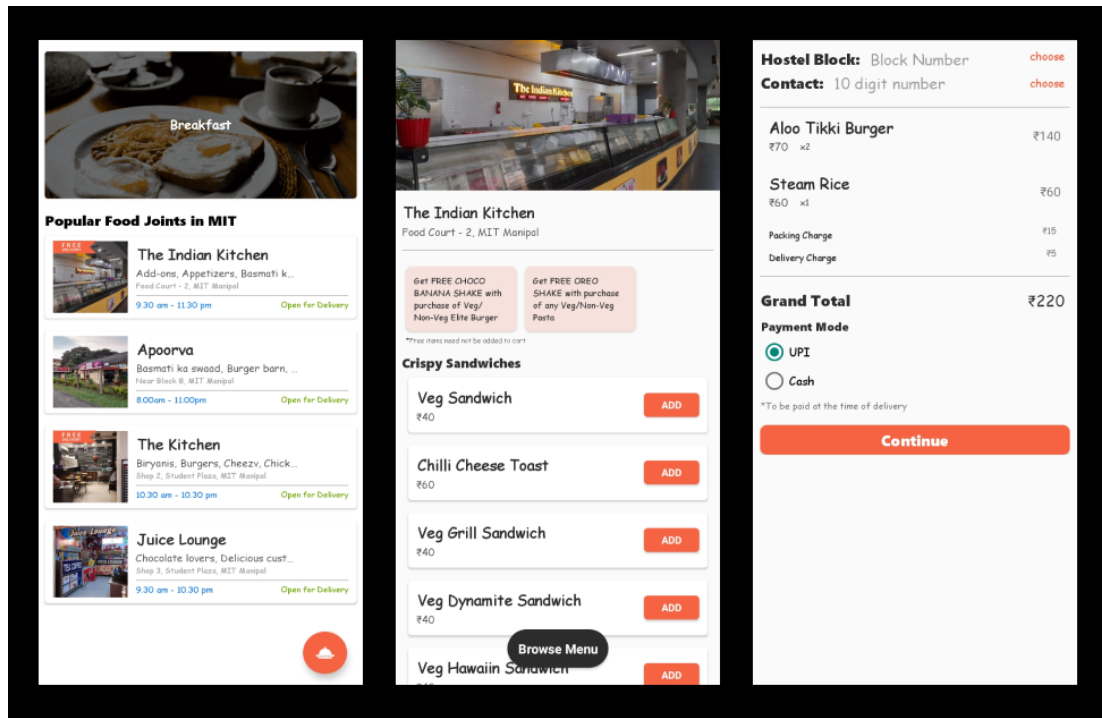
What are some of the setbacks you faced?

Soumith: There was one major setback that we faced the day we launched the app. We got about ten fake orders, which all summed up to about three to four thousand rupees in losses. The issue was with there being no validation for phone numbers while placing the order. We had to change the app's architecture immediately and had to force everyone to shift to the new one. This brought a negative impact to the users on the very first day itself.

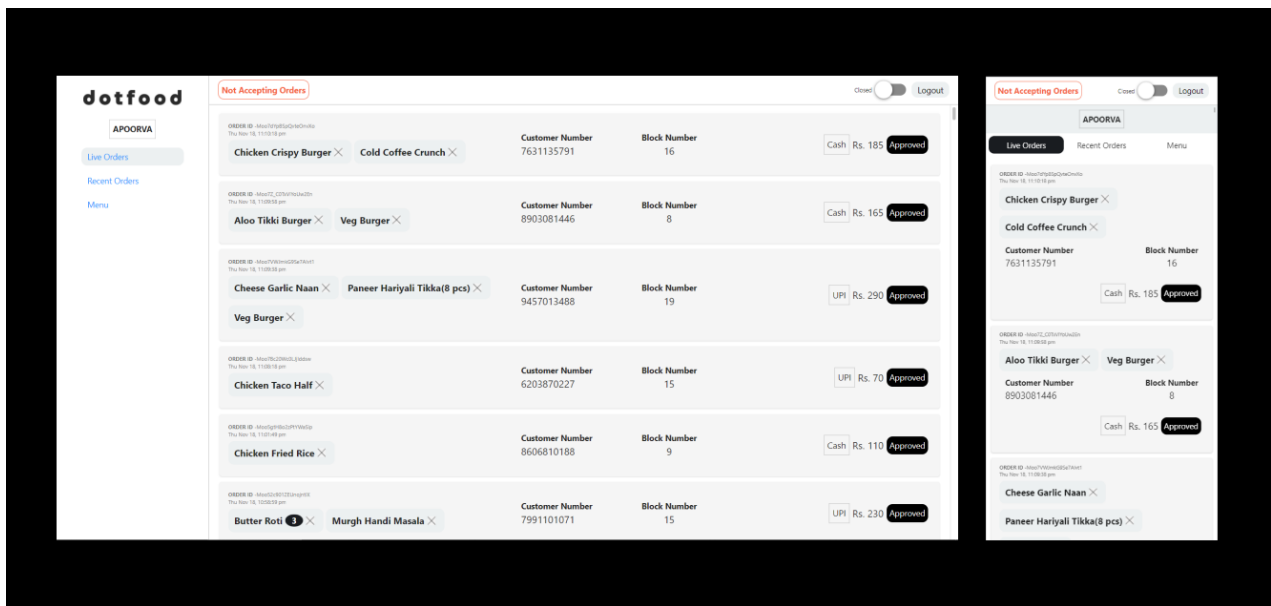
Parthiv: We did manage to fix the bug in a day, and rolled out a new update which incorporated the OTP verification methodology and since then, the app has been functioning well and gaining traction with the students.

Give us a brief on the day-to-day workings.

Parthiv: There are two parts to the whole product. One is the app that the students use. The other is the web app that the restaurant managers or receptionists use to track orders, modify menus, and let people know the restaurants open for delivery. The app has three basic screens, a list of all the restaurants, menus for each specific restaurant, and available offers. When a person places an order, it gets added to the cart like on any delivery app, and then you can place your order along with the mode of payment. All of this data is reflected on the web app for the restaurants.



The user interface on the Android app



The web interface that restaurants see.

How did you come up with the name? Is there a story there?

Soumith: We were sitting about, thinking of a name, and it wasn't us who came up with the name. One of our friends suggested it, and we really liked it. So we decided to go

ahead with the name dotfood.

Parthiv: We were also trying out different combinations for logos, and this one looked pretty good. Earlier ones looked like we were impersonating some other companies.

When can we expect an iOS and a web version?

Soumith: We've already started looking for iOS developers. We have received multiple requests from people asking for the iOS app.

Parthiv: Right now, it's just the two of us in the whole team, and we work on all aspects—marketing, outreach, development, and operations. So eventually, we are looking to expand our team. But at the moment, our priority is to get an iOS developer. And as far as the web version is concerned, we don't feel the need for a web version because apps are handier for such use cases.

If you were to scale the idea, would you offer the same services to other universities if they face the same issues?

Soumith: We definitely have a plan for scaling up and around Manipal. Firstly, we plan to implement the same business model in Kasturba Medical College (KMC). Apart from that, there are several other colleges in and around Manipal, apart from MAHE as well. We hope to put this app in as many universities and colleges as possible.

Considering that the service is limited to a small area, would you consider using reusable crockery and cutlery picking up boxes from the customer in an effort not to generate avoidable packaging waste?

Soumith: That is a point to be considered, but there is a major drawback of using crockery. If they break or get misplaced, it is a loss. They also need to be washed. It may not be a significant loss, but it could be a considerable loss

if many people break stuff. As for picking up leftover boxes or utilising reusable crockery, it is highly unpredictable in the longer run. We, as students, live mostly in hostels. And I don't think a lot of people would have boxes or reusable crockery.

The UI is not only easy to use but also aesthetically pleasing. What are some of the software you used to develop this app? And which of them would you recommend to other aspiring app developers?

Soumith: I built the app using Java—it is a native android app. The web app portal for the restaurants was created by Parthiv using ReactJS. Personally, I would suggest all aspiring app developers to stick to native Android or iOS platforms instead of going for hybrid models.

Parthiv: Additionally, we used Firebase—it is a platform provided by Google that doles out backend as a service. Since we wanted a quick and clean launch, we stayed away from building the back-end of the application from scratch. We leveraged a lot of inbuilt functionalities provided by Firebase, including authentication and notification services. So, Firebase is what forms the sturdy back-end of our application.

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