THE IMPACT OF INDIA'S GROWING QUICK COMMERCE INDUSTRY ON CONSUMERS AND GIG WORKERS

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Abstract

This paper examines India's growing quick commerce (q-commerce) industry and its projected trajectory over the coming decade. Two primary research questions guide the study: (1) How has q-commerce shaped consumer behavior—particularly impulse buying and loyalty program engagement—among urban Indian consumers? and (2) What employment opportunities and vulnerabilities are associated with gig work in the sector? The study covers the competitive landscape, supply chain infrastructure, and consumer-facing incentive strategies, including loyalty programs and promotional discounts.

An original consumer survey, conducted between January and March 2025 via Google Forms and distributed through WhatsApp groups in the Bangalore metropolitan area, received 128 responses spanning diverse age groups and employment statuses. Chi-square tests of association and Wilson 95% confidence intervals are reported to contextualize key findings. Alongside the consumer analysis, a structured literature review examines gig employment dynamics, drawing on academic research, government reports, and industry data. The paper concludes with a discussion of the industry's future sustainability, including the role of artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and policy in shaping long-term viability.

Introduction

Quick commerce—also referred to as q-commerce—is a rapidly growing e-commerce segment focused on delivering goods within 10 to 30 minutes. Unlike traditional retail, q-commerce prioritizes speed and convenience, reshaping consumer expectations through near-instant gratification. Its rise in India began during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdowns necessitated rapid delivery solutions for firms seeking to maintain business continuity. Initially centered on food delivery, the model has since expanded to cover groceries, electronics, personal care items, and apparel.

India, one of the fastest-growing digital markets globally, saw q-commerce adoption surge by 2023, with 40–50% of all online grocery orders placed through these platforms by 2024. Convenience and efficiency have emerged as top consumer priorities—trends pre-dated by PwC's pre-pandemic consumer research and since accelerated by behavioral shifts during the pandemic. Yet despite strong growth projections, concerns about long-term financial sustainability and labor conditions remain pressing. Q-commerce depends heavily on gig workers—task-based laborers who lack standard employment protections—raising serious questions about worker welfare and job security that this paper examines alongside its consumer dimension.

Research Questions

- How has q-commerce shaped consumer behavior—particularly impulse buying and loyalty program engagement—among urban Indian consumers?

- What employment opportunities and vulnerabilities does gig work in the q-commerce sector present for Indian workers?

Paper Roadmap

Section 0 reviews the existing literature on q-commerce and the gig economy. Section 1 covers the state of the Indian q-commerce industry—competition, supply chain operations, and marketing strategies. Section 2 presents the methodology and results of an original consumer survey conducted in Bangalore. Section 3 provides a structured literature review of gig employment dynamics. Section 4 discusses future sustainability. A conclusion, limitations section, and references follow.

Section 0: Literature Review

The q-commerce industry has grown rapidly, driven by consumer demand for convenience and speed, particularly following COVID-19. Ranjekar and Roy (2023) analyzed its emergence from e-commerce, highlighting the centrality of dark stores—small, strategically positioned fulfillment warehouses—in enabling rapid delivery. Quick commerce has reshaped urban logistics globally (Rai et al., 2023), with supply chains relying on electric bikes, mopeds, and real-time routing technologies. Consumer convenience is the defining value proposition of these platforms (Rau et al., 2023), disrupting traditional online grocery retail in the process.

Key drivers of q-commerce growth include shifting consumer preferences, increased smartphone penetration, urbanization, and the pandemic (Nougarahiya et al., 2021; Stojanov, 2022). Sarvanan (2024) highlights major industry challenges—profitability, logistics inefficiencies, and sustainability—while emphasizing AI's role in improving operational efficiency. Despite its appeal, the model raises environmental concerns around emissions, congestion, and packaging waste (Haneefa & Singh, 2025). Supply chain integration through information sharing and logistics cooperation has been shown to enhance resilience (Qi et al., 2022). Most existing studies focus on Western markets such as Paris, London, and New York (Rai et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding fast-growing emerging markets like India—a gap this paper directly addresses.

On the consumer side, existing literature shows that convenience and speed increase impulsiveness, satisfaction, and brand loyalty (Goswami & Kumari, 2024). In Indonesia, discounts, product quality, and user interface design have been found to enhance customer experience (Felix & Rembulan, 2023). Chu et al. (2010) further demonstrate that online shoppers exhibit stronger brand loyalty and lower price sensitivity—behavioral tendencies that q-commerce platforms appear to reinforce.

Gig employment in q-commerce offers significant opportunities in India's labor market (Mehta, 2020), though barriers including high competition, late-night deliveries, and poor pay structures persist (Behl et al., 2022). Sinha and Pandit (2023) document the economic fragility of gig work in Kolkata through long hours and unstable incomes. Looking forward, AI is expected to drive further transformation, enhancing consumer personalization and operational efficiency while simultaneously raising automation-related displacement concerns (Afroz et al., 2023).

This paper distinguishes itself from prior work by simultaneously integrating consumer behavior and worker welfare analysis and by exploring how consumer preferences may influence employment trends within the sector—an angle largely absent from existing literature. The original consumer survey and structured literature review together provide a multi-dimensional assessment of q-commerce's impact in India.

Section 1: State of the Quick Commerce Industry in India

1.1 – Competition and Business Operations

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several firms—particularly in food and beverage—pivoted to e-commerce to maintain consumer access and supply chain resilience (Memon et al., 2021; Reardon et al., 2021). Key drivers including convenience, rapid urbanization, and evolving consumer lifestyles have led firms to optimize delivery speeds and reconfigure traditional e-commerce supply chains (Ranjekar & Roy, 2023). Key players in India's q-commerce market include Zomato's Blinkit, Swiggy Instamart, Flipkart Minutes, Tata's BigBasket Now, and startup Zepto, which currently leads in revenue growth among newer entrants.

According to a JP Morgan report (2024), Swiggy Instamart recorded the fastest median delivery time—8 minutes across its four leading cities—against a 6-minute promise. Zepto followed with a median of 9 minutes (5-minute promise), while Blinkit delivered in 11 minutes (8-minute promise). In early 2024, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) requested delivery data from these firms to verify their 10-minute delivery claims. Allowing a 4-minute buffer, the CCPA required firms exceeding this threshold to revise their marketing claims. As most companies met the 14-minute benchmark—Flipkart Minutes excepted—the industry has largely maintained its efficiency standards. With projected revenues of USD 5.38 billion in 2025 (Statista), q-commerce in India is expected to expand rapidly.

A 2025 Citi report estimated Blinkit holds the largest market share at 41%, followed by Swiggy Instamart at 23%. Zepto's Gross Order Value (GOV) of 24,500 crore closely matched Blinkit's 24,528 crore and significantly surpassed Instamart's 13,528 crore. A separate Motilal Oswal analysis places Blinkit at 46%, Zepto at 29%, and Instamart at 25%. These varied estimates reflect a highly competitive and rapidly evolving landscape where consistent measurement remains difficult. None of the three leading platforms has achieved profitability to date. For sustainable growth, firms must raise their Average Order Value (AOV), accelerate customer acquisition, and reduce supply chain costs. Blinkit operates approximately 1,229 dark stores and offers value-added services including instant printing. Zepto, with 1,447 dark stores, was purpose-built for 10-minute delivery. Both Zepto and Instamart offer loyalty programs—Zepto Pass and Swiggy One respectively—while Blinkit does not offer a comparable subscription incentive.

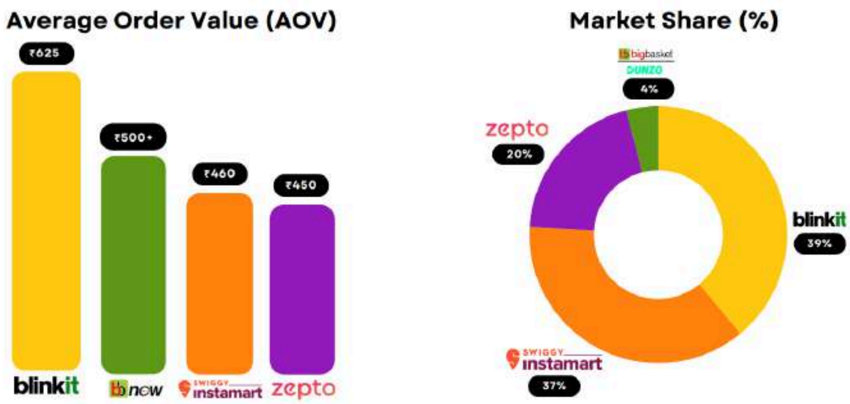

Fig. 1.1—AOV and Market Share of Top Q-Commerce Firms (Chryseum, 2024). Note: estimates vary across Citi (2025) and Motilal Oswal (2025).

Projections and Growth

India's q-commerce sector is projected to grow at 75–100% annually, outpacing traditional retail (Bernstein, 2024). The top 40–50 cities are expected to contribute a significant share of the USD 250 billion grocery market. In FY2024, q-commerce accounted for nearly half of all e-commerce grocery transactions. According to ANAROCK and ETRetail, India's broader e-commerce market was valued at USD 125 billion in FY 2024 and is projected to reach USD 345 billion by FY 2030, reflecting a 15% compound annual growth rate (CAGR). Meanwhile, Chryseum (2024) reported that q-commerce grew 73% year-on-year (YoY) in FY2023–24 versus just 14% for broader e-commerce. With a current market penetration of just 7% against a Total Addressable Market (TAM) of USD 45 billion, substantial upside potential remains.

Quick Commerce Penetration – Indian Retail Market

Year	E-commerce	Total retail
2018	0.14 percent	0.003 percent
2023	4.8 percent	0.3 percent
2028 (*Projected*)	17-30 percent	2-3 percent

Source: Grant Thornton Bharat, Economic Times

Fig. 1.2—Q-Commerce Penetration in Indian Retail and E-commerce Markets (Grant Thornton Bharat, Economic Times, 2024).

1.2 – Supply Chain Operations

Central to q-commerce operations is the use of dark stores—small, strategically located warehouses designed exclusively for online order fulfillment. Blinkit and Zepto currently operate approximately 1,229 and 1,447 dark stores, respectively, while Swiggy Instamart targets 1,000 by Q4 FY 2025. During Q4 FY2024–25 alone, Instamart and Blinkit each added 250–300 new stores. Blinkit expanded from 85 to 153 cities between December 2024 and March 2025, while Instamart grew from 75 to 100 cities—reflecting a push into Tier 2 and 3 markets where meeting 10-minute delivery timelines may pose additional challenges. Zepto took a more measured approach, adding 105 stores while deepening its presence in existing urban markets; its rising store vintage signals stronger unit economics.

Dark stores stock the full inventory visible to customers through q-commerce apps, receiving daily shipments from central warehouses—particularly of high-demand and perishable items. Store placement is determined through historical sales data, surveys, and analytics, as described by Zepto's co-founder and CTO Kaivalya Vohra. Frequently ordered Stock Keeping Units (SKUs) are positioned near checkout zones to minimize retrieval times. A team of "pickers" is guided by the system to specific product locations; according to Kabeer Biswas, CEO of Dunzo, the picking process takes only 2–3 minutes, leaving 7–8 minutes to assign a delivery partner and complete the final leg.

Once an order is placed, AI algorithms assess real-time inventory and route the request to the nearest micro-fulfillment center (MFC). AI-optimized paths guide pickers through the store; barcode scanning ensures accuracy; and picking and packing is typically completed within 3–4 minutes. Machine learning (ML) tools estimate delivery times by factoring in driver availability, warehouse workload, distance, and weather—generating minute-level accuracy, as noted by Swiggy CTO Dale Vaz. Drivers, often pre-stationed nearby, receive the package through contactless handover in under a minute, then navigate via live traffic data. Since each dark store serves a small delivery radius, the final leg typically takes around 5 minutes.

Demand forecasting relies on ML models trained on historical sales, seasonal patterns, location-specific data, shelf life, and turnover rates, with safety buffers added for demand fluctuations. Products undergo multiple quality checks upon arrival, and an Inventory Management System (IMS) keeps real-time stock data aligned with digital listings. Several infrastructural components are critical to scaling these operations (Ranjekar & Roy, 2023): an effective order management system (OMS), optimized warehouse layouts, modern racking systems, and durable yet sustainable packaging. In February 2025, Swiggy announced an investment of up to 1,000 crore (USD 115.47 million) in its supply chain subsidiary—reflecting a growing industry-wide emphasis on logistical efficiency. Balancing technological advancement with ethical labor practices and environmental sustainability will be among the sector's defining challenges moving forward.

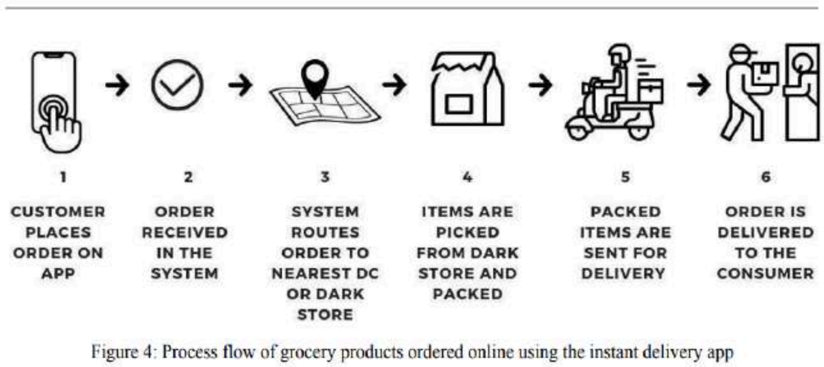

Fig 1.3 – Process Map of Order Delivery (Ranjekar & Roy, 2023).

1.3 – Marketing Strategies and Consumer Psychology

Q-commerce firms deploy aggressive marketing strategies—promotions, loyalty programs, coupons, and discounts—to stimulate demand and retain customers. Swiggy's overall promotional budget stood at 1,850 crore in 2024, while Zepto allocated 303 crore to advertising in FY24 (up from 215.82 crore in FY23), and Blinkit spent 191 crore. Collectively, q-commerce platforms generated an estimated 3,000–3,500 crore in Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR) from advertising—with Blinkit at approximately a 45% share, Zepto at 35%, and Instamart at 20% (Elara Securities). Blinkit's ad revenue surged 220% YoY in Q3 FY24, highlighting the growing importance of targeted on-platform advertising, which carries margins of 90–95%.

These platforms exploit the substitution effect: by lowering the effective cost of ordering through discounts and free-delivery incentives, they prompt consumers to substitute away from physical store visits. When platforms offer reduced prices, free delivery above a minimum cart value, or loyalty benefits, the perceived cost of app-based shopping falls relative to traditional retail, reinforcing habitual online purchasing. Impulse buying is significantly amplified by q-commerce compared to traditional e-commerce, as demonstrated in Singh's (2020) structural equation modeling study. A correlation coefficient of 0.71 was found between delivery speed and impulse buying scores, driven by convenience, emotional states such as stress and excitement, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Post-purchase regret is approximately twice as high in q-commerce (40%) versus traditional e-commerce (20%), raising sustainability concerns. Impulse buying now accounts for roughly 30% of AOV on these platforms, up from 5–7% five years ago.

Fig. 1.4—An Example of Swiggy Instamart's Incentive Strategy.

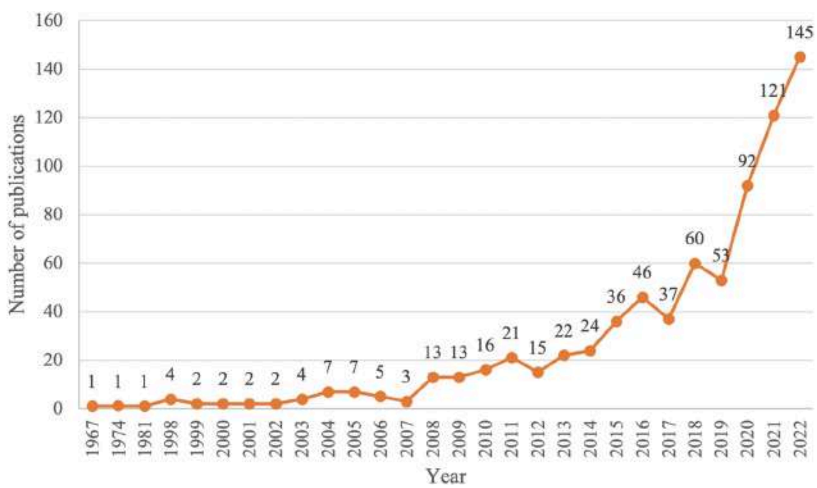

Fig. 1.5—Number of Published Papers on Impulse Buying, 1967–2022 (Gong et al., 2024).

Loyalty programs are a key retention tool. Free delivery thresholds (199 for Instamart and Zepto; 100 for Blinkit) leverage the "point pressure effect," prompting consumers to inflate orders to qualify for rewards—thereby increasing impulse buying and overconsumption. Tiered programs include Swiggy One (116/month for 3 months), which provides free delivery within 7 km plus coupons; Swiggy One Lite (99 for 3 months), covering free delivery on 10 Instamart orders; and Swiggy BLCK (invite-only, 299 for 3 months), offering free deliveries up to 10 km. Zepto Pass (299/month) provides unlimited free deliveries and discounts. These programs generate urgency and tap into loss aversion, boosting short-term sales but risking long-term margin pressures if overused. Firms must therefore balance aggressive customer retention with sustainable profitability.

Fig. 1.6—Zepto's 'Zepto Pass' Loyalty Program.

Fig. 1.7—Psychology of Loyalty Programs (2Stallions, 2024).

Psychologically, loyalty programs boost reciprocity, dopamine release, and perceived social value—core mechanisms in customer retention (Shah, 2024). While effective at driving short-term engagement, heavy reliance on discounts may erode profit margins and threaten firm viability. For consumers, repeated exposure to FOMO-driven marketing risks encouraging overconsumption and financial strain. Ultimately, the industry's capacity to sustain demand through behavioral economics while transitioning to profitable unit economics will define its long-term trajectory.

Section 2: Survey Methodology and Results

2.1 – Survey Design and Sample

Survey Instrument

An original consumer survey examined preferences, behaviors, and attitudes toward q-commerce in India. It covered: reasons behind platform preferences; purchase frequency online and offline; satisfaction levels and willingness to wait; concerns about platform use; scenarios in which q-commerce is preferred; usage change compared to the prior year; loyalty program participation and its influence on spending; and impulse buying awareness. The main variables of interest were consumer preferences, purchase frequency, satisfaction and concerns, loyalty program engagement, impulse buying awareness, and use-case scenarios. Data were collected through mandatory multiple-choice questions administered via Google Forms.

Data Collection and Sample

The survey was conducted between January and March 2025 and distributed exclusively via WhatsApp groups—comprising the author's personal and professional network and broader community groups within the Bangalore metropolitan area. Bangalore was selected as one of India's primary q-commerce markets with high digital adoption. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no incentive was offered. The survey received 128 complete responses spanning multiple age groups, employment statuses, and marital statuses, with women comprising approximately 75% of respondents.

Demographic Variable	Category	n	% of Total
Age	18–24 years	51	39.8%
	25–34 years	17	13.3%
	35–44 years	27	21.1%
	45–54 years	29	22.7%
	55+ years	4	3.1%
Gender	Female	~96	~75%
	Male	~32	~25%
Employment	Salaried Worker	42	32.8%
	Homemaker	31	24.2%
	Student	26	20.3%
	Self-Employed	24	18.8%
	Retired/Unemployed	5	3.9%

Table 2.1—Demographic Profile of Survey Sample (n = 128).

Survey Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample is a convenience sample recruited through the author's WhatsApp networks and is not random or nationally representative. Geographic concentration in Bangalore limits generalizability to Tier 2 and 3 markets, where q-commerce penetration and demographics differ substantially. The gender imbalance (~75% female) may introduce bias in shopping preference data. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference: associations between variables reflect co-occurrence, not causation. Self-reported impulse buying and overconsumption measures are also subject to social desirability bias. These limitations are revisited and expanded upon in Section 4.2.

2.2 – Survey Results

Shopping Preferences by Age and Employment

Overall, 54.7% of respondents preferred online shopping, 27.3% preferred offline, and 18% expressed no preference. Online preference was highest in the 35–44 cohort (63%, 17 of 27) and lowest among those aged 55 and above (31.6%, 6 of 21), suggesting habitual and technological barriers among older consumers. Among 18–24-year-olds, 48.3% preferred online shopping. Key online drivers for younger groups included "Increased Convenience" and "Saved Time" (cited by 81% of 18–44-year-olds), while "Fresher Produce" was the dominant concern among the 55+ group (17 of 21). A chi-square test for the association between age group and online preference yielded $\chi^2(3) = 7.66$, $p = .054$—a borderline statistically significant result that warrants cautious interpretation given the sample size.

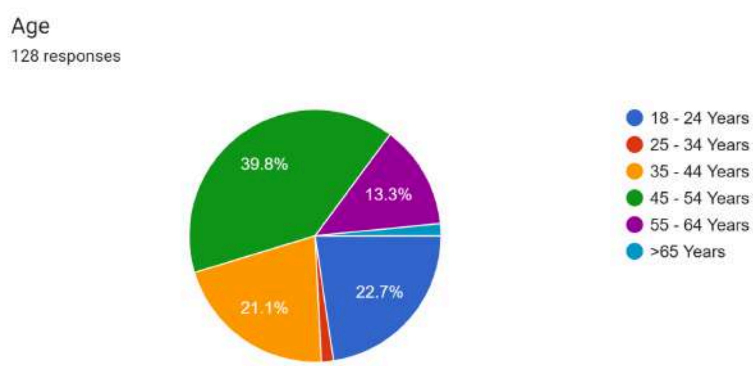

Fig. 2.1—Age Group Distribution of 128 Surveyed Respondents.

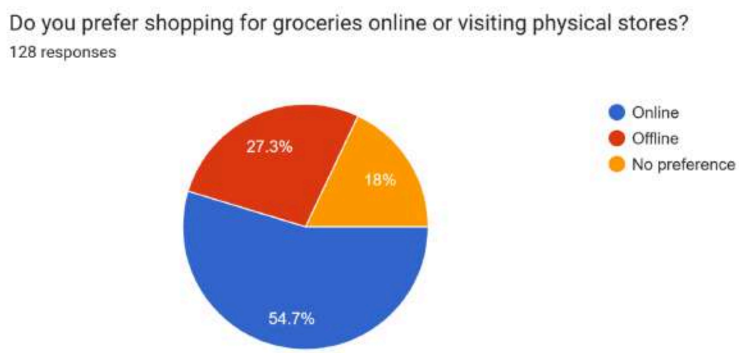

Fig. 2.2—Shopping Preferences of 128 Surveyed Respondents.

Employment Status	Surveyed	Prefer Online	Selected 'Increased Convenience'	Selected 'Fresher Produce'
Salaried Worker	42	26 (62%)	35 (83%)	27 (64%)
Self-Employed	24	12 (50%)	13 (54%)	13 (54%)
Homemaker	31	16 (52%)	19 (61%)	28 (90%)
Retired	4	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
Student	26	14 (54%)	22 (85%)	16 (62%)
Unemployed	1	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 2.2—Relationship between Employment Status and Consumer Attitudes.

Chi-square test: employment vs. convenience selection: $\chi^2(3) = 10.35$, $p = .016$.

Chi-square test: homemakers vs. others on fresher produce: $\chi^2(1) = 7.70$, $p = .006$.

Platform Usage and Growth

53 respondents (41.1%) used q-commerce platforms 3–6 times weekly, and 83 (64.8%) used them 3 or more times per week. Most notably, 80.5% of respondents (103 of 128) reported a significant increase in usage compared to the prior year (95% Wilson CI: 72.8%–86.4%). When asked about future usage intentions, 49.2% rated their likelihood to increase usage between 3 and 5 on a 5-point scale. These figures are consistent with industry-level growth projections, though readers should note that respondents recruited via q-commerce-active WhatsApp groups are likely more active users than the broader Bangalore population.

Satisfaction and Concerns

61.7% of respondents expressed satisfaction with q-commerce services (95% Wilson CI: 53.1%–69.7%), while 24.2% remained neutral—indicating that platforms are largely meeting consumer expectations around delivery speed and convenience. Key concerns included expensive prices and delivery fees (53.1%), poor product quality or availability (50%), and environmental impact (38.3%). Additional issues were lack of variety (25%), poor customer support (24.2%), delivery reliability (21.9%), and app glitches (18.8%). With 64% of respondents willing to wait at most 20 minutes for a delivery, platforms face continued pressure to maintain current delivery windows while improving operational consistency.

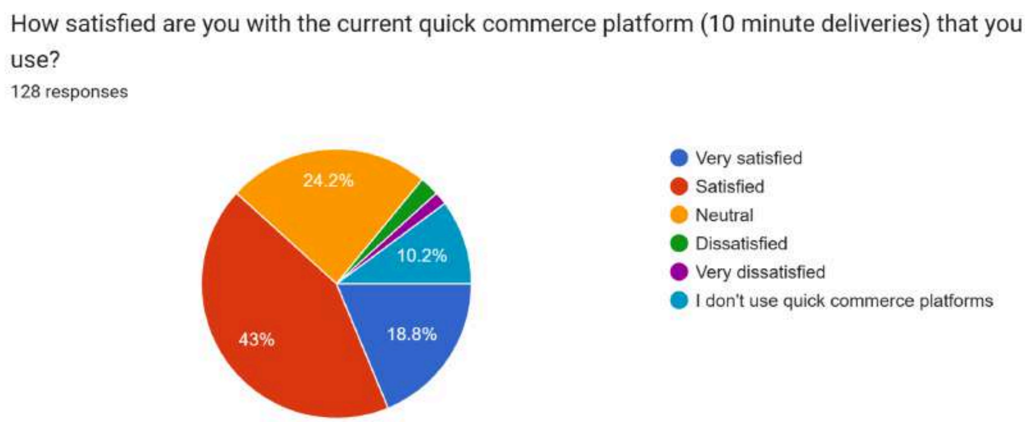

Fig. 2.4—Satisfaction Ratings of 128 Surveyed Individuals

Fig. 2.5—28 Surveyed Customers' Preferences on Waiting Times

Loyalty Programs and Impulse Buying

39.1% of respondents (n = 50) held an active loyalty program (95% Wilson CI: 31.0%–47.7%), and 41.4% (n = 53) reported that loyalty programs or discounts had influenced them to order more than usual (95% Wilson CI: 33.2%–50.1%). Additionally, 37.5%

(n = 48) admitted to buying more than they needed (95% Wilson CI: 29.6%–46.1%), with this proportion exceeding 50% among students—raising financial sustainability concerns for non-earning individuals. The primary driver of overbuying was the effort to reach minimum free-delivery thresholds, cited by 74.2% of those who reported overbuying (95% Wilson CI: 66.0%–81.0%). Other triggers included discounts or coupons (25.8%), impulse buying (17.2%), and stockpiling (14.1%). These patterns highlight the double-edged nature of current platform incentive strategies: effective at short-term demand generation but potentially contributing to consumer debt, food waste, and margin erosion over time.

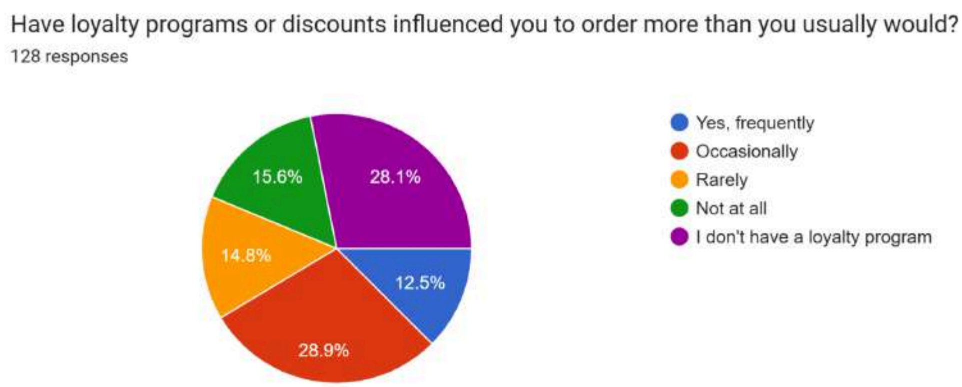

Fig. 2.6—The Influence of Loyalty Programs on 128 Surveyed Individuals

Consumer Expectations

Survey respondents anticipated increased AI and technology adoption (54.7%), expansion into Tier 2 and 3 cities (53.1%), lower prices (50%), wider product variety (45.3%), platform mergers (43%), and faster deliveries (23.4%). Notably, 33.6% expected improved gig worker conditions—highlighting growing consumer awareness of ethical concerns. Open-text suggestions called for improved driver pay and safety, fresher produce, better customer support, reduced packaging waste, and greater product variety.

Section 3: Employment Dynamics, Opportunities, and Implications

Note: This section presents a structured literature review of gig employment in the q-commerce sector. In the absence of primary interview data with delivery partners or dark store workers, all findings are derived from academic research, government reports, and industry analyses. Definitions are standardized throughout: "delivery partners" refers to last-mile courier gig workers, while "dark store workers" refers to in-store picking and packing staff. Where sources conflate food delivery gig work with q-commerce gig work, this is noted explicitly.

3.1 – Opportunities

The gig economy, defined by short-term contracts and freelance work rather than permanent employment, has significantly reshaped India's labor market. India's gig workforce currently comprises 7.7 million individuals and is projected to reach 23 million by 2029–30 (NITI Aayog). Q-commerce alone employs approximately 300,000–400,000 gig workers—roughly 3.9–5.2% of the total gig workforce—with a ratio of approximately 3:1 between delivery partners and dark store workers. This segment grew at 77% annually between FY23 and FY24 (Business Standard), and hiring is expected to rise by approximately 60% in 2025, potentially reaching 500,000 workers. A typical dark store employs 30–35 in-house staff and 120–140 delivery workers, underscoring the sector's demand for flexible labor at scale.

Dark store workers typically earn 12,000–18,000 per month (144,000–216,000 annually), with additional performance bonuses (2,000–5,000), attendance bonuses (500–1,500), and retention bonuses (1,000–3,000). Delivery partners in metro areas earn 18,000–23,000 monthly (Business Standard, 2025). Platforms like Blinkit offer weekly payouts, flexible shift structures (4, 6, or 10-hour shifts), and free accidental and medical insurance—appealing to those seeking autonomy and flexibility. This flexibility is particularly valuable during economic instability, and the Forum for Progressive Gig Workers notes it also increases earning potential for women

City Type	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary
Metro	INR 18,000–23,000	INR 216,000–276,000
Non-Metro	INR 15,000–20,000	INR 180,000–240,000

Table 3.1—Estimated Salary, Delivery Partners, Quick Commerce (Business Standard)

With a national illiteracy rate of 27% and an unemployment rate of 3.2% in 2023–24, gig work's low entry barriers provide vital employment access. The NCAER found that only 54% of gig workers had completed Class 12, underscoring the sector's accessibility to individuals without formal education. A record 100% increase in gig employment has been recorded in smaller cities as q-commerce firms expand nationally.

Wage trends are encouraging. According to TeamLease Digital (2025), dark store workers saw a 9.15% earnings increase in FY2024–25 and delivery partners an 11.57% rise, compared to just 5.97% growth in IT fresher salaries. With delivery partners now averaging 312,000 annually versus 414,000 for IT freshers, the wage gap is narrowing—establishing gig work as an increasingly competitive employment option for many Indians.

QComm Workers Earnings Vs IT Fresher Salaries

Y-0-Y	Quick Commerce (Dark Store) (LPA)	YOY Growth%	Delivery Partner Base Pay(LPA)	YOY Growth%	IT Products & Services CTC(LPA)	YOY Growth%
2022-23	1,80,000		223140		364992	
2023-24	2,20,824	20.37% growth	277860	21.8% growth	390000	6.62% growth
2024-25	2,42,000	9.15% growth	312000	11.57% growth	414000	5.97% growth
Source	Teamlease Digital					

Fig. 3.12—Quick Commerce Workers vs IT Freshers Employment Comparisons (Teamlease Digital)

As the sector grows, several factors are expected to sustain and expand gig employment:

- Digital penetration: expanding internet access, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, is increasing demand in Tier 2 and 3 cities.
- Consumer preference for convenience: growing expectations for faster deliveries are generating more gig roles, as confirmed by survey findings in Section 2.
- Market expansion: with more firms entering the sector and investing in infrastructure, new employment opportunities continue to emerge.
- Rising cost of living: paired with improved welfare efforts, these pressures are directing more individuals—particularly those with limited formal education—into gig work.
- Flexible work preferences: particularly among women and caregivers, flexibility and work-life balance are becoming key motivators.
- Role diversification: as AI and technology adoption rise, higher-skilled roles in logistics and support will grow, encouraging upskilling and increasing earning potential.

Fig. 3.13—Gig Economy's Pros and Cons (Drishti IAS)

3.2 – Vulnerabilities

Note: Some evidence below draws from food delivery platforms broadly (e.g., Swiggy, Zomato) rather than q-commerce specifically due to limited sector-specific data. These findings may not apply uniformly to q-commerce gig workers and are flagged accordingly.

While gig employment offers significant opportunities, serious structural vulnerabilities persist. A 2023 study by the National Institute for Workers' Rights found that 54% of gig workers lack access to employer-based health and retirement benefits. According to TeamLease (2025), 97.6% of Indian gig workers earn under 5 lakh per year, with 77.6% earning below 2.5 lakh. Most work long hours: 85% for 8 or more hours daily, and 21% for over 12 hours. Per-delivery payouts from platforms like Swiggy and Zomato have reportedly fallen from 35 to 10–15—though these figures relate primarily to food delivery and should not be extrapolated uncritically to q-commerce. Many workers reportedly earn approximately 10,000 per month, far below initially advertised figures of 30,000–40,000.

Working conditions are frequently poor, particularly given the pressure of 10–15 minute delivery windows. A 2025 Borzo report cited in Fortune India found that only 19.4% of workers felt safe making 15-minute deliveries, compared to 80.6% for 60-minute deliveries. 57.3% reported feeling stressed under 15-minute windows versus 42.7% for 60-minute deliveries—suggesting significant safety and well-being costs associated with the 10-minute delivery promise.

Metric	15-Minute Deliveries	60-Minute Deliveries
% of workers finding deliveries physically challenging	34.1%	26.7%
% of workers feeling stressed	57.3%	42.7%
% of workers feeling sense of urgency	32.3%	19.0%
% of workers feeling safe	19.4%	80.6%

Table 3.2—Data from Surveyed Gig Workers (Borzo Report, 2025). Note: The source covers food delivery workers broadly; q-commerce-specific figures are not separately reported.

A NCAER survey of 924 food delivery workers found that 39.7% in smaller cities are overqualified, with 12.5% holding technical or vocational degrees. Among workers aged 18–35 with at least secondary education, these individuals worked 23% more hours but earned 8% less than their peers. After adjusting for inflation, real wages for delivery executives fell by 11% between 2019 and 2022 (NCAER, 2023)—reflecting a mismatch between educational attainment and occupational role that reduces income mobility for a significant cohort of workers.

Under existing Indian labor law, gig workers are classified neither as employees nor as protected workers, resulting in job insecurity, minimal rights, and volatile incomes that fluctuate daily based on order volumes. Firms may terminate gig workers without cause, precluding access to benefits such as health insurance and retirement provisions. While Zomato (Blinkit's parent) offers a health cover of 3 lakh as a loyalty benefit for workers with two to three years of tenure, the ease of termination means a smaller percentage of workers are realistically eligible.

As AI and robotics improve efficiency, firms may progressively substitute human labor. Big Basket's partnership with SkyeAir for drone-based grocery delivery in Bangalore, and similar collaborations by Zepto and Swiggy in Gurgaon, signal a potential medium-term shift toward automation that could displace large numbers of gig workers. These dynamics make gig work in q-commerce increasingly precarious over time, and addressing the tension between operational efficiency and labor welfare will be among the sector's most consequential challenges.

Section 4: Discussion

4.1 – Is Quick Commerce Sustainable?

The preceding sections have examined India's q-commerce industry and its associated gig economy. The sector is projected to grow at a CAGR of 17%, potentially contributing 1.25% to India's GDP by 2030 (Forum for Progressive Gig Workers). Hiring is expected to increase by approximately 60%, adding around 500,000 workers by CY25. Survey findings are broadly consistent with these projections: 80.5% of respondents reported increased platform usage over the prior year (95% Wilson CI: 72.8%–86.4%), and 49.2% rated themselves likely to increase future usage.

On the consumer side, 37.5% of respondents reported buying more than they needed, with this proportion exceeding 50% among students—a financially vulnerable group. The primary trigger was reaching minimum free-delivery thresholds (74.2%), suggesting that platform incentive structures are directly associated with overconsumption. Brand loyalty remains weak; consumers readily switch between platforms for better deals, potentially rendering costly loyalty programs commercially inefficient. The normalization of 10-minute delivery is also associated with heightened consumer expectations and increased pressure on delivery personnel—contributing to the safety and well-being concerns documented in Section 3.

On the firm side, the current business model is financially strained. None of the three leading platforms has achieved profitability. Swiggy's negative price-to-earnings ratio of -45.24 and reported debt of 10.64 billion (September 2024) illustrate the broader challenge. With AOVs of 500–625 and high operational costs, offering free delivery is structurally unsustainable without increasing order thresholds or broadening product categories. Firms must adopt efficient technologies, consider strategic partnerships to reduce costs, and expand into new verticals such as electronics, beauty, and wellness to improve unit economics.

AI and automation are expected to play an increasingly central role. AI is already applied in real-time inventory management, route optimization, and demand forecasting; further automation in picking and last-mile delivery via drones and robots represents a plausible medium-term trajectory. While this may reduce per-unit costs and improve efficiency, it carries significant implications for gig workers—particularly unskilled delivery and picking staff—who could be progressively displaced. Addressing this tension between operational efficiency and labor welfare will be among the most consequential challenges facing the industry.

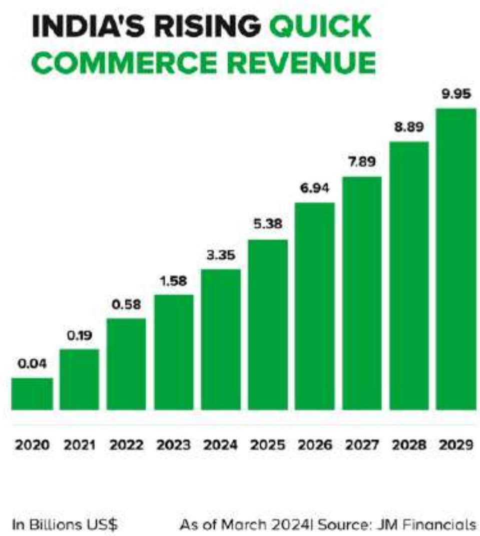

Fig. 4.1—Quick Commerce Projected Revenue in India (Billions USD), March 2024 (Market Brew, Tata Fintech & JM Financials)

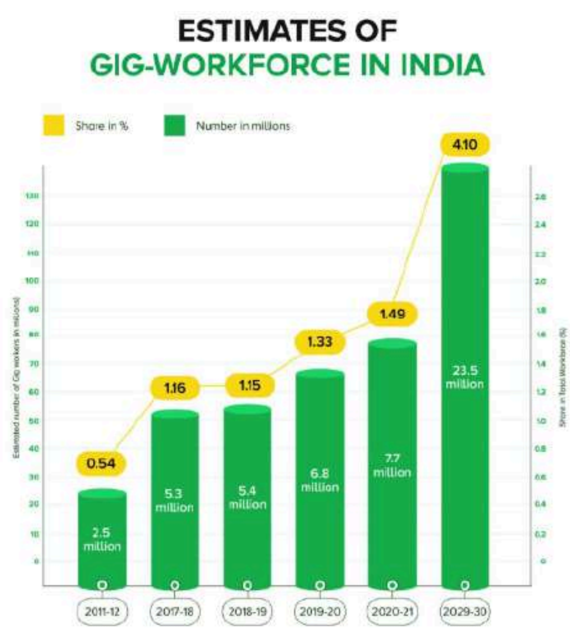

Fig. 4.2—Estimated Gig Economy Employees and Percentage in India (Market Brew, Tata Fintech & Niti Aayog Study Report)

4.2 – Limitations and Future Research

This study has several important limitations. The consumer survey relies on a convenience sample—128 respondents recruited via WhatsApp groups in Bangalore—that is neither random nor nationally representative. Geographic concentration limits generalizability to other Indian cities; the ~75% female composition may introduce gender-based bias in shopping preference data; and the digital distribution channel favors tech-savvy, already active q-commerce users over the broader population.

All survey measures are self-reported and cross-sectional. Impulse buying and overconsumption are susceptible to social desirability bias, and cross-sectional data cannot establish causal direction—the association between loyalty program participation and increased ordering frequency, for instance, does not establish that loyalty programs cause overconsumption. The gig employment analysis relies entirely on secondary sources, some of which conflate food delivery and q-commerce workers. Primary data—such as structured interviews with delivery partners and dark store workers—would substantially strengthen this section.

Future research should pursue: (1) a nationally representative, multi-city stratified survey across Tier 1, 2, and 3 markets; (2) qualitative or mixed-methods research incorporating in-depth interviews with gig workers; and (3) longitudinal survey designs tracking changes in consumer behavior and order frequency over time.

Conclusion

The rise of q-commerce in India is reshaping retail and e-commerce by prioritizing speed, convenience, and instant gratification. Buoyed by a growing economy and an expanding middle class, the sector is projected to grow at a CAGR of 17%, while the broader gig workforce is expected to reach 90 million by 2030. Younger demographics are driving adoption, valuing immediacy over price or product freshness. Survey evidence from Bangalore is broadly consistent with these trends, showing high platform satisfaction, rapid usage growth, and strong—if price-sensitive—consumer engagement.

For gig workers, q-commerce offers accessible employment without formal prerequisites, providing an entry point into the formal economy. However, existing literature documents poor working conditions, declining real wages, minimal job security, and the growing threat of technological displacement. The informal classification of gig workers under Indian labor law leaves this workforce exposed, and without regulatory reform, these vulnerabilities are likely to intensify as firms prioritize cost efficiency.

For firms, current operating models are financially unsustainable. High cash burn rates, unprofitable unit economics, and intense competitive pressure challenge long-term viability. The path to profitability requires higher AOVs, broader product categories, and significant investment in AI and automation—though automation carries the risk of displacing the gig workforce that underpins current operations.

To achieve long-term sustainability, the q-commerce sector must simultaneously invest in operational technology, adopt environmentally responsible logistics, and engage with policymakers to develop fairer frameworks for gig employment. Without these structural changes, the industry's rapid rise risks producing adverse outcomes—overconsumption for consumers, exploitation for workers, and margin collapse for firms. The sector's future depends on its willingness to balance commercial ambition with social and environmental responsibility.

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Appendix

Survey Questions (128 Responses)

All questions were mandatory to respond to. Survey conducted January–March 2025 via Google Forms, distributed via WhatsApp groups in the Bangalore metropolitan area.

Q1 - Gender: Male / Female / Rather Not Say / Other

Q2 - Age: 18 - 24 Years / 25 - 34 Years / 35 - 44 Years / 45 - 54 Years / 55 - 64 Years / >65 Years

Q3 - What is your marital status?: Unmarried / Married without children / Married with children

Q4 - What is your employment status?: Student / Salaried Worker / Self-Employed / Retired from Workforce / Unemployed / Homemaker

Q5 - Do you prefer shopping for groceries online or visiting physical stores?: Offline / Online / No preference

Q6 - Which quick commerce app do you use most frequently?: Swiggy Instamart / Zepto / Blinkit / I don't order food and groceries online

Q7 - Approximately how many times per week do you totally purchase groceries and other essentials (online and offline together)?: <3 Times / 3-6 Times / 7-10 Times / >10 Times

Q8 - Approximately how many times per week do you purchase these groceries and essentials using quick commerce apps (10 minute deliveries)?: None of the times / <3 Times / 3-6 Times / 7-10 Times / >10 Times

Q9 - On a scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to increase the number of times you order online from quick commerce apps? (1 = Extremely Unlikely; 5 = Extremely Likely)

Q10 - If you decide to shop online through quick commerce apps, what factors influence your preference over shopping at physical grocery stores? (Select all that apply): Increased Convenience / Saved Time / Saved Energy / More Variety Online / Cheaper Prices / Emergencies / Other

Q11 - If you decide to shop at a local grocery store physically, what factors make you prefer them over online platforms? (Select all that apply): Better Pricing / Fresher Produce / No delivery fees / Convenient / Habit / No waiting / Better variety / Other

Q12 - How satisfied are you with the current quick commerce platform (10 minute deliveries) that you use?: Very satisfied / Satisfied / Neutral / Dissatisfied / Very dissatisfied / I don't use quick commerce platforms

Q13 - On average, how long are you willing to wait at most for orders placed via quick commerce apps?: Under 10 Minutes / 10-20 Minutes / 20-30 Minutes / No preference / Depends. Few hours

Q14 - How has your usage of quick commerce platforms changed compared to last year, on a scale of 1-5? (1 = Much less frequently; 5 = Much more frequently)

Q15 - What concerns do you have about using quick commerce services? (Select all that apply): Delivery reliability / Expensive prices and delivery fees / Poor product quality, packaging and availability / Environmental impact / Poor customer support / App glitches and payment failures / Lack of variety in options / Other

Q16 - In what scenarios do you think quick commerce is most useful? (Select all that apply): Late night needs and emergencies / Everyday needs / Urgent needs / Forgotten items / Other

Q17 - Do you have an active loyalty program with any of these platforms?: Yes / No

Q18 - Have loyalty programs or discounts influenced you to order more than you usually would?: Yes, frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Not at all / I don't have a loyalty program

Q19 - I often buy more than I need when using these platforms: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly Agree

Q20 - Why do you think you would buy more than you need when using these

platforms? (Select all that apply): To reach the minimum for free delivery / Due to discounts or coupons or loyalty programs / To stock up for later / It is more convenient to order in bulk online / Impulse buying / Other

Q21 - Which of the following changes do you think are most likely to happen in the quick commerce industry in the next 2 years? (Select all that apply): Deliveries will get faster / Prices will become more competitive and cheaper / Implementing AI and emerging technologies / More eco-friendly packaging / Mergers amongst top players / Increased focus on tier 2 and 3 cities / Wider product variety / Improved conditions for workers / Other

Q22 - Personally, what would be the most important improvement you would like to see in this industry?: (Open text response)