

How has quick commerce changed the business model of Indian grocery retailers?

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ABSTRACT

Indian grocery retail businesses have been transformed over the past few years with substantial growth of quick commerce (QC) delivery platforms as they transformed inventory management, doorstep delivery, and customer expectations. This study investigates major driving factors responsible for the rise of QC in India and explores the disruption of traditional business models. This study is based on secondary data from recent studies published in peer reviewed journals, industry reports, and publications from 2020 to 2026 as part of descriptive research design.

Findings of the study suggest that increasing smartphone usage, demand for convenience, adoption of UPI, cheap internet, improved last-mile deliveries, and technological advances have played a vital role in expanding quick delivery apps. Order processing and delivery has been faster due to shift from local retail shops and supermarkets and warehouses to micro-fulfilment centers and dark stores in densely populated areas to provide delivery within 20 minutes. However, competition has become more intense for local grocery shops, especially in urban areas where consumers prefer convenience and speed.

Lastly, this study has identified challenges for quick commerce platforms like high operating costs, pricing, inventory management, sustainability, and profitability. The study suggests collaboration between QC players and local stores to avoid competition and reduce problem of inventory management and high operating cost of establishing new dark stores. They can create win-win situation with local fulfilment and fastest delivery without bearing loss for anyone. To conclude, long-term sustainability will rely on adaptability of business models that can manage affordability, convenience, and trust.

Keywords – quick commerce, grocery retail landscape, business model, inventory management, operating cost, dark stores

1. Introduction

Quick Commerce (QC) refers to doorstep delivery of limited range of grocery and other household items within limited timeframe in the quantities they order by charging a specific delivery fee. The timeframe of delivery is usually 10 minutes to 1 hour. Consumers who want fastest delivery without going out use QC model. Delivery charge is one of the sources of revenue in this platform. QC adds an attractive value proposition when there is limited time for consumers as they value convenience (Ranjekar and Roy, 2023).

Comfort in online grocery shopping was the major driver for the success of QC delivery platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the guidelines to comply with norms of social distancing with online payments and contactless deliveries. QC is majorly supported by dark stores, cloud stores, or micro-fulfilment centers. These are delivery-specific stores that consumers cannot access. However, Reliance Smart Point is an exception as it enables consumers to pick products from their shelves and pay on their own on checkout counters. These stores are also used for online grocery delivery (Yadav and Jadhav, 2025).

One thing that majorly differentiates e-commerce and quick commerce is quick delivery time. E-commerce also promotes online shopping but it delivers products from different parts of the world and delivery time usually varies 4-6 days. On the other side, QC resorts to local delivery with micro centers in close proximity. QC is defined by small range of items delivered instantly to households. When e-commerce relies on mini trucks and vans, QC can deliver products by anyone with 2-wheelers (Ghag et al, 2026).

Ecommerce platforms usually stock inventory in warehouses. They offer different products. Usually, delivery is clubbed as per locations with large vehicles. Consumers use discounts and promo codes by buying additional products. The delivery period is ranging from 10 minutes to 1 hour in QC, even though promise for 10-minute delivery appears to be impracticable. Some players have a delivery-charge threshold. For example, there is no delivery charge for orders above Rs. 100. However, this offer varies platform to platform (Raj and Das, 2025). This study focuses on major success factors responsible for quick commerce in Indian grocery retail market and how it transformed other retail businesses.

2. Literature Review

Ranjekar and Roy (2023) investigated the rise of QC platforms in India, focusing on business models that firms adopt, challenges faced, and infrastructure needed in online grocery retail. This study is based on a comprehensive review of recent literature to investigate the fundamental model of QC businesses and various business models that firms adopt. Business models rely on the availability of online consumers. When it comes to quick commerce, the discussion relies

majorly on shopping patterns of business operations and consumers in urban centers, affecting the potential to apply findings in rural markets. Sustainability of QC models is highly uncertain because of free deliveries and deep discounts, resulting in losses for other businesses.

Kaul (2026) investigates the importance of 10-minute delivery of QC in post-COVID era to reconfigure temporality and spatiality with mediatized spaces in urban areas in India by affecting traditional models of territory and economic space in society. This study discussed the importance of mediatized dark stores with ethnographic data to redefine the fluidity of spaces, temporality, and spatiality in urban areas of India. It focuses on layered simultaneousness to improve the temporal and affective space for urban practices along with current gaps of social inequality of delivery partners (Kaul, 2026).

The penetration of internet, availability of digital payments, and demographic shifts worldwide have been the driving factors for the success of online shopping. Consumer behavior has been shifted towards online shopping because of convenience of contactless delivery due to COVID-19. Businesses have switched to hybrid from traditional office settings after COVID-19. Flexible delivery models, reward points, and discounts have lured a huge number of users. There has been a rise in competition between online, organized and unorganized shopping. Online shoppers are relying on technology to drive and forecast demand accurately, make informed decisions, and manage inventory smoothly on the basis of knowledge of consumer behavior. Online shoppers are constantly switching to product recommendations, build loyalty, and fulfill consumer needs with personalization. Ganapathy et al (2025) mapped digitalization of grocery sector to understand evolution of market over the years.

Ganapathy et al (2023) explored the rise of Indian grocery retail and consumer value delivered by each business model. Grocery business models in India have been inspired widely by developed countries. Still, it is a fact that consumer behavior is not similar across the world. Indian grocery market is different and it should be considered when designing a new model. Grocery is a tough business in price-sensitive consumer market and elusive margins. Consumers ditch the businesses when their experience is poor. Findings highlight the scope for various models to co-exist in India defined by various preferences and choices of consumers. Proper strategies are needed to ensure sustainability of online grocery models to generate revenues beyond commissions.

Kuppili (2025) investigated how consistent use and acceptance of QC platforms across India are shaped by shopping behavior, consumer behavior and expectation for sustainability. This study also studies the difference between how QC is used by people and how they used to shop at local Kirana shops. This study relies on cross-sectional and quantitative survey design for data collection with 113 consumers in large cities in India. Data was analyzed with multiple

regression, correlation, and descriptive statistics. It is found that there is a high adoption of QC. Convenience and speedy delivery are the major factors. Consumer satisfaction is the strongest factor to determine constant use of QC. Sustainability is known to be vital but significant gap is observed by consumers.

2.1 Research Gap

Retail sector in India has been disrupted by emerging QC in India. This study aims to understand wider social and economic approvals. Control measures related to COVID-19 like social distancing and lockdown have disrupted the e-commerce sector. There are several interlinked and complex factors like increasing use of smartphones, rising population of middle-class with growth of disposable income, and need for instant satisfaction have been responsible for exponential growth of QC. This study explores the drivers responsible for this growth to determine the viability of quick commerce in India.

2.2 Objectives of the study

- To investigate major success factors for quick commerce boom in India
- To discuss how quick commerce has disrupted Indian retail landscape

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is based on descriptive research design to investigate the influence of the rise of QC on business models of retailers in India. This study collects secondary data to explore the changes in traditional retailing because of rising popularity of QC platforms. This study relies on changing practices of traditional retailers, especially small grocery businesses and local Kirana shops in terms of evolving expectations of consumers and competition from digital platforms.

3.2 Data Collection

This study based on collection of peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, research publications, and industry reports. This study collects data from relevant sources providing information on Indian QC and retail sector in India. Relevant studies were collected from Google Scholar to examine QC, traditional shopping, changes in buying behavior, and digital transformation. In addition, publications from 2020 to 2026 were considered in this study to capture the rise of QC in India and its relevance to retail sector.

Relevant studies will be selected as per research objectives, credibility, and availability of data related to grocery retail industry in India. This study prioritizes sources with evidence about transformation in retail sector, consumer expectations, and behavior. This study excludes studies based completely on other sectors and provide insufficient evidence about retail market in India.

3.3 Scope of the study

There are two major dimensions focused in this study. First is based on the impact of QC on business models of traditional retailers, such as, changes in product range, pricing strategy, consumer engagement, delivery systems, and adoption of digital ordering. Second, this study investigates the disruption of Indian retail sector due to QC. This study identifies the effect of QC to differ as per location, business size, characteristics of local consumers, and technological access.

3.4 Data Analysis

This study investigates data collected to identify documented evidence related to transformation in retail sector and factors driving the success of quick commerce in India. This study organizes findings from industry reports and studies as per the objectives of this study. It gives special attention to the adoption of home delivery, apps, diversification of products, pricing changes, and practices related to consumer relationship. Conclusion in this study will be based on evidence available and reported trends are not generalized automatically to every retailer in the country.

4. Results

4.1 Major Success Factors for quick commerce boom in India

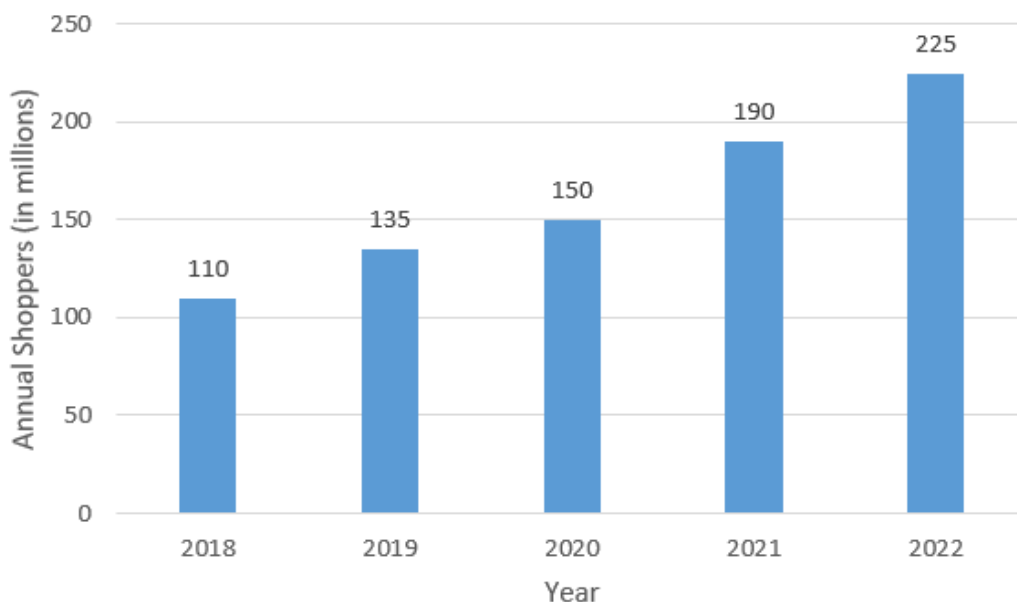
Before diving into major success factors of quick commerce sector, it is important to first explore the emergence of e-commerce industry. In the beginning of 21st century, emergence of internet and technological advances have led to the rise of ecommerce market in India. E-commerce first became popular in urban population of India with rapid growth and popularity of Indian commerce. It has minimized consumers' dependence to physical stores by offering a whole range of products and services on websites and apps. The ecommerce market in India is estimated to gross USD 350 billion by 2030 from US\$ 200 billion in 2026 (Ranjekar and Roy, 2023). There are several reasons behind the growth of ecommerce.

According to World Bank, around 50% of transactions are conducted through mobile apps with the increasing use of internet by Indian population. By 2025, the number of internet users was projected to cross 900 million, according to Kantar and IAMAI research report (Economic Times, 2025). The existing norms related to foreign direct investment (FDI) have been relaxed

for 100% FDI through automatic route in e-commerce in B2B segment. In the same way, 100% FDI is enabled with automatic route under B2C ecommerce (Singh, 2026).

Promoting digital payments with RuPay and UPI is a major success factor for ecommerce. In addition, digital payment gateways were proposed to be incentivized by the FY22 budget (NDTV, 2021). In the same way, Bharatnet is also promoting internet penetration across villages to bring ecommerce within reach for everyone (Kayum, 2018). The “Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)” was also launched by the government to bring internet access to small vendors and create a win-win situation for both ecommerce and local vendors (Mahesh et al, 2022). In addition, online payments are also promoted through social media like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and various OTT platforms. The rise of online grocery shopping is the byproduct of this ecommerce boom (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Annual Growth in Online Shoppers in India (in millions) (2018-2022)



Source – Statista (2021)

From traditional mom-and-pop stores (Kirana shops) to ecommerce, the rise of quick commerce has marked a paradigm shift in retail sector with added convenience, technological excellence, and instant satisfaction. There are different factors influenced the process of decision making of consumers as well as reform in retail environment. This shift has led to a favorable environment for quick commerce to grow. Figure 2 illustrates some of the factors responsible to Quick Commerce boom in India.

Figure 2 – Factors driving QC Boom in India

Source – Yadav and Jadhav (2025)

4.1.1 Constant Demand and Changing Behavior

With constant demand for quick delivery and rapid urbanization, the Quick Commerce industry fills the gap between need for convenience and demand for instant delivery. Consumers have become familiar with digital platforms and they get their desired products whenever they want. It has fueled the rising demand for rapid delivery times, especially for groceries, medicines, and food items. This shift is aligned with instant demand, which has emerged over the years among urban consumers.

4.1.2 Technological and Logistics Advancements

QC couldn't be happening without its key enablers, i.e., technological growth and logistics optimization. Innovations in machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT) enabled QC to ensure demand prediction, optimize routes, and maintain inventory levels in real-time. For instance, ML tools based on Python can also adopt inventory management, demand forecasting, and tech-driven decision-making in retail environment (Sunke and Gudi, 2026). It ensures availability of products to be delivered in the given timeframe. In addition, advanced mobile apps are used by many companies to provide smooth ordering to consumers. These apps offer real-time updates, GPS tracking, and instant communication to improve both satisfaction and convenience for users. In addition, fintech sector is booming in India to provide smooth transactions with "Unified Payments Interface (UPI)".

4.1.3 Last-Mile Delivery

Optimizing last-mile delivery is one of the most important factors to drive QC growth. It refers to final step in the process where product is delivered to the doorstep of consumer. Usually, it is the most expensive and complex part of logistics. Organizations are using bicycles, drones, and

electric scooters to minimize carbon footprint and delivery times. These approaches are especially relevant in densely populated cities, where delivery speeds may be affected by traffic congestion. Quick commerce offers efficient, sustainable delivery solutions to meet consumer demand.

4.1.4 Rise of Digital Payments

Contactless payments are playing a vital role in growing economy. As more and more consumers are adopting digital payments, the whole process of shopping has become more convenient. This convenience is important for the rise of quick commerce. Transactions are streamlined by digital wallets and contactless payments for quick and secure order processing. This convenience is very important where every second matters in quick commerce. Consumers can easily shop without any disturbances to improve overall experience by integrating several payment options to their apps.

4.1.5 Gig Economy

Quick Commerce has grown significantly with cheap labor and rise of gig economy in India. QC depends majorly on easily available and large pool of delivery workers and logistics partners. In comparison of developed countries, quick commerce operations are more sustainable and affordable. This combination improves quick commerce sector rapidly. With flexible labor having large network of riders, the gig economy acts as the foundation of quick commerce.

In grocery shopping, consumer behavior relies on value proposition and mode of shopping. There are basically three reasons why consumers shop for groceries and these also affect their mode of shopping –

- Stock up – This way, consumers shop mainly with local Kirana shops and supermarkets usually for long-term usage or for extra discounts.
- Top up – In this type of purchase, consumers shop daily consumable items like fruits, vegetables, eggs, milk, etc. through online platforms and local Kirana shops.
- Unplanned – These are sudden expenses or emergency shopping of daily use items through both quick commerce and local Kirana stores.

The buying behavior depends widely on the value perceived by consumers while buying products. Consumers used to buy groceries from local shops or supermarkets before COVID-19. However, the rise of online platforms has been a key driver for changing patterns of consumer purchase, especially for the consumers seeking time and convenience as a major value

proposition. Table 1 summarizes consumer types and their selection of stores as per their value perception.

Table 1 – Buying Behavior of Consumers and value propositions

	Offline		Online	
	Local Shops	Supermarket	Ecommerce	QC
Value	Relevant products	Variety under one roof	Last mile delivery	Doorstep delivery
	Familiar	Discounts	Convenience	One-tap purchase
	Network	Convenience	Huge range and discounts	Quick delivery
Target consumers	Old consumers	In-store experience	Convenience	Youth
	Housewives		Consumers using internet	Time savers

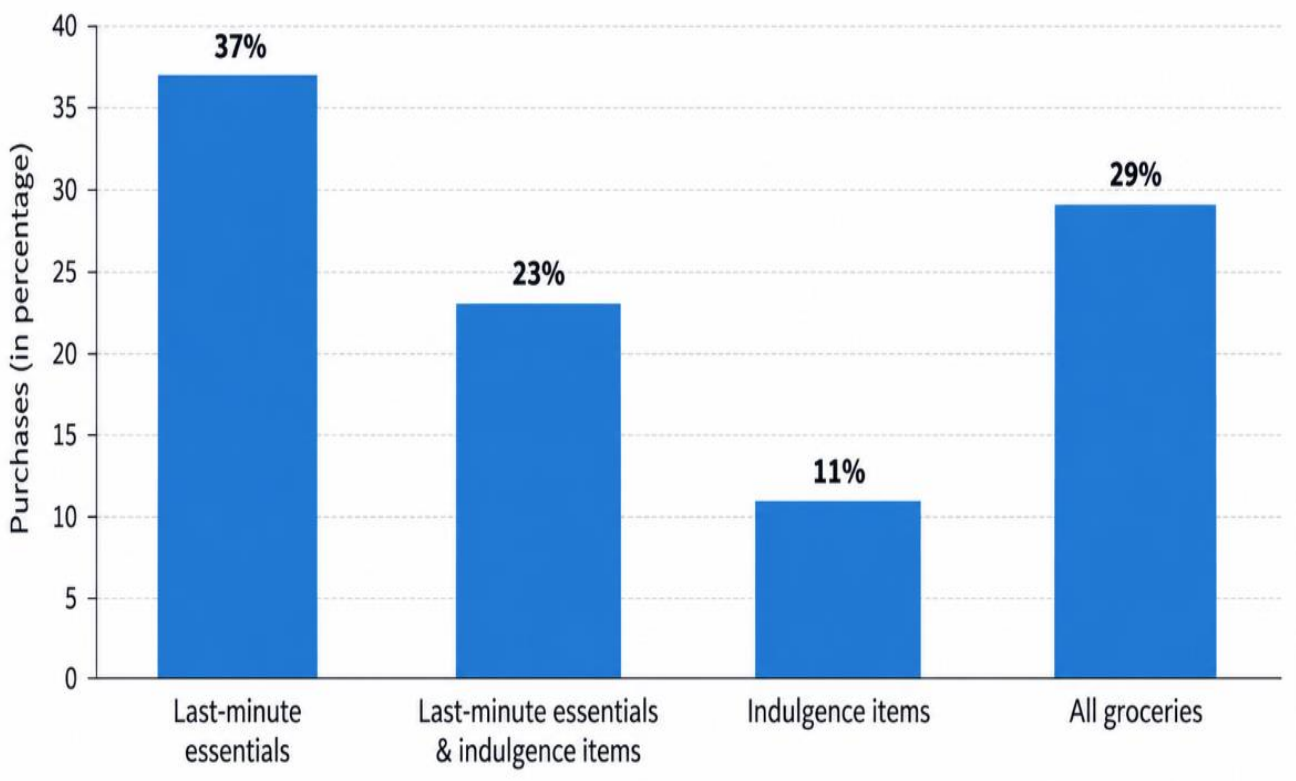
4.2 How Quick Commerce has disrupted Indian retail landscape?

Hectic schedules, changing lifestyle, convenience of online shopping, and attractive discounts have brought a drastic shift in buying behavior of consumers in urban settings. While they prefer ease of shopping from home, concerns related to COVID-19 have shifted to instant deliveries from late deliveries as groceries are daily-use items. Quick Commerce has emerged a new buzzword over the past few years and has disrupted ecommerce industry (Patil et al, 2021). Stojanov (2022) defined QC as a category of ecommerce to deliver products in few minutes to consumers' doorstep, fulfilling consumer demand for groceries, daily items, fruits and vegetables.

From readymade items to groceries, cosmetics, medicines, and electronics, instant deliveries have expanded to offer instant purchases with convenience of online shopping. Busy lifestyles, urbanization, and convenience are the parameters influencing consumer behavior, where companies are focusing on minimized delivery times. In addition, these needs have been intensified by COVID-19 pandemic since people were discouraged from going out due to work-from-home (WFH) culture and social distancing. Firms are motivated to reduce delivery time

and add flexibility to consumers. Figure 3 illustrates the types of grocery items available with QC apps. A survey was conducted on 10070 participants across 272 districts in India and observed that 37% of participants used QC apps for last-minute deliveries, 23% consumers used QC for last minute and indulgence essentials, 11% used quick commerce for indulgence items, and 29% participants used quick commerce for all groceries (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Use of Quick Commerce for Groceries in India (as of Feb 2022)



Source – Statista (2022)

Lockdown induced by COVID-19 has been the major driver for the growth of quick commerce. Quick commerce sector is estimated to grow around 15 times. QC has around 10% of contribution to the online grocery industry, i.e., about to grow up to 50% in few years to come (Dey, 2022). Quick commerce market has also adapted to the ever-growing industry. Quick commerce industry has been formed newly with supply chain of e-commerce and has seen a change from single warehouse to a network of dark stores. Figure 4 gives an overview of evolution of patterns in storage systems and grocery shopping.

Figure 4 – Transformation of Inventory Storage and Buying Behavior



Quick Commerce creates win-win for both retailers and consumers (Roycroft et al, 2022). Here are some of the benefits of quick commerce in India for retailers –

- **Improved brand awareness and value among consumers** – With the rapid growth of online market, consumers expect better service to add competitiveness for e-commerce. Hence, consumers get better value for money with faster delivery than e-commerce platforms.
- **Advanced insights** – As more and more consumers are ordering quick commerce, retailers can gain knowledge of consumer behavior. Improved understanding of behavior makes inventory management easier. Businesses can predict buying patterns related to local influencers, seasonality, and other demographics.
- **Loyalty** – If consumers constantly get discounts, better quality, fastest delivery, and overall better experiences, they are more likely to be loyal to those platforms. Satisfied consumers are more likely to attract new consumers, which ultimately increases customer footfall with new acquisition.

Quick commerce has provided new opportunity to startups, entrepreneurs, and several leading ecommerce players. Instant deliveries are widely used to deliver groceries, vegetables, pharmaceuticals and electronics, which were once used only for food deliveries (Ranjekar and Roy, 2023).

5. Discussion

Rise in disposable incomes, convenience of online shopping, deep internet penetration, rapid urbanization, advanced technology, available cheap internet, and convenience in digital payments are increasing the demand for quick commerce (Villa and Monzón, 2021; Gupta and Rao, 2011). Quick commerce refers to timely delivery of groceries in one hour of ordering and combines both digital and physical products (Zhang and Hanninen, 2022; Huang and Yen, 2021). For instance, ordering items out of stock on a short note and grocery for dinner can easily be done with QC (Reif, 2022).

During the pandemic, there was a rise in demand for quick delivery of grocery items (Eriksson and Stenius, 2020; Lohariwala, 2022; Ariker, 2021; Elnahla & Nelson, 2021). Even after subsidence of pandemic, quick commerce never stopped growing as it became the part of daily life and also due to consistency of WFH culture (Escudero et al, 2020; Günday et al, 2020). Discounts, competitive prices, quick delivery, and offers attract consumers for grocery shopping (Groß, 2022). Women are more likely to purchase products using QC apps than men in a study (Groß, 2022). However, there is hardly any scope for differentiation in quick commerce apps to motivate consumers to repurchase. To fill this gap, Alpakas, a Berlin-based delivery company, started delivering goods without packaging and plastic-free packaging in short time limit.

Emotional bond with consumers and offering local goods can be another source to stand out to play a vital role in sustainable consumption (Reif, 2022). In addition, few QC players in India couldn't bear expenses more than profits (cash burning). High operating cost of dark stores and need to maintain right inventory level and handling consumer expectations are some of the reasons behind cash burn. A startup named Noyes has started a nano warehouse offering a huge range of products and automated the pick-up process in dark stores. Sales revenue cannot be achieved only by delivery charges (Reif, 2022). Hence, they need to monetize assets, collaborate with other brands, invest in affiliate marketing, cross selling, and put efforts in reducing costs to improve profitability and revenue.

Having dark stores in densely populated areas can annoy residents because of nuisance. Dark stores don't get permissions in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris, London, and the Netherlands easily (Reif, 2022). There is a need to address these operational limitations by QC players. Data analytics must be used for recommending products to consumers to ease shopping experience

and delivery teams must share infrastructure and operating systems to rationalize costs. Collaborative efforts are needed between market players (Huang and Yen, 2021).

Varied payment options, product images, personalized recommendations, convenient reordering, and personalization improve ordering frequency of items. For instance, a QC platform in Germany, Pandamart, has “Hurrier” system developed by Delivery Hero, its parent company, to predict demand and supply with algorithms. Big data analytics has been used to develop a rider scheduling tool. Robotics has been used for inventory management in warehouses in a Hong Kong-based HKTV mall (Huang and Yen, 2021). Apart from right models, it is also important to understand value proposition of consumers to serve consumers well for retailers to sustain in the long term (Sanghi et al, 2024).

The transformation from traditional stores to quick commerce is rooted from behavioral change of urban consumers, who prefer hassle-free and time-saving experience in shopping. Physical outlets, which used to thrive on credit-based relations and community, are facing tough competition from quick commerce and reduced revenue and footfall. Quick commerce had grown tremendously during COVID-19 due to lockdowns which appealed to quick deliveries of groceries. This behavioral shift has led to the growth of platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, BigBasket, Swiggy Instamart, expanding their footprints in tier-1 and tier-2 cities.

Once started to fulfill urgent needs during lockdowns soon became the part of daily life of consumers, quick commerce has attracted both working professionals and youth. Traditional Kirana shops lacked product variety, delivery system like QC platforms, and technological access. While some retailers have offered home delivery with aggregators or through WhatsApp, many retailers faced tough competition with QC platforms. They compromised on service or quality in order to match the need for wide range of inventories and discounted prices, which prevented their loyal consumer base.

As reported by FinShots, around 80% consumers started ordering around 25% of their groceries from quick delivery apps. Within a year, over 2 lakh local grocery stores have been shut down, out of them, 25% were shut down in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, 30% in tier-1 cities, and 45% in metro cities (Finshots, 2025). People are highly loyal to their local shops in rural areas and they still go to Kirana shops because they shop products on credit and they are familiar with the store owners. They also have trust issues with online platforms at the same time. Instead of competing with online platforms, local shops can work with them and allow them to use their stocks to deliver to the doorsteps, instead of establishing a dark store. This model is followed already by Flipkart Minutes to make quick deliveries without isolating local stores. Instead, they consider them as mini warehouses for fastest delivery (The Economic Times, 2025). Overall, the rise of quick delivery apps has marked radical change in consumer behavior in India. The rise in

demand for speedy delivery, logistical growth, and convenience have created new shift in retail space. However, there are various challenges in this transformation in terms of ethical practices, sustainability, and profitability in the long run.

6. Conclusion

Grocery is already a low-margin business. Generating a stream of high cash flows requires a sustainable and profitable business model. Quick delivery apps and Kirana shops are direct competitors. So, it is recommended for quick commerce businesses to build strategic alliance with local shops to create a level playing field. There are concerns related to quick commerce alienating ecommerce. But this possibility is ruled out because of delivery time. Businesses can observe frequencies and choose viability as per their data. India is truly a diverse market and it is worth to find out if consumers prefer quick delivery with limited range of products or they opt for better range, attractive discounts, and free delivery by waiting for longer period.

India is such a diverse and complex market that it requires understanding of unique traits of each consumer segment by investing heavily on resources, especially when it comes to derive knowledge from data and use the same for decision-making. The success depends on right pricing for quick commerce retail as it also depends upon location. Quick commerce players need to spend in inventory, technology, and dark stores in densely populated areas for proper order density. Quick commerce industry has come a long way in India within a short time.

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