# Transition towards Sustainability and Innovation: A focus on South Indian Food Technopreneurship Sector

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**Abstract**

The resurgence of food technopreneur ship in India especially in South India was driven by an increasing number of youthful, vibrant businesspeople who had tried and over the past few years, implemented new concepts into action to taste the essence of success in their venture. This tendency gained momentum during the recent years post covid as it had a severe impact on businesses and personal lives. It was made worse by widespread company layoffs brought on by a sluggish and depressed business climate. Young, creative minds were inspired to look for novel ways like involving organic and traditional food products to get involved in startup companies in the local food market to combat the enormous brief that had overtaken society. The distinctive aspects of start-up food technopreneur ship in terms of sustainability and innovation is the use of technology into their business right from meal ordering, food preparation, and delivery has resulted in incredible advancements in the market for aspiring entrepreneurs. Qualitative research using case analysis methodology was carried out taking food technopreneurs- Cookr, Food doo and Shero who are a part of making home cooked food delivery. The results listed a wide range of difficulties and problems they encountered, including a poor digital website, insufficient startup money, a dearth of support for e-commerce and portals, and a shortage of human capital with the necessary digital skills and competence. In contrast to this dismal situation, the restoration initiatives of home cooked food launched by these technopreneurs provide a glimmer of optimism for this emerging sector which is lacking in the fancy restaurants and is a threat to the health.

**Keywords:** *Food, technopreneurs, innovation, sustainability.*

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered the global business landscape, creating unprecedented challenges while simultaneously opening new avenues for entrepreneurial innovation. In South India, this disruption catalyzed a remarkable transformation in the food technology sector, as young entrepreneurs pivoted from traditional career paths to establish innovative food delivery platforms focused on home-cooked meals. This shift represents more than a mere business opportunity; it embodies a cultural and technological renaissance that combines traditional culinary practices with modern digital solutions.

The post-pandemic period witnessed widespread unemployment and economic uncertainty, particularly affecting the younger demographic who had traditionally relied on stable corporate employment. This crisis became a catalyst for entrepreneurial ventures, as displaced professionals and fresh graduates turned to food technology as a means of economic survival and creative expression. The South Indian context is particularly significant due to the region's rich culinary heritage, strong technological infrastructure, and cultural emphasis on home-cooked food as a symbol of health, tradition, and family values.

The emergence of home-cooked food delivery platforms represents a unique intersection of sustainability and innovation within the broader food technopreneurship ecosystem. Unlike conventional restaurant delivery services, these platforms prioritize authenticity, health consciousness, and environmental sustainability while leveraging technology to create efficient distribution networks. This research examines three pioneering companies—Cookr, Fooddoo, and Shero—that exemplify this emerging trend and provide insights into the challenges and opportunities facing South Indian food technopreneurs in the post-COVID era.

## Literature Review

### Post-COVID Entrepreneurship Dynamics

The COVID-19 pandemic created what Sharma and Kumar (2022) term "necessity-driven entrepreneurship," where individuals pursue business ventures not primarily for opportunity recognition but as a response to economic adversity. This phenomenon has been particularly pronounced in developing economies where social safety nets remain limited. Research by Patel et al. (2023) indicates that food-related entrepreneurship experienced a 45% increase in India during 2020-2022, with the highest concentration in South Indian states.

### Technology Integration in Traditional Food Systems

The digitization of food systems represents a significant departure from traditional business models. According to Krishnan and Reddy (2023), the integration of technology in food delivery has evolved beyond mere convenience to encompass supply chain optimization, quality assurance, and customer relationship management. However, this technological adoption often faces resistance from traditional food providers who lack digital literacy and resources for platform development.

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### Home-Cooked Food as a Market Category

Home-cooked food delivery emerges as a distinct market category that bridges the gap between commercial restaurant food and domestic cooking. Research by Menon and Nair (2024) suggests that consumers increasingly value the perceived authenticity, nutritional quality, and cultural connection associated with home-cooked meals. This trend gained significant momentum during the pandemic when restaurant closures and health concerns drove consumers toward perceived safer and healthier food options.

### Sustainability in Food Delivery Systems

Sustainability considerations in food techno premiership extend beyond environmental impact to encompass economic sustainability for food providers and social sustainability through community building. Studies indicate that home-cooked food platforms often demonstrate superior sustainability metrics compared to conventional restaurant delivery due to reduced packaging waste, lower carbon footprints from distributed preparation, and support for local food ecosystems.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology utilizing multiple case study analysis to examine the experiences and challenges of three South Indian food techno premiership ventures: Cookr, Food doo, and Shero. The case study approach was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics facing food technopreneurs in the post-COVID landscape.

The three companies were selected based on their focus on home-cooked food delivery, their establishment during or shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, their operations within South Indian markets, and their reach has tremendously grown, with their VCs interest in investing in their increasing market share compared to the restaurants. All three companies represent the emerging category of technology-enabled home-cooked food platforms rather than traditional restaurant aggregators. Data was collected covering the topics including company origins, technological challenges, funding experiences, operational difficulties, and sustainability initiatives. Secondary data sources included company websites, social media platforms, industry reports, and relevant academic publications. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis methodology, identifying recurring patterns and themes across the three cases. The analysis framework focused on four key dimensions: technological challenges, financial constraints, human resource limitations, and sustainability innovations. Cross-case comparison was employed to identify common challenges and unique approaches adopted by each company.

### Case Study Analysis

Cookr was established in Chennai in late 2020 by three engineering graduates who lost their jobs during the pandemic. The platform connects home cooks with local customers seeking authentic South Indian meals, emphasizing traditional recipes and organic ingredients. The company operates primarily in Chennai and Coimbatore, serving approximately 500 orders per day across both cities. Cookr's sustainability model centers on supporting local home cooks, predominantly women, who can generate income while working from their homes. The platform encourages the use of organic and locally sourced ingredients, reducing transportation costs and environmental impact. Their quality assurance system includes regular health checks for partner cooks and standardized packaging using

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biodegradable materials. The company developed a mobile application that facilitates order placement, payment processing, and delivery tracking. However, technical limitations became apparent in website functionality and user interface design. The founders acknowledged that their engineering backgrounds, while providing basic technical skills, were insufficient for creating sophisticated e-commerce platforms that could compete with established food delivery services. Cookr faced significant challenges in digital platform development, with frequent website crashes and poor user experience ratings. Funding constraints limited their ability to hire experienced software developers or invest in robust server infrastructure. Additionally, many potential partner cooks lacked smartphone familiarity and required extensive training to use the platform effectively.

Fooddoo emerged in Bangalore in 2021, founded by a former software professional and a culinary arts graduate. The platform specializes in regional South Indian cuisines, offering dishes from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh prepared by home cooks who are natives of these regions. The company serves urban professionals seeking authentic regional flavors that are typically unavailable in commercial restaurants. Fooddoo's sustainability approach focuses on cultural preservation and environmental responsibility. By partnering with home cooks who maintain traditional cooking methods and recipes, the platform helps preserve regional culinary heritage while providing economic opportunities. The company implements a zero-waste policy, encouraging cooks to utilize food scraps for composting and providing reusable containers for frequent customers. The platform utilizes a sophisticated recommendation algorithm that matches customers with cooks based on regional preferences and dietary requirements. Integration with popular payment gateways and real-time GPS tracking for deliveries provides a seamless customer experience. However, the company struggled with developing effective inventory management systems for home cooks who operate with limited storage capacity. Fooddoo's primary challenges included scaling operations while maintaining quality standards and building trust between customers and home cooks. The company experienced difficulties in standardizing portion sizes and delivery times across different cooks. Financial constraints limited marketing efforts, resulting in low brand awareness compared to established food delivery platforms.

Shero was launched in Hyderabad in 2022 by two women entrepreneurs who recognized the potential for empowering homemakers through food entrepreneurship. The platform exclusively partners with women home cooks, providing them with training, resources, and market access. The company has grown to include over 200 partner cooks across Hyderabad and Vijayawada. Shero's business model prioritizes social sustainability by focusing on women's economic empowerment. The platform provides comprehensive training programs covering food safety, digital literacy, and business management. Environmental sustainability is addressed through minimal packaging requirements and encouragement of local ingredient sourcing. The company also maintains a community garden project where partner cooks can access fresh vegetables. The platform features a user-friendly mobile application with multilingual support in Telugu, Tamil, and English. Advanced features include meal planning services, nutritional information display, and customer feedback systems. The company invested heavily in developing robust backend systems to handle order processing and payment management efficiently. Shero faced significant challenges in securing adequate startup funding, particularly due to gender bias in investor communities. The company also struggled with developing effective quality control mechanisms across a large network of home cooks. Technical issues included server capacity limitations during peak ordering periods and integration challenges with third-party delivery services.

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**Cross-Case Analysis and Findings**

## Common Challenges Identified

### Digital Infrastructure Limitations

All three companies experienced significant challenges related to digital platform development and maintenance. Poor website functionality, inadequate server capacity, and suboptimal user interfaces emerged as recurring issues that directly impacted customer acquisition and retention. The founders' technical backgrounds, while providing basic capabilities, proved insufficient for developing competitive digital platforms.

**Financial Constraints**

Insufficient startup capital represented a critical barrier for all three ventures. Limited funding affected multiple operational areas including technology development, marketing initiatives, quality control systems, and human resource acquisition. Traditional funding sources showed limited understanding of the home-cooked food delivery model, making capital acquisition particularly challenging.

**Digital Skills Gap**

A significant shortage of human capital with appropriate digital skills and competencies constrained growth across all three companies. This gap was evident both within the founding teams and among partner home cooks who required extensive training to effectively utilize digital platforms. The challenge was compounded by limited availability of affordable training programs focused on food technology entrepreneurship.

**E-commerce Support Infrastructure**

All three companies identified inadequate support for e-commerce development and portal management as a significant operational challenge. Limited access to affordable technical support services, insufficient integration options with payment gateways and delivery services, and poor customer service infrastructure hampered business development efforts.

**Innovation Patterns and Sustainability Initiatives**

**Technology Integration Approaches**

Despite technical limitations, all three companies demonstrated innovative approaches to technology integration. Common features included mobile-first platform design, integration with digital payment systems, real-time order tracking, and customer feedback mechanisms. However, the sophistication of implementation varied significantly based on available resources and technical expertise.

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### Sustainability Models

Each company developed unique sustainability approaches that combined environmental, social, and economic considerations. Common elements included support for local food ecosystems, women's economic empowerment, waste reduction initiatives, and preservation of traditional culinary practices. These sustainability models differentiated the companies from conventional food delivery platforms while addressing community needs.

### Quality Assurance Systems

All three companies implemented quality assurance mechanisms adapted to the home-cooking context. These included health certifications for partner cooks, standardized packaging requirements, customer rating systems, and regular quality audits. However, implementing consistent quality standards across distributed home-based operations remained an ongoing challenge.

### Market Response and Growth Patterns

Customer response to home-cooked food delivery platforms demonstrated strong demand for authentic, healthy, and culturally appropriate food options. All three companies experienced steady growth in order volumes and customer base expansion, despite technical and operational challenges. Customer retention rates remained high, indicating satisfaction with the core product offering despite platform limitations.

The companies' focus on traditional and organic food products resonated strongly with health-conscious urban consumers, particularly in the post-COVID environment, where food safety and nutritional quality gained increased importance. Regional cuisine specialization proved effective in creating market differentiation and building customer loyalty.

## Discussion

The experiences of Cookr, Food doo, and Shero illustrate how the COVID-19 pandemic served as both a catalyst and constraint for food techno premiership development. While economic disruption created necessity-driven entrepreneurship opportunities, it also limited access to resources and support systems essential for startup success. The companies' emergence during this period reflects broader patterns of crisis-induced innovation where entrepreneurs identify market gaps created by changing consumer behaviours and preferences.

The post-pandemic environment created heightened awareness of food safety, health, and authenticity that benefited home-cooked food platforms. However, economic uncertainty also reduced consumer spending power and investor confidence, creating additional challenges for early-stage ventures. This dual impact of the pandemic context shapes both opportunities and constraints facing South Indian food technopreneurs.

The case studies reveal both the potential and limitations of technology integration in traditional food systems. While digital platforms enable market access and operational efficiency for home cooks, technical constraints significantly impact competitiveness and growth potential. The gap between technological aspirations and implementation capabilities represents a critical barrier that requires targeted support and intervention.

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Successful technology integration appears to depend not only on platform sophistication but also on user education and support systems. The companies that invested in comprehensive training programs for partner cooks achieved better operational outcomes and higher quality standards. This finding suggests that technology adoption in traditional food systems requires holistic approaches that address both technical and human capacity development.

The three companies demonstrate how sustainability initiatives can create competitive advantages in crowded food delivery markets. By focusing on environmental responsibility, social impact, and cultural preservation, these platforms differentiate themselves from conventional restaurant delivery services while addressing growing consumer demand for sustainable food options. However, the case studies also reveal tensions between sustainability goals and commercial viability. Sustainable practices often require additional resources and operational complexity that strain limited startup budgets. Balancing sustainability commitments with financial sustainability emerges as a critical challenge requiring innovative business model development and supportive policy environments.

The prominent role of women as both entrepreneurs and service providers across all three companies highlights important gender dynamics in South Indian food technopreneurship. Home-cooked food platforms create economic opportunities for women who may face barriers in traditional employment markets. However, the case studies also reveal gender-specific challenges, including limited access to funding and technical support. The success of Shero's women-focused model suggests potential for gender-inclusive approaches that address specific needs and constraints facing women entrepreneurs. However, scaling such models requires addressing systemic barriers, including access to capital, technical training, and market networks that disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs.

## Implications and Recommendations

Government initiatives should focus on developing affordable technical support services specifically designed for food technology startups. This includes establishing incubation centers with specialized expertise in e-commerce platform development, providing subsidized access to technical consultancy services, and creating mentorship programs connecting experienced technology professionals with food entrepreneurs. Targeted funding programs should be developed to address the unique needs of home-cooked food delivery platforms. These might include micro-finance options for individual home cooks, seed funding programs for technology development, and guarantee schemes that reduce investor risk for early-stage food technology ventures.

Food safety regulations should be adapted to accommodate home-based food preparation while maintaining appropriate quality standards. This includes developing simplified certification processes for home cooks, establishing clear guidelines for platform operators, and creating supportive regulatory environments that encourage rather than constrain innovation.

Food technopreneurs should consider collaborative approaches to platform development that share costs and technical expertise across multiple ventures. Industry associations could facilitate such collaboration while ensuring competitive differentiation in market-facing services. Comprehensive training programs should be developed that address both technical and business skills required for food techno premiership success. These programs should be accessible to diverse participant groups, including women entrepreneurs, displaced professionals, and traditional food providers seeking to modernize their operations.

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Industry-wide quality standards should be developed specifically for home-cooked food delivery platforms. These standards should balance food safety requirements with the flexibility needed to accommodate diverse cooking environments and traditional preparation methods. Future research should examine the long-term sustainability and scalability of home-cooked food delivery models. Longitudinal studies tracking the development of companies like Cookr, Food doo, and Shero would provide valuable insights into success factors and failure modes. Additionally, comparative studies with similar ventures in other regions could identify transferable best practices and context-specific adaptations. Research into consumer behaviour and preferences for home-cooked food delivery would inform product development and marketing strategies. Understanding the factors that drive customer acquisition, retention, and willingness to pay premium prices for home-cooked food would support business model optimization and market development.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study's limitations include its focus on only three companies within the South Indian context, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or business models. The qualitative methodology, while providing rich insights into company experiences, does not enable quantitative analysis of market dynamics or performance metrics.

Future research should expand the sample size to include more companies across different South Indian states and business models. Quantitative studies examining customer satisfaction, market penetration rates, and financial performance would complement the qualitative insights provided by this research. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of these companies over time would provide insights into growth patterns, adaptation strategies, and long-term viability.

## Conclusion

The emergence of home-cooked food delivery platforms in South India represents a significant innovation in food technopreneurship that combines traditional culinary practices with modern technology solutions. The experiences of Cookr, Fooddoo, and Shero demonstrate both the potential and challenges facing entrepreneurs in this emerging sector. While these companies have successfully identified market opportunities and developed innovative business models, they face significant constraints related to digital infrastructure, financial resources, human capital, and technical support. These challenges are not merely operational issues but reflect broader systemic gaps in the support ecosystem for food technology innovation.

The sustainability initiatives implemented by these companies suggest that home-cooked food delivery platforms can contribute to environmental, social, and economic sustainability while creating viable business models. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the fundamental constraints that limit growth and competitiveness. The post-COVID context has created both opportunities and challenges for food technopreneurship development. While changing consumer preferences and economic disruption have created market opportunities, limited resources and support systems constrain the ability of entrepreneurs to capitalize on these opportunities effectively.

The experiences documented in this research provide valuable insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support organizations seeking to develop South India's food technology sector. The

companies' innovative approaches to sustainability and community building offer models that could be adapted and scaled in other contexts. However, their struggles with technical implementation and resource constraints highlight the need for targeted support interventions. As South India's food techno premiership sector continues evolving, the lessons learned from these early pioneers will inform the development of more effective support systems and business models. The sector's focus on combining traditional food culture with modern technology solutions positions it to contribute significantly to sustainable food system development while creating economic opportunities for diverse community members.

The restoration initiatives launched by these technopreneurs provide hope for creating healthier, more sustainable, and more culturally authentic food delivery options that serve as alternatives to conventional restaurant delivery services. Their success will depend on the ability to address current constraints while maintaining the innovative spirit and sustainability focus that differentiates them in the marketplace.

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