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Comparative Study of Consumer Perceptions Between Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail in India

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, quick commerce platforms have been reshaping consumer shopping patterns, giving hard competition to traditional retail stores. This study aims to analyse the differences between quick commerce (Q) and traditional retail (TR) across key consumer decision-making factors, specifically, Product Quality, Convenience, Variety, Prices, Discount, and Return of products. Consumer data is collected using a quantitative survey from more than 250 individuals. This data is further analysed through a paired t-test and presented using columned bar charts. The results concluded that while traditional retail has better satisfaction among consumers for most of the key variables investigated, some variables were rated higher for q-commerce, while one, namely, convenience, was rated equal between both. Traditional retail is perceived to offer significantly higher product quality, better pricing, and easier return processes across all income groups. However, q-commerce was perceived to be providing greater product variety, especially among lower and higher-income consumers. These results can be explained by a multitude of reasons, such as different inventory management techniques, the use of AI, increased digitization in India, and increased connectivity. In conclusion, the study results help in gaining a better understanding of the differences between q-commerce and traditional retailing, which can help companies improve their services to provide greater competition and increase consumer confidence and variety.

Keywords: Consumers, Quick-commerce, Traditional retail, Convenience, Product Quality

1. Introduction

1.1 General Background

The retail industry is going through a drastic transformation as exponential growth in digitization influences consumer behaviour [1]. Especially in India, where quick commerce platforms have

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taken hold of the market with their promises of same-day delivery, catering to the fast-paced, convenience-driven lifestyle of the population today [2]. However, traditional platforms still maintain their popularity, offering tangibility, familiarity, and trust. The coexistence of these two makes the retail landscape dynamic, changing in terms of technology, variety, and services, and therefore, it is important to understand how consumers interact with and perceive each medium.

The rise of q-commerce can be attributed to the growth in digitization. The increased usage of smartphones, data services, and online payment methods such as UPI, accelerated by shifts in consumer behaviour during COVID-19, has inclined and forced consumers to adapt to online shopping [3, 4]. Having the option for both, consumers navigate between q-commerce and traditional retailers, depending on the urgency, convenience, and degree of trust they require [5]. With growing awareness of the concept of equality in societies, more minorities, whether it be gender groups or class groups.

Urbanization and fast-paced lifestyles increase the demand for q-commerce as well. With busier lifestyles, adults with dependents have less and less time to shop for groceries and daily needs. For many, q-commerce platforms offer efficient solutions to time-constrained problems, and also for a lack of transportation, delays, and the inconvenience of traffic congestion in large urban areas, and long working hours. This has made q-commerce a necessity, showing how social pressure due to lifestyle changes has directly influenced consumer choices in terms of retail platforms [6, 7].

However, there are differences between how q-commerce and traditional retail are perceived in terms of overall satisfaction, quickness, and trust. These elements impact consumer decisions, which are based on personal goals and situations, including a consumer's work style and the number of dependents they have. Businesses must analyse these perspectives in order to improve service quality, adjust their strategy, and satisfy a range of customer expectations.

1.2 Literature review

In order to analyse the extent of the research done on this topic already, a literature review was conducted to identify gaps in research. In the same realm, the aim of a study done by Raja Sarkar and Dr. Sabysachi Das is to compare consumer behaviour across online shopping modes and offline shopping modes using different factors such as convenience, variety, and product tangibility, specifically amongst the Indian audience [8]. Using an extensive review of existing literature, the authors explore behavioral differences and preferences across the two modes. Furthermore, they use a 5-stage consumer decision-making model. On the basis of the results, they have concluded that online shopping offers greater convenience in terms of availability and travelling costs, and it also offers a greater variety of products. Additionally, online shopping

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customers have the benefit of browsing the customer reviews, obtaining an overall idea of the product quality. They also have greater discounts due to lower overhead costs, due to savings on electricity and rent of a physical store. However, offline shopping offers a tangibility that online shopping is unable to offer; furthermore, the products are available the same day, as opposed to online shopping. Lastly, returns and exchanges are more hassle-free and convenient. In conclusion, although online shopping is growing fast, most Indian consumers prefer offline shopping.

Another study, conducted by Gauri Ranjekar and Debjit Roy, aims to analyse the rise of quick commerce in India by examining the business models and infrastructure requirements involved in building a sustainable and efficient business [9]. The primary research method is a detailed literature review conflated with an analytical assessment of the same. The material analysed includes academic articles, industry reports, and market data on the rapid changes in the field of quick commerce in India. From these materials, they specifically analyse supply chain models, consumer behavior, and technological advancements. Based on the results, the authors concluded that one of the main reasons for the growth of quick commerce platforms in India is greater access to the internet and COVID-19-induced changes in consumer behavior, preferring quick delivery. Secondly, they found that multiple business models can be followed in q-commerce, including inventory-based, hyper-local, and multi-vendor platforms; moreover, warehousing in dark stores with automation is crucial for efficiency. However, the industry faces sustainability challenges in terms of a growing carbon footprint and delivery partner safety, including ethical considerations surrounding it.

Anushka Goswami and Rashmi Kumari investigate how delivery speed affects consumer decision-making in terms of buying speed, impulsiveness, and satisfaction received [10]. Using structured surveys of a convenient sample of 63 participants, in-depth interviews, and some secondary data involving reviewing academic journals, industry reports, and government publications, the researchers tried to understand existing trends and theoretical frameworks. The data analysis was primarily done using a chi-square statistical test to evaluate relationships between the factors mentioned above. On the basis of the results, the authors concluded that quick-commerce has increased consumer convenience by providing superfast delivery, benefiting people who have last-minute needs. The same also has a positive influence on impulse buying. Despite this, q-commerce does not overall have much impact on consumer decision making, as proved by the chi-square test. Promotions, alongside delivery speed, play a role in how consumers recommend a particular platform. Finally, demographics such as age and gender play a crucial role in whether consumers adapt to this business model or not.

To research how q-commerce influences consumer decisions and satisfaction in Thane city, a study examined factors such as delivery speed and ease of shopping experience [11]. This was

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done using a structured Google Forms questionnaire of 100 participants selected through convenient random sampling. The survey responses were analysed using different data analysis methods, including demographic profiling and statistical testing, specifically the Mann-Whitney U test to compare satisfaction levels between q-commerce and traditional retail platforms. On the basis of the results, the authors concluded that a majority of the participants considered q-commerce to be more convenient and faster than traditional shopping outlets. 58% rated it more convenient, and 69% were more satisfied due to the fast delivery feature. Additionally, satisfaction levels were also rated higher in terms of product variety and user interface. In conclusion, delivery speed, user interface, and product variety are crucial factors influencing consumer decision-making in Thane city.

Specifically for Sariaya, Philippines, a research was conducted to determine the significant differences between online and traditional shopping based on customer satisfaction levels, using factors such as product quality, convenience, variety, and others [12]. Using a qualitative survey, with a sample size of 40, data was collected. Statistical analysis, including t-tests, was used to compare consumer satisfaction across the two shopping models, focusing on sub-variables like those mentioned above. On the basis of the results, it was concluded that there was a significant difference in consumer satisfaction levels regarding product quality, with traditional shopping having higher ratings. Similar results were deduced regarding satisfaction levels with return processes. On the contrary, other factors, such as convenience, variety, prices, and discounts, were found to have no significant differences in satisfaction levels between traditional and online shopping.

Another similar study investigates Malaysian and Indian consumers' preferred shopping methods during COVID-19 [13]. In addition to preferences, the study investigates the reasons behind the preferences and problems faced by consumers in terms of transactions. Lastly, the study also aims to understand shifts in consumer behaviour and what those mean for adapting businesses. Using primary data collection through a survey with a 200 sample size in Malaysia and India, data was collected. On the basis of the results, it was concluded that around 56% of the respondents preferred using a mix of both online and traditional shopping methods. Additionally, 27% of respondents still liked traditional shopping, mainly because it allows physical inspection of products, ensuring product quality. 81% of respondents purchased goods online during the pandemic, with shopping for goods (non-essential items) most bought online. However, risks such as encountering fraudulent sellers (48.2%) and receiving damaged goods (28.6%) were significant concerns. Respondents recommended that businesses should improve customer service, ensure appropriate stock, provide clear product information, offer promotions or discount vouchers, and invest in digitalization and logistics.

Within the context of a district in Odisha, a different study in the same domain was conducted to

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understand consumer behaviour by comparing online and offline shopping methods, by identifying factors influencing consumer decision making, and analyzing demographics [14]. Structured questionnaires and interviews with a sample size of 150 respondents were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages and charts to understand shopping preferences, frequency, and factors affecting shopping choice, were analyzed. Additionally, secondary data, mainly an extensive literature review, was conducted. On the basis of the results, it was concluded that females shop online more than males. A similar trend was noticed, where the younger population (below 35) had more of an online shopping presence than those aged above 35. The preferred site was Flipkart, followed by Amazon and Snapdeal, where clothes were the most shopped for, followed by clothes and toys. The convenience of shopping from home, time-saving, and lower prices compared to offline stores are significant reasons for consumers to prefer online shopping. Conversely, consumers preferred offline shopping for products associated with tangibility and trials, such as clothes and electronics.

Finally, a study by Thijs Broekhuizen aims to understand consumers' purchase intentions across different shopping channels, specifically online and offline, by measuring and comparing their perceived value of shopping in these channels [15]. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze consumer data, two case studies were conducted based on consumer data from cooperating companies. On the basis of the result, it was concluded that consumers use different factors to evaluate each of the shopping channels. Furthermore, differences in criteria also arose between consumers who have more experience with different channels and those who don't, concluding that experience with channels is likely to influence purchase intention. Purchases were dependent on the functional benefits of products, and on the intrinsic and perceived value.

1.3 Research Gaps and Rationale for the Study

Based on the above literature review, the following gaps have been identified. Most studies make comparisons between online shopping and traditional retailers; however fail to account for the rise of q-commerce, which is another method for shopping, and hence it alters the market significantly. Moreover, a significant amount of research is dependent on literature reviews. Few studies conduct primary research, which validates research findings. For example, the study by Ranjekar and Roy primarily combines insights from existing academic articles, industry reports, and market data, but does not engage directly with consumers or businesses through surveys, interviews, or large-scale datasets. While this approach provides a strong theoretical context for the research, it lacks depth and validity. Lastly, most studies don't compare income standards while making conclusions about consumer preferences. Income is an important factor as it determines access to the internet and knowledge about quick commerce in the first place; however, this has been overlooked.

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Looking at the limitations and gaps identified, we can conclude that further research is required regarding q-commerce and traditional retail platforms to implement effective strategies, both as consumers and firms. The rationale behind conducting this discussion on quick commerce (q-commerce) is because of its growing relevance within India's dynamic retail industry. As digitization and changing lifestyles are transforming consumer behaviour, q-commerce has emerged as an important model of retail, especially due to its unique selling point of convenience and speed. However, existing research mainly compares online and traditional retail, overlooking q-commerce as an important category. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how consumers perceive q-commerce in comparison to traditional retail. Understanding this relationship is important, as both platforms compete for the same consumers. Each offers unique features in terms of trust and tangibility. This discussion aims to provide deeper insights into changing consumer preferences within India's growing economy.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Aim & Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyse the differences between quick commerce (Q) and traditional retail (TR) across consumer decision-making variables, specifically, Product Quality, Convenience, Variety, Prices, Discount, and Return of products, in order to understand how each platform influences consumer preferences and differences in satisfaction levels across both.

- "To assess differences in **product quality** between Q-commerce and traditional retail."
- "To evaluate consumer perceptions of **convenience** offered by Q-commerce as compared to traditional retail."
- "To examine the extent of **variety** available across both platforms, according to consumers."
- "To compare **pricing** structures and perceived fairness between Q-commerce and traditional retail."
- "To analyse differences in **discounts and promotional offers** between the two models of retail."
- "To investigate the ease of **return and exchange processes** and their effect on customer satisfaction."
- "To explore how **income levels** influence consumer perception and preference towards Q-commerce and traditional retail."

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2.2 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study to evaluate the objectives.

- H_{01} : "There is no significant difference between Quick Commerce & Traditional Retailing on the basis of Product Quality."
- H_{02} : "There is no significant difference between Quick Commerce & Traditional Retailing on the basis of convenience."
- H_{03} : "There is no significant difference between Quick Commerce & Traditional Retailing on the basis of Variety"
- H_{04} : "There is no significant difference between Quick Commerce & Traditional Retailing on the basis of Prices"
- H_{05} : "There is no significant difference between Quick Commerce & Traditional Retailing on the basis of Discounts"
- H_{06} : "There is no significant difference between Quick Commerce & Traditional Retailing on the basis of Return of products"

2.3 Scales and Tools used (Rating of scale)

A quantitative survey was used to collect primary data on consumer preferences between Quick Commerce (Q) platforms and Traditional Retail (TR). The questionnaire was divided into three main sections, each addressing different aspects of the research objectives. The first section, Section A–Demographic Information, includes questions about Age, gender, education qualification, occupation, annual income, and settlement type (rural, semi-urban, urban). This section also includes income level to explore how economic status influences platform choice. The second section, Section B–Shopping Preferences and Behaviour, contained information about the frequency of purchases through Q-commerce and TR platforms, and the product categories typically purchased from each mode (groceries, clothing, electronics, etc.). The last section, Section C– Satisfaction Ratings (Likert Scale), is where respondents rated their satisfaction with Q-commerce and Traditional Retail separately on factors such as Product Quality, Convenience, Variety, Prices & Discounts, and Return & Exchange. Each factor used multiple items to ensure internal consistency and reliability of responses, enabling accurate comparison between Q-commerce and traditional retail experiences. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale to measure respondents' satisfaction across various factors, where 1 represented "Extremely Dissatisfied" and 5 represented "Extremely Satisfied." The scale items were adapted

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from prior studies comparing online and offline shopping satisfaction, particularly from "A Comparative Study of Online and Traditional Shopping as Revealed by the Satisfaction of the Selected Consumers" by Glen Millar (2023). The responses attained from the use of the 5 point Likert scale helped quantify consumers' perceptions across different factors, including product quality, convenience, variety, price, discounts, and ease of return. These scales allowed us to make quantitative comparisons between the two shopping models using statistical analysis.

2.4 Sampling and Sample Characteristics

A convenience sampling method was used to collect the data. The survey form, made using Google Forms, was circulated through social media and WhatsApp. A total of 258 responses were collected. A majority of the respondents (44.6%) were aged between 13-28, followed by respondents aged 29-44 (39.5%). The other 15.9% of the respondents were aged between 45-60, followed by 60 and above and 13 below. Furthermore, 64% of the respondents were female, and the other 36% were male respondents. Subsequently, a majority of respondents (43.8%) hold a bachelor's degree, followed by 19.4% holding a master's degree. 15.9 % of respondents hold a high school diploma or equivalent. 12% of the respondents reported a professional degree, followed by 5.4% having some degree higher than a master's. 47.3% of respondents had an annual income of below or equivalent to INR 5 Lakh, followed by 20.9% having an income above INR 20 Lakh. 13.2%, 11.6%, and 7% had reported incomes of INR 5-10 lakhs, 10-15 lakhs, and 15-20 lakhs, respectively. Finally, around 84.1% of respondents reside in urban dwellings, and 11.2% reside in rural settings. The rest are in semi-urban areas.

2.5 Statistical tools and techniques

To analyse the quantitative data collected through the survey, paired t-tests and graphs were used. The paired t-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between respondents' satisfaction levels with Quick Commerce (Q) and Traditional Retail (TR) across factors such as product quality, convenience, variety, pricing, discounts, and return processes. Since each participant rated both platforms on the same set of variables, the paired t-test was appropriate as it compares two related groups. This test helps us assess whether any differences in mean satisfaction scores are due to actual variation in consumer perception or due to random chance. In addition to statistical testing, graphical representation was used to visually interpret and communicate findings. Data were presented through grouped column charts, which allow for side-by-side comparison of Q-commerce and TR ratings for each factor. This visualization method effectively highlights contrasts in satisfaction levels, making it easier to identify whether any differences arose across income brackets and whether any patterns were noticed for the same.

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2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study followed strict ethical standards to ensure the protection and privacy of all participants. Prior to the participation, respondents were provided with a statement outlining the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and how the data would be used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was attained when participants agreed to complete the survey. Along with this, anonymity was maintained by not collecting any personal information that helps us identify the participants, such as names, email addresses, or contact details. All responses were submitted anonymously through Google Forms. Furthermore, confidentiality was ensured by restricting access to the raw data to the researcher only, and results were reported in processed data tables and charts.

3. Results

Table 1 represents the results for paired t-tests for all the hypotheses assumed in the study. Herein, Q in subscript means Quick Commerce, and TR in subscript means Traditional Retail. Moreover, PQ, C, V, Pr, D, and RP denote Product Quality, Convenience, Variety, Prices, Discount, and Return of products, respectively.

For hypothesis 1, the results led to the conclusion that the null hypothesis should be rejected, since the p-value ($p < 0.001$) of the t-test is lower than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there are significant differences between the mean values of product quality in Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail. By comparing the means, it is observed that the mean product quality score for Traditional Retail (10.96) is higher than that of Quick Commerce (10.24). Therefore, according to both the t-test and the mean difference, consumers perceive product quality to be significantly higher in Traditional Retail compared to Quick Commerce.

For hypothesis 2, the results fail to reject the null hypothesis, since the p-value (0.98) of the t-test is much greater than the significance level of 0.05. This means there are no significant differences between the mean values of convenience in Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail. The mean scores are nearly identical, with Quick Commerce at 10.53 and Traditional Retail also at 10.53. Therefore, based on both the t-test and the mean comparison, it can be concluded that consumers perceive the level of convenience to be the same across Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail, with no significant difference.

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Table 1: Results of Paired t-tests for the hypotheses considered in the study

Hypotheses	Group	n	Mean	SD	t-statistic	p-value
PQ_Q - PQ_{TR}	PQ_Q	258	10.24	2.89	-4.82	<.001***
	PQ_{TR}	258	10.96	3.26		
C_Q - C_{TR}	C_Q	258	10.53	3.01	0.02	0.98
	C_{TR}	258	10.53	3.07		
V_Q - V_{TR}	V_Q	258	13.93	4.12	2.33	0.021**
	V_{TR}	258	13.35	4.14		
Pr_Q - Pr_{TR}	Pr_Q	258	8.99	3.01	-7.42	<.001***
	Pr_{TR}	258	10.29	3.09		
D_Q - D_{TR}	D_Q	258	6.48	2.15	-0.06	0.954
	D_{TR}	258	6.49	2.18		
RP_Q - RP_{TR}	RP_Q	258	9.31	3.41	-3.85	<.001***
	RP_{TR}	258	10.21	3.31		

*Where *** represents a p-value < 0.001 & **represents a p-value < 0.05*

For hypothesis 3, the results imply that the null hypothesis should be rejected, as the p-value (0.021) of the t-test is less than the significance level of 0.05. This shows that there are significant differences between the mean values of variety in Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail. By comparing the means, it can be observed that the mean score for Quick Commerce (13.93) is greater than that of Traditional Retail (13.35). Therefore, according to both the t-test and the mean difference, consumers perceive the product variety to be significantly higher in Quick Commerce compared to Traditional Retail.

For hypothesis 4, the results led to the conclusion that the null hypothesis should be rejected, as the p-value (< 0.001) of the t-test is far below the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that

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there are significant differences between the mean values of prices in Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail. Looking at the mean scores, the price perception for Traditional Retail (10.29) is higher than that of Quick Commerce (8.99). Therefore, both the t-test and the mean comparison suggest that consumers perceive prices in Traditional Retail to be significantly higher than those in Quick Commerce.

For Hypothesis 5, it is concluded that the null hypothesis should not be rejected, as the p-value (0.954) of the t-test is far greater than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean values of discounts in Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail. Examining the mean scores, the mean discount perception for Quick Commerce (6.48) is nearly identical to that of Traditional Retail (6.49). Therefore, both the t-test and the mean comparison suggest that consumers perceive discounts to be similar across Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail platforms.

For Hypothesis 6, the null hypothesis should be rejected, as the p-value (< 0.001) of the t-test is far below the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the mean values of return of products in Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail. Looking at the mean scores, the return of product perception for Traditional Retail (10.21) is higher than that of Quick Commerce (9.31). Therefore, both the t-test and the mean comparison suggest that consumers are more likely to purchase products in Traditional Retail compared to Quick Commerce due to greater ease in return processes.

Figure 1: Ratings for Q-commerce and Traditional Retail in Product Quality

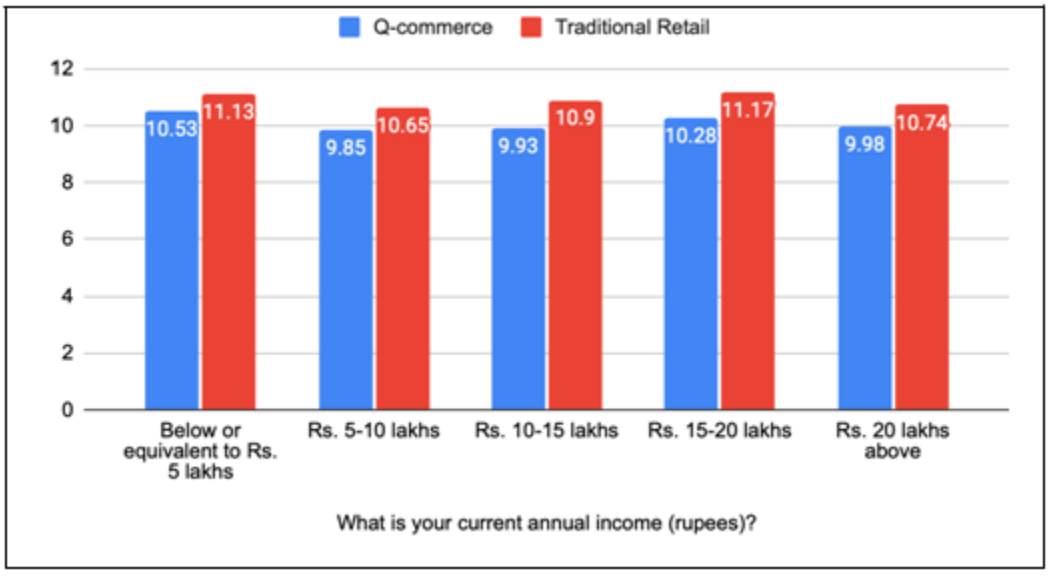

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Figure 1 shows a column chart presenting customer perceptions on product quality across different income brackets for quick commerce and traditional retail. Traditional retail consistently scores higher on product quality across all income groups, with the largest gap observed in the Rs. 15–20 lakh segment (11.17 vs. 10.28). Even though Traditional retail scores higher, Q-commerce scores consistently, ranging from 9.85 to 10.53. Even among higher-income groups, where expectations may be greater, traditional retail maintains its lead, indicating stronger consumer trust in its product quality of traditional retail regardless of income level.

Figure 2: Ratings for Q-commerce and Traditional Retail in convenience

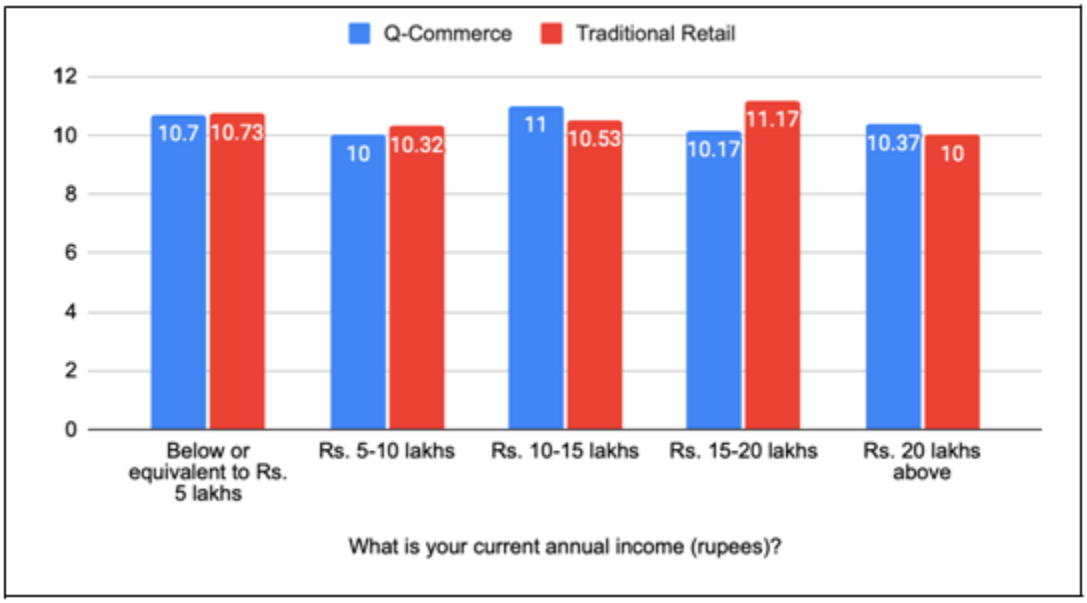

Figure 2 depicts a column chart presenting customer perceptions on convenience across different income brackets for quick commerce and traditional retail. The convenience ratings between Q-commerce and traditional retail remain relatively close across income groups. Q-commerce shows a slight lead in the Rs. 10–15 lakh (11 vs. 10.53) and Rs. 20 lakh above (10.37 vs. 10) categories, suggesting a stronger appeal among upper-middle and higher-income consumers for convenience. Traditional retail, however, performs better in the Rs. 5–10 lakh (10.32 vs. 10) and Rs. 15–20 lakh (11.17 vs. 10.17) groups, reflecting its popularity among mid-income households in terms of convenience. In the lowest income bracket (below Rs. 5 lakh), both Traditional retail and q-commerce are nearly identical (10.7 vs. 10.73). Overall, the data indicate that Q-commerce is gradually gaining traction with higher-income consumers, while traditional retail maintains its popularity in middle-income segments where trust, habit, and accessibility may remain key drivers.

The graph in Figure 3 shows a column chart presenting customer perceptions on variety across

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different income brackets for quick commerce and traditional retail. Variety ratings indicate Q-commerce holds an overall edge, especially in the Rs. 10–15 lakh (14.47 vs. 13.47), below Rs. 5 lakh (14.25 vs. 13.59), and Rs. 20 lakh above (13.56 vs. 12.63) categories. Traditional retail performs better in the Rs. 15–20 lakh group (13.67 vs. 13.06) and matches Q-commerce in the Rs. 5–10 lakh bracket. Overall, Q-commerce is seen as offering more variety, particularly by lower and higher-income consumers, while traditional retail maintains relevance among mid-income groups.

Figure 3: Ratings for Q-commerce and Traditional Retail in Variety

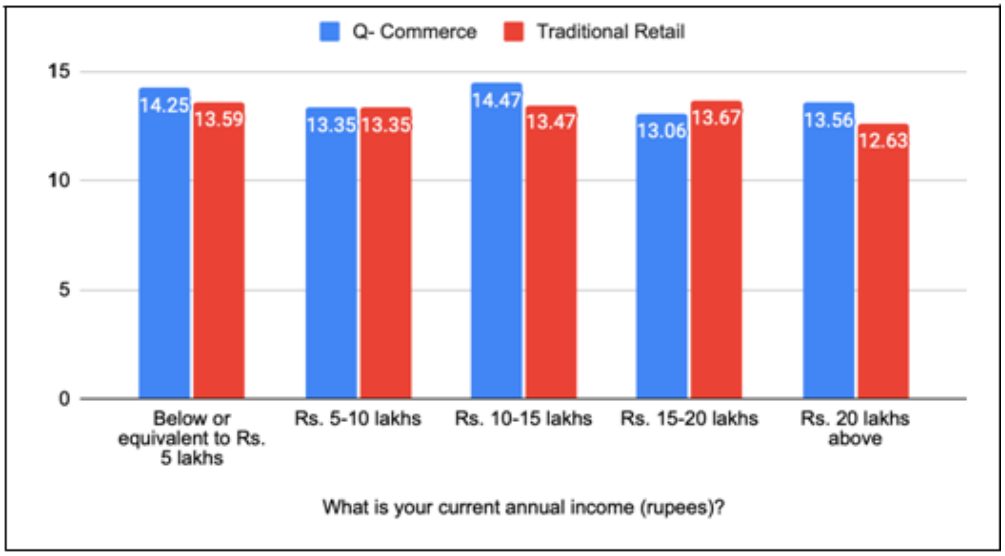

Figure 4:Ratings for Q-commerce and Traditional Retail in Prices

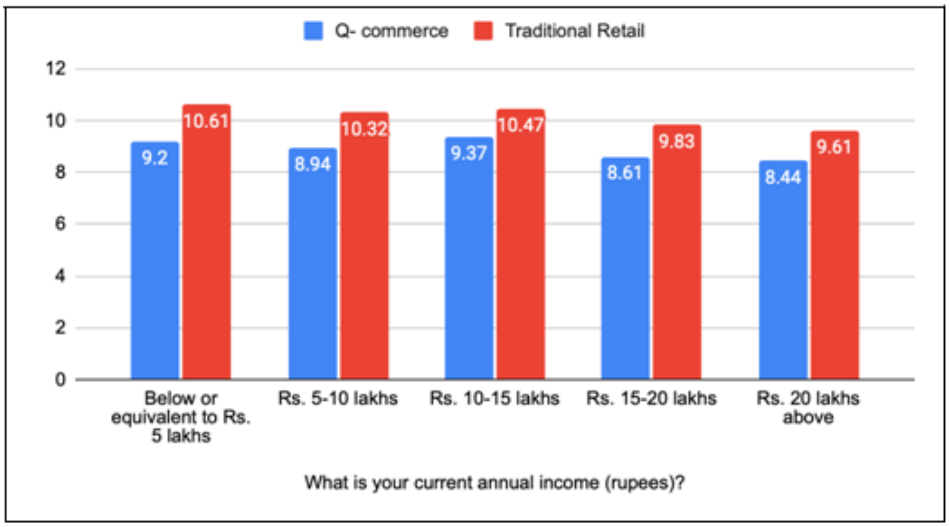

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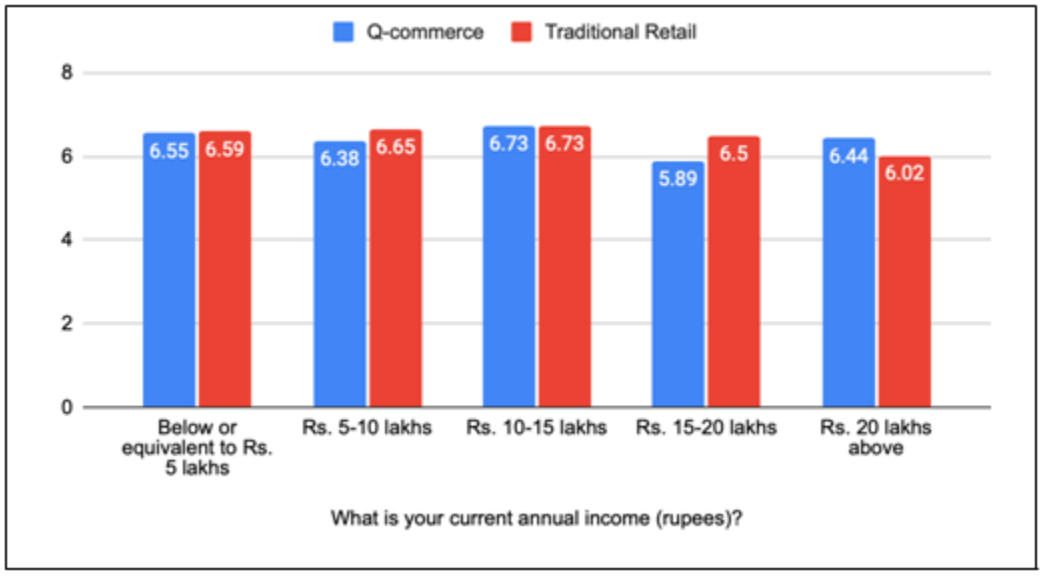
Figure 4 demonstrates a column chart presenting customer perceptions on prices across different income brackets for quick commerce and traditional retail. Price perceptions show a clear advantage for traditional retail across all income groups, suggesting that consumers consistently view it as more affordable than Q-commerce. The gap is most significant among lower-income groups (below Rs. 5 lakh: 10.61 vs. 9.2) and remains consistent across the mid-income brackets, such as Rs. 10–15 lakh (10.47 vs. 9.37) and Rs. 15–20 lakh (9.83 vs. 8.61). Even among higher-income consumers (Rs. 20 lakh above), traditional retail scores better (9.61 vs. 8.44). These results suggest that while Q-commerce appeals through convenience and variety in higher income groups, it struggles with perceptions of value-for-money, particularly for price-sensitive households. Traditional retail continues to hold more value in terms of pricing, reinforcing its competitiveness across all consumer income groups.

Figure 5: Ratings for Q-commerce and Traditional Retail in discounts



The chart in Figure 5 represents a column chart presenting customer perceptions on discounts across different income brackets for quick commerce and traditional retail. Discounts appear relatively balanced between Q-commerce and traditional retail across all income groups, indicating that consumers perceive similar value in terms of promotional offers. For lower-income groups (below Rs. 5 lakh), traditional retail scores slightly higher (6.59 vs. 6.55), suggesting a marginally better perception of discounts. This pattern continues in the Rs. 5–10 lakh and Rs. 15–20 lakh brackets, where traditional retail maintains a lead (6.65 vs. 6.38; 6.5 vs. 5.89). However, Q-commerce matches traditional retail in the Rs. 10–15 lakh consumer income group (6.73 each) and surpasses it in the Rs. 20 lakh above category (6.44 vs. 6.02). These results imply that while traditional retail retains a slight advantage in perceived discount value,

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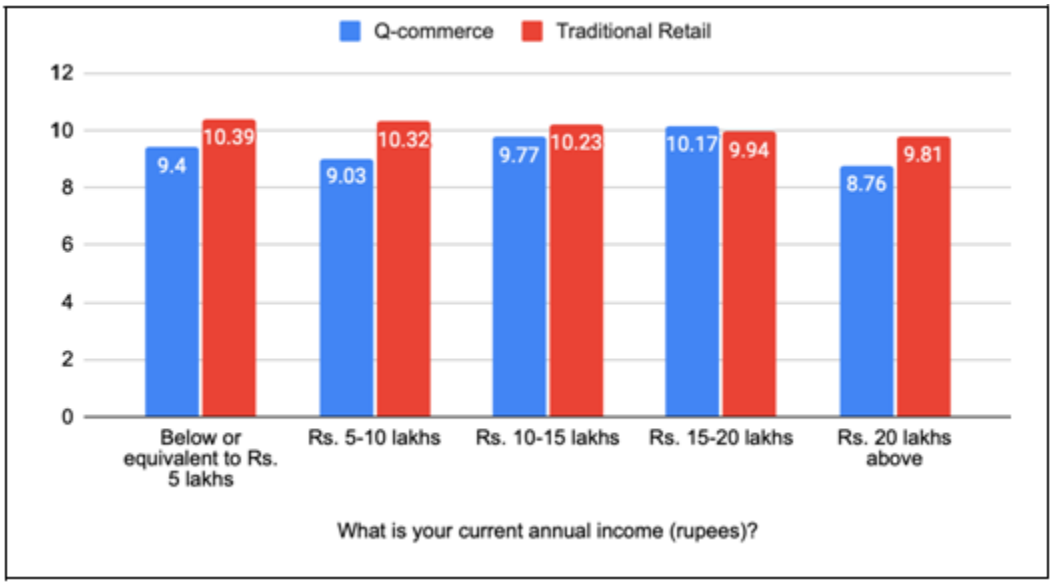
Q-commerce is increasingly competitive, especially among higher-income consumers.

Figure 6: Ratings for Q-commerce and Traditional Retail in Return of Products



Finally, Figure 6 shows a column chart presenting customer perceptions on ease of process of returns across different income brackets for quick commerce and traditional retail. Return of product perceptions shows a consistent advantage for traditional retail across all income groups, indicating that consumers generally find it more reliable or convenient for handling returns. The largest difference appears in the Rs. 5–10 lakh income group (10.32 vs. 9.03), followed by lower-income consumers (10.39 vs. 9.4). Although the gap narrows among mid-income groups such as Rs. 10–15 lakh (10.23 vs. 9.77) and Rs. 15–20 lakh (9.94 vs. 10.17), traditional retail still maintains an overall lead. Even among high-income households (Rs. 20 lakh above), traditional retail is rated higher (9.81 vs. 8.76). These findings suggest that despite Q-commerce's growing accessibility, traditional retail remains more trusted for product return experiences across all income brackets.

4. Discussion

The findings indicated that traditional retailing is often perceived by consumers as offering higher product quality compared to quick commerce platforms due to several psychological, experiential, and operational factors, some of which are highlighted below. Firstly, due to trust and tangibility, it seems that consumers have a better experience with traditional retail in terms of product quality [16]. Consumers tend to trust traditional retail more because they can physically inspect products before purchasing, reducing the perceived risk of receiving damaged goods.

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This hands-on interaction supports higher confidence in quality control. The absence of the same in Q-commerce can reduce consumer confidence in the quality of goods purchased [17]. Secondly, personal relationships also seem to be a reason. Traditional retailers, especially local stores, often develop personal relationships with regular customers. This fosters loyalty and encourages store owners to maintain higher quality standards to protect their reputation in their community [18, 19]. The absence of a physical relationship in q-commerce proves to be the absence of motivation to maintain high-quality standards. Lastly, perceived authenticity and accountability also play a role. Face-to-face interactions give consumers a sense of accountability. If there is an issue with quality, they can immediately address it with the shopkeeper. In contrast, digital platforms can feel impersonal, and digital mechanisms for quality complaints often seem less direct [20].

Moving on to the next factor, it has been seen that there is no clear, significant difference in perceived convenience between Q-commerce and Traditional Retail for Indian consumers because both models provide forms of convenience adapted to local needs and contexts. Indian consumers often perceive convenience based on the following factors: Immediate product availability; Proximity and trust in the retailer; Flexible payment methods, including digital options; Minimal complications in choosing, purchasing, and receiving goods [21]. Based on these, some of the factors that equalize the level of perceived convenience between the two models are discussed. Firstly, the increasing Digital Adaptation in traditional retail can contribute to equalising the two. Kirana stores have adopted UPI, QR codes, and even app-based ordering, closing the payment-based convenience gap. In terms of payment, Kirana stores give equal competition to q-commerce platforms, as all payment methods are common between the two in most cases [22, 23]. Secondly, a rise in Localised Delivery in traditional retail also plays a role. Although q-commerce promises speed, Kirana stores also offer localised delivery, if not matching then, coming close to the delivery speeds of q-commerce. This once again equalises the delivery factor [24].

Next, consumers perceive greater product variety in Q-commerce compared to Traditional Retail in India due to several structural and technological advantages Q-commerce platforms offer. Firstly, Centralized and Real-Time Inventory play an important role in giving q-commerce an advantageous edge in product variety. Q-commerce companies utilize central warehouses (“dark stores”) that combine inventory from multiple suppliers, allowing them to offer a broad selection of products in each location, typically far more than what can physically be housed in a neighborhood kirana store or small traditional shop. Moreover, Digitized, real-time inventory management software enables platforms to rapidly add or remove SKUs (products) based on trends, seasonality, and demand, ensuring the catalog feels dynamic and always well-stocked [25, 26]. Secondly, Algorithms and product discovery also help in increasing consumer perception of

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product variety. Q-commerce apps leverage AI and advanced recommendation algorithms to curate a wider and more personalized range of products for each user. This is something a physical store (with space and stocking limitations) cannot match.

Furthermore, consumers perceive prices in Traditional Retail to be higher than in Quick Commerce for several reasons tied to technology and promotional strategies. The ability of q-commerce to give Heavy Discounting and Promotional Offers makes prices cheaper [27]. Quick Commerce platforms frequently use aggressive discounting, flash deals, and bundled offers to attract price-sensitive consumers, especially during initial adoption phases. Additionally, Q-commerce platforms usually have brand deals with other companies, allowing them to run frequent promotions while being cost-effective [28]. A common kirana store is unable to do this without significant profit loss. Moreover, traditional retail also faces limitations. Traditional stores face higher overhead costs, an inability to use purchasing economies of scale, and less access to products directly from brands. All of these lead to less competitive shelf prices [29].

Subsequently, there is no significant difference in discount perception between Quick Commerce and Traditional Retail in India because both channels have made discounts a normal and expected part of the shopping experience, resulting in similar consumer expectations and experiences. Consumer expectations and benchmarking play an important role in equalising discount perception between q-commerce and traditional retail. Regular exposure to promotions in every shopping environment, physical and digital, means consumers have normalized discounts and often expect comparable offers whether they shop on an app or in a local store [30]. Additionally, festive discounts also raise consumer expectations, making them standard across e-commerce and traditional retail [31]. Brands and suppliers often control recommended retail prices, as well as festive and season-end discounts, ensuring that consumers encounter similar promotional deals both online and offline.

Indian consumers believe that returning items is simpler in traditional retail than in quick commerce due to a number of psychological and practical considerations based on operational difficulties. Firstly, due to immediate resolution and personal interaction, consumers perceive the ease of return to be greater in traditional retail. In traditional retail, returns are typically resolved instantly with a direct conversation between the shopper and the shopkeeper, often without the need for formal paperwork or waiting periods [32]. Trust and long-term relationships with neighborhood stores result in a flexible approach to returns, where small mistakes or dissatisfaction can be addressed on the spot for regular customers. Secondly, because of simplicity and flexibility, consumers may perceive ease of return to be greater in traditional retail. Traditional retailers rarely have strict policies [33]. They often accommodate returns informally, especially for regular buyers, making customers feel less anxious and more confident

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about the return process.

Finally, income brackets of consumers also seem to have an effect on consumer perceptions across the two ways of purchasing goods. While most income brackets rank traditional retailing higher for most variables, some variables are ranked higher for Q-commerce by the upper income brackets (15 lakhs and above INR). Specifically, for convenience, product variety and discounts were ranked higher in Q-commerce by higher income brackets. It could be due to increased demand for speed and convenience in upper-income earners q-commerce may be more favoured. Upper-income consumers often lead busier, fast-paced lives, needing that convenience and speed Q-commerce offers through 10-30 minute deliveries [34, 35]. Moreover, they are often more comfortable with mobile phone apps and therefore are more likely to place orders online. Furthermore, due to access to a greater variety in q-commerce, high-income consumers may lean towards it. Q-commerce platforms combine large inventories from multiple suppliers, enabling them to give access to a variety of products, premium brands, and niche items that are not always available at traditional retail outlets. Wealthy consumers often demand more specialty products, which q-commerce is able to better cater to [36].

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the research helped in revealing that consumer perceptions of quality, convenience, pricing, and returns differ between traditional retail and quick commerce for Indian consumers, to an extent. These findings give us evidence for understanding the broader implications. This study aimed to compare Q-commerce and traditional retail across several consumer decision-making factors, such as quality, convenience, variety, pricing, discounts, returns, and the influence of income, to understand how each platform satisfies consumer preferences and satisfaction. This research was conducted using a structured quantitative survey with a 5-point Likert scale, with 258 respondents through convenience sampling. Additionally, paired t-tests and columned bar charts were used to compare perceptions of Q-commerce and traditional retail across key variables. To make this survey ethical, ethical standards such as anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent were strictly followed. The study results, collated using the paired t-test results and the columned bar charts, show that there are clear contrasts between Q-commerce and traditional retail across several variables. Traditional retail is perceived to offer significantly higher product quality, better pricing, and easier return processes across all income groups. However, q-commerce was perceived to be providing greater product variety, especially among lower and higher-income consumers. Convenience perceptions had no significant overall difference, though Q-commerce has slightly better ratings among upper-income groups. Discounts are perceived similarly across both platforms. Overall, traditional retail maintains stronger trust and value perceptions, while Q-commerce is more favourable for variety and convenience among higher earners.

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These results can be explained by a number of different reasons, including psychological, operational, and technological factors that have shaped consumer perceptions across both platforms. Traditional retail is viewed as better in product quality and returns because consumers can physically inspect items, and hence, there is a sense of tangibility. Additionally, consumers can rely on personal relationships with vendors and resolve issues immediately with shopkeepers. In contrast, Q-commerce is perceived to offer greater variety due to centralized inventories, real-time stock management, and AI-based product recommendations. Convenience is perceived to be equal across both models, as kirana stores now use digital payments and provide local delivery options, which match the services provided by Q-commerce platforms. However, Q-commerce is seen as more affordable due to heavy discounting and brand deals. Moreover, discounts overall are perceived similarly because promotions are common across both models due to them being festival-based or season-based. Finally, income influences preferences as well. Higher earners prefer Q-commerce for speed and variety, while lower and mid-income groups continue to rely on traditional retail for trust, pricing, and accessibility.

In conclusion, the study shows that while Q-commerce is better in terms of variety and speed, traditional retail is better in trust, quality, pricing, and returns, making both models relevant according to different consumer needs.

6. Policy Implications and Limitations

The study's findings can help implement policies aimed at strengthening both traditional retail and Q-commerce in India. Policymakers/firms could promote the usage of digital operations management platforms among kirana stores by providing training, subsidies, or tax incentives to enhance convenience and competitiveness. Furthermore, standards for product quality, transparent pricing, and return policies across Q-commerce platforms could be enforced to build consumer trust. Finally, additional support for hybrid retail models that combine physical and digital services can improve accessibility, especially for lower-income consumers, making them more aware essentially.

Despite valuable findings and implications, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, the use of convenience sampling and online surveys limits how generalised the results can be, as respondents may not represent the broader Indian consumer population. Secondly, the survey relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by bias, including conscious efforts to make responses look better in terms of fear of judgement, etc. . Thirdly, the study focused primarily on urban respondents, underrepresenting rural and semi-urban consumers. Further research could address these limitations by using probabilistic sampling, including different regions.

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