

Food in the Platform Economy

Advancing risk assessment regulatory capacities in the context of the platform economy (Typology)

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Introduction

A typology offers a way to categorise actors according to key types or characteristics, which may help organise thinking about how given actors compare. This typology builds on a combination of research by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) (Brice, 2018; FSA, 2019; Prost, 2018) and input from across the FSA.

Systemic Role

The primary division that equalises/differentiates actors in the platform economy (and by extension, the challenges they face) is the general systemic role they perform. As Table 1 details, most actors in the platform economy take a role of either, vendors, informational hubs or platforms, or intermediary platforms.

Table 1: Types of systemic roles

Online vendors	Informational platforms ²	Intermediary platforms
Food businesses that sell or otherwise trade their own food products or services online.	Websites or online platforms where food products from or services by external vendors are advertised/marketed but where sales are not intermediated or purposely facilitated.	Websites or online platforms that intermediate or purposely facilitate the sale or exchange of products from or services by external vendors.

Sub-types

As is the case with any actor, numerous subcategories can be conceived, and the optimal subcategory varies according to the needs of a given project. Tables 2 and 3

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² Due to the informational nature of their activities, this project did not consider informational platforms, so these are excluded from subsequent sections.

offer a way to subcategorise online food vendors and intermediary platforms into sub-types likely to face similar food safety and integrity challenges.

Table 2: Vendor sub-types.

Vendors
Food businesses the sell or otherwise trade their own food products or services online.
Personal
People or households without dedicated food premises selling or otherwise exchanging their own food products or food services online (regardless of whether they do it via their website or an intermediary platform). Examples: Home kitchens, home-based vegetable growers, food surplus enthusiasts.
Goods (groceries) Experiences (events) Cooked meals
Click & Collect On-demand Scheduled
Ordering* Logistics** Direct handling
MSMEs
Micro, small, and medium businesses (MSMEs) selling or otherwise exchanging their own food products or food services online (regardless of whether they do this via their website or an intermediary platform). Examples: Takeaways, restaurants, food trucks, local grocery stores with online shops.
Goods (groceries) Experiences (events) Cooked meals
Click & Collect On-demand Scheduled
Ordering* Logistics** Direct handling
Large
Large businesses (typically but not necessarily operating across regions, jurisdictions, or market segments) selling or otherwise exchanging their own food products or food services online (regardless of whether they do this via their website or an intermediary platform). Examples: Ocado, Gousto, Hello Fresh, Domino's, McDonald's.
Goods (groceries) Experiences (events) Cooked meals
Click & Collect On-demand Scheduled
Ordering* Logistics** Direct handling

* Ordering involves taking part in the realisation of a sale but without involvement with food products or services (a typical example being aggregators that limit their activities to order intermediation).

** Logistical support occurs when a business is not directly involved in delivering food or realising a food event but facilitates such thing via outsourcing tasks.

*** Direct handling of food occurs when a business undertakes food delivery or management/realising of a food event by itself (via contracted staff).

Table 3: Intermediary platforms sub-types.

Intermediary platforms
Websites or online platforms that intermediate or purposely facilitate the sale or exchange of products from or services by external vendors.
Personal
Blogs with shops that include products or services from external vendors (they exist but are not covered by the remainder of this project).
Click & Collect On-Demand Scheduled
Ordering* Logistics** Direct handling***
Mixed food & non-food Food Sectoral*
Booking & Ordering
Platforms aggregating food products or services from external vendors in a manner that includes but is not limited to booking and ordering (with or without involvement in logistics by means of contributing to delivery or event management). Examples: Olio, Farmdrop, Amazon Fresh, Caterwings, EathWith, CityPantry, Feast It, JustEat, Deliveroo, Too Good to Go, Karma, Bookatable.
Click & Collect On-Demand Scheduled
Ordering* Logistics** Direct handling***
Mixed food & non-food Food Sectoral*
Open/social
Town-square-like platforms (a.k.a. marketplaces) that facilitate the trade or exchange of food products or experiences by providing a digital space designed to match vendors' products and services with potential consumers. Examples: FB marketplace, Craigslist, Gumtree.
Click & Collect On-Demand Scheduled
Ordering* Logistics** Direct handling***
Mixed food & non-food Food Sectoral*

* Focused on a specific sector of the food industry. Magazines are the archetypal example, but larger social networks can also be focused. Tidbit Social, for instance, is restaurant-oriented.

Some caveats exist. Firstly, the typology enables a perspective of the whole system. For the same reason, it does not imply priorities. Secondly, some actors operate across categories. This is a challenge for efforts like mapping, which may require assigning actors to single classes. Conceptually, however, the matter is a non-issue because categories can be conceived as involving overlaps. Thirdly, there is a need to subject the typology above to improvement, for numerous reasons, including it being a preliminary version developed to compare actors as per their risk – which may or may not be compatible with other normative, legal, and procedural considerations that are also important.

References

- Brice, J., 2018. Food in the Platform Economy: Understanding and governing emerging digital marketplaces. Food Standards Agency, London.
- FSA, 2019. Online aggregators – Economic and market profile of the key players in the UK takeaway market issue (Internal Report - Unpublished). Food Standards Agency, London.
- Prost, S., 2018. Food in the platform economy: Digital food marketplaces for unconventional food entrepreneurs. Food Standards Agency, London.