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Understanding the Perception of Kirana Store Owners towards Online Grocery Platforms

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of online grocery platforms such as Zepto, Blinkit, and Swiggy Instamart has sparked many debates about their impact on traditional kirana stores, which have been an integral part of the Indian community. The present study aims to investigate the perceptions of kirana store owners and how their perception towards the growing presence of online platforms. A survey was conducted with 25 kirana store owners in Pune, Maharashtra, using structured questionnaires that combined both quantitative and qualitative elements. The findings revealed that many kirana store owners reported a noticeable decline in customer footfall and sales, with customers increasingly choosing the convenience of online ordering. To adapt, many shopkeepers introduced digital payment systems, home delivery, and phone or WhatsApp-based ordering, while a few experimented with their own apps. These findings suggest that although online platforms challenge kirana stores, they also push them towards modernisation and digital adoption. The implications extend to retail associations, and technology providers, highlighting the need for targeted support that ensures traditional and digital retail models coexist in a way that sustains small businesses while meeting evolving consumer needs.

Keywords: *Kirana Stores; Grocery Platforms; Business; Sales and Consumer Behaviour*

Introduction

In recent years, the rise of e-commerce platforms have transformed business practices. It expands the market reach of a business and makes the operations efficient (Diwan, 2024). There has been an increase in quick commerce— a business model that aims to deliver goods like groceries, stationery, personal hygiene products, and medicines to consumers within ten to forty minutes (Cmartix Tech Blog, 2022).

Quick e-commerce platforms are in demand post pandemic; due to the fact that customers find it practical to have groceries delivered at home. The focus of the digital grocery industry is speed of delivery. The duration of this is less than an hour and has come down to twenty minutes since 2019 (Satyapal & Yadav, 2023). Companies like Zepto, Blinkit, Swiggy's Instamart and Reliance's Dunzo promise to deliver groceries within ten minutes (Malhotra, 2022).

Blinkit had a smaller user base in 2019, with grocery penetration in India at just 0.3%. By the end of 2021 (India Today, 2021), a rapid increase in online grocery adoption saw Blinkit's user base grow to 200,000 (Sharma, 2024). By November 2021, they were delivering 125,000 orders daily. On similar lines, Swiggy caught onto this trend and established Swiggy Instamart in 2020; It grew to serve 9 million users by the end August 2022 (Business Standard, 2022).

Traditional Kirana stores (conventional grocery stores), that historically operated on a brick-and-mortar model, are facing unprecedented challenges. Quick commerce relies on hyperlocal distribution networks, dark stores, and advanced logistics algorithms to provide instantaneous delivery. However, conventional kirana stores struggle to adapt to changing consumer preferences, resulting in declining foot traffic, customer loyalty, and lower profit margins (Singh & Agarwal, 2025).

Pricing competition is one of the most difficult challenges that traditional stores face. Local grocery stores struggle to compete with Q-commerce sites, which often offer discounts, subscription rewards, and aggressive pricing policies. Another obstacle they face is supply chain inefficiencies due to traditional stores' lack of a streamlined logistics system that would allow for quick order fulfilment (Singh & Agarwal, 2025).

However, traditional grocery stores are adapting to the new retail environment by implementing omni-channel strategies like online orders and home delivery. Kirana store owners work with third party delivery aggregators like Dunzo and Swiggy, increasing their footprint and maintaining their current customer base (Singh & Agarwal, 2025). A few platforms like Swiggy Instamart use a hybrid model—of having their own stores and collaborating with kirana stores. Other companies like Kiko.live and Pincode help kirana stores compete in the age of fast delivery (BORA, 2025).

Existing literature focuses on the convenience and customer experience provided by quick-commerce platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Instamart, impact on kirana stores is less explored. The present study addresses the gap by understanding how kirana store owners perceive digital grocery services and the extent by which it has impacted their sales, customer relationships, and everyday operations. This study will provide implications for developing strategies to support local kiran store owners.

Methodology

Research Aim

This study aims to understand the impact of digital grocery stores on hyperlocal stores like Zepto, Blinkit, Swiggy Instamart in Pune, Maharashtra. Current study adopts a quantitative approach to examine the effect. The primary data collection uses a structured survey questionnaire designed to gather numerical data on various aspects. This quantitative design aims to provide statistical insights into the effects observed among the kirana stores of Pune, allowing a rigorous examination of the role of digital grocery stores on hyperlocal stores.

Research Design and Tools Used

The study uses a descriptive, cross-sectional 25-question survey to explore how kirana store owners perceive and are impacted by quick-commerce grocery platforms. It gathers demographic and store-specific data, assesses the awareness and use of digital apps, evaluates the platforms' impact on business and customers, and measures shopkeepers' willingness to adapt or collaborate. The form uses a combination of multiple choice, likert scale, and open-ended responses to provide a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes, challenges, and evolving behaviours of local retailers in a digitally transforming marketplace.

The survey is divided into seven sections that aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of kirana shopkeepers' attitudes towards quick-commerce platforms. It starts with demographic details, which collects age, gender, location, and store name to help understand responses. Section two is store background that collects ownership history, digital access, and customer data to better understand operational behaviour. Third section, awareness and impact on business measures people's familiarity with online grocery platforms and their believed effects. The Perception Scale uses a 5-point rating system to assess attitudes towards competition, modernisation, and potential collaboration. Customer perception explores observed changes in customer behaviour and online shopping habits. Support and adaptation explores what steps shopkeepers have taken and what support they need to remain competitive. Finally, feedback allows respondents to freely express their thoughts, offering deeper qualitative insights.

Sample

The sample consists of 25 Kirana Store owners from Pune, chosen through convenience sampling, where shopkeepers who were readily accessible were approached for responses. Most stores whose responses were taken were located in Baner (40%), Aundh (20%) and Deccan (20%), with fewer in Pimple Nilakh, Blue Ridge Township Hinjewadi and Senapati Bapat Road. Majority of the owners were young to middle-aged between 20-25 years (28%), and 41-45 years (20%), while few were above the age of 50. The sample was also male-dominated, with 22 men (88%) and only 3 women (12%).

Table 1: Demographic Information about Kirana Store owners of Pune (N=25).

Age	**Number**	**Percentage**
20-25	7	28%
26-30	2	8%
31-35	3	12%
36-40	4	16%
41-45	5	20%
46-50	3	12%
51-55	1	4%
Gender	**Number**	**Percentage**
Male	22	88%
Female	3	12%
Geographical Location	**Number**	**Percentage**
Senapati Bapat Road	1	4%
Baner	10	40%
Pimple Nilakh	2	8%
Blue Ridge Township Hinjewadi	2	8%
Deccan	5	20%
Aundh	5	20%

Ethical Considerations

All data was collected ethically. The kirana store owners that participated were provided with proper information regarding the purpose, procedures, and implications of their participation prior to their inclusion in this study. The participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The consent process emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, emphasizing that individuals could withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences. The consent was presented digitally before proceeding with the survey without formal schooling for literate respondents using Google Forms. Participants without formal schooling were interviewed personally for people without formal schooling. The details of the study were verbally communicated, ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to seek clarification and ask questions before providing their informed consent.

Data Collection Procedure

This study's data was gathered through a self-administered survey conducted using Google Forms. Google Forms provided a convenient and accessible platform for participants to respond to the survey at their own pace and location. To ensure inclusivity and accommodate a diverse range of respondents, the survey was made available in Hindi, Marathi, and English. The goal of this decision was to remove language barriers and encourage participation from people who could speak either language. Exceptions were made for people who had difficulty using technology or did not have access to digital devices. In such cases, interviews were conducted in person, allowing participants to provide responses while the interviewer filled in the survey on the respondents behalf.

Data Analysis Strategy

Graphical representation and frequency distributions have been used to present the findings of the study. Demographic factors of kirana store owners were calculated through frequency distribution. A considerable percentage of kirana owners hold higher levels of educational qualification. The strategy tallied the instances of various business types, spoken languages, and the usage of UPI features, constructing tables that show the percentage and frequency of each category. The analysis also looked at sales and customer volume changes pre and post-UPI adoption, as well as historical data on UPI adoption rates to identify trends over time.

The paper assessed the frequency of use of various UPI features to discover user preferences and possible usability issues. In order to understand the importance of language skills and business adaptation to digital technologies, a thematic analysis of the qualitative responses was finally carried out. The efficiency and effectiveness of digital marketing agencies' engagement with kirana store owners were eventually improved by this multifaceted approach, which made it possible to identify trends and patterns that can guide targeted marketing and sales strategies.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the results of the study, offering a thorough analysis of the data that has been collected. The section provides a detailed description of the findings, along with supportive studies and inferences.

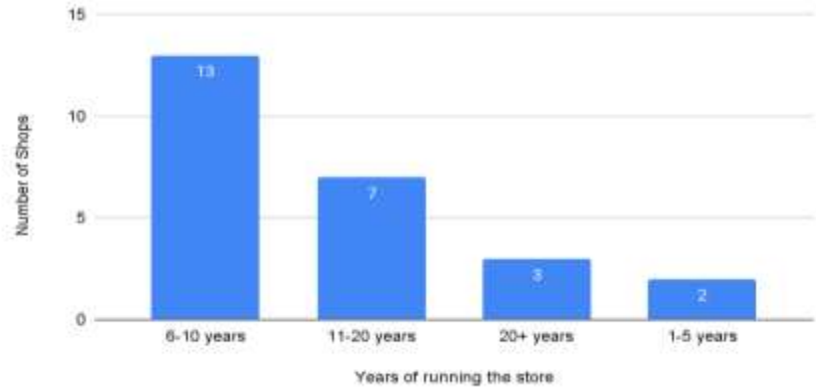

Figure 1: Length of years the kirana stores have been running in Pune (N=25).

Figure 1 shows that the majority of Pune's kirana shops i.e. 52% have been in business for 6 to 10 years. 12% of stores have been operating for more than 20 years, whereas 28% have been operating for 11 to 20 years, indicating that a smaller percentage of stores are long-standing. Of the stores that have been open for 1 to 5 years, only 8% are relatively new.

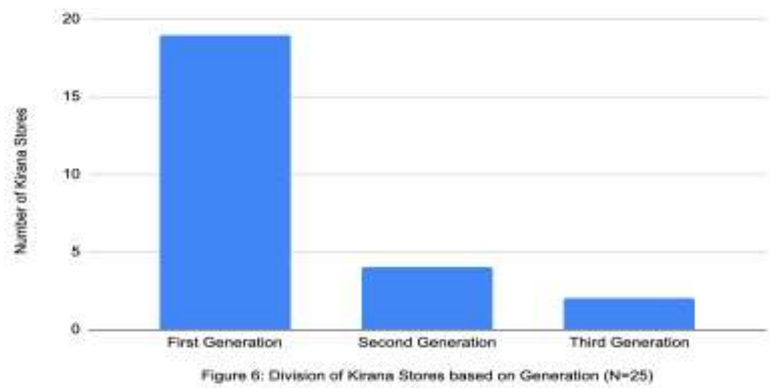

Figure 2: Division of Kirana Stores based on generation. (N=25)

Figure 2 illustrates that 76% of the kirana stores surveyed are run by first-generation owners. There are currently 16% of stores that are owned by second-generation owners, but only 8% have survived into the third generation.

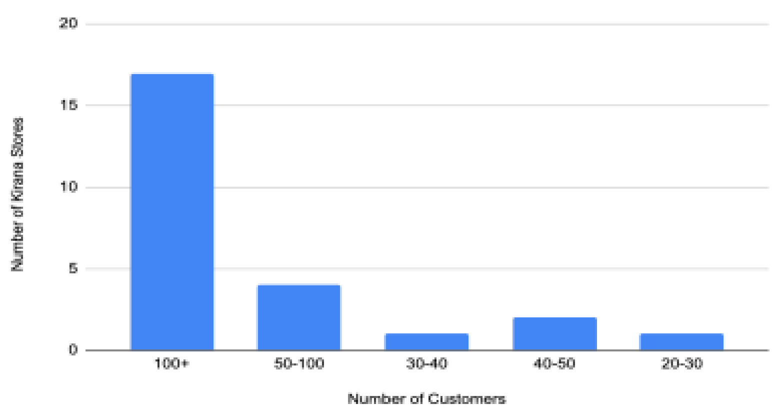

Figure 3: Number of customers served daily on an average. (N=25)

Figure 3 indicates that 68% of the kirana stores serve over 100 customers every day. Between 50 and 100 customers are served daily by 16% of stores. There are 8% of stores that claim to serve 40–50 customers, 4% that serve 30–40 customers, and another 4% that serve 20–30 customers every day.

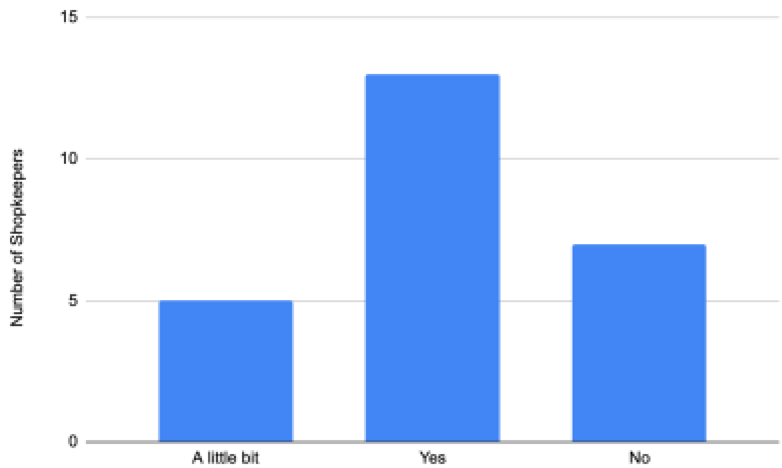

Figure 4: Scale of impact of online grocery applications faced by kirana stores in Pune (N=25)

Figure 4 illustrates the extent to which kirana stores have been impacted by online grocery applications. While 20% of shopkeepers stated that they were only slightly impacted, 52% stated that online platforms had a significant impact on their business. 28% said there was absolutely no impact. Accordingly, nearly three-quarters of kirana shops believe that online grocery platforms have negatively impacted their business.

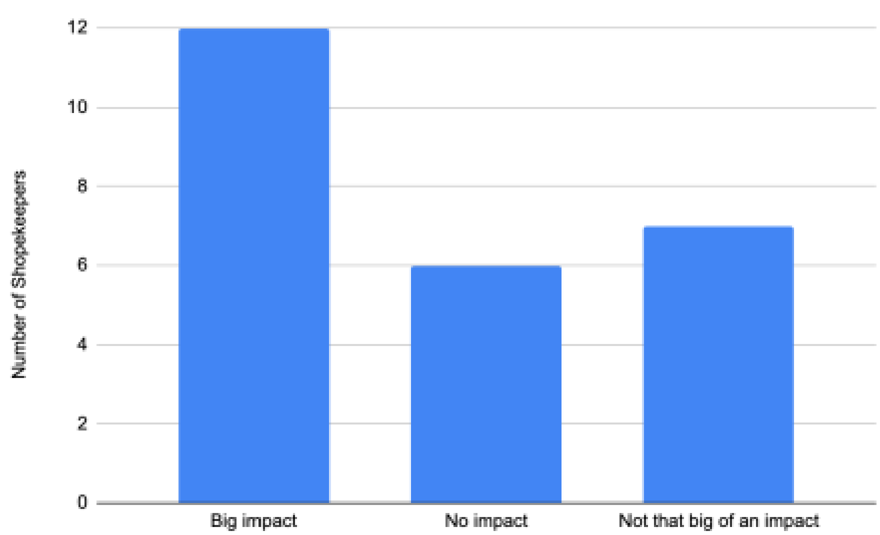

Figure 5: Impact on sales of kirana stores in Pune (N=25)

In Figure 5, 48% of shopkeepers reported that sales have been strongly impacted by online platforms. 28% said the impact was not that big, while 24% claimed they have not been affected at all. Almost half of the stores have seen a large decline in sales, while a smaller portion remains unaffected.

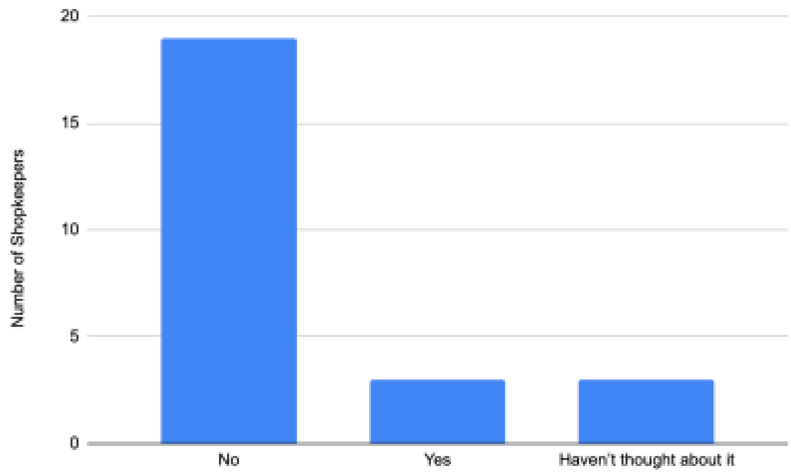

Figure 6: Count of how many shopkeepers want to take their shop online or join platforms like Blinkit or Zepto in the future (N=25)

Figure 6 shows how open shopkeepers are to changing by using online platforms like Zepto or Blinkit.The vast majority of respondents (76%) said they had no interest. Just 12% of respondents indicated they had considered it, and another 12% said they had not.

Table 2: Mean & Standard Deviation (N=25)

Mean	Standard Deviation
20.68	5.98

Table 2 presents the perception of Kirana store owners regarding online platforms in relation to a number of factors, including attracting customers, competitive pricing, delivery speed, revenue impact, pressure to modernize, the usefulness of sourcing, and partnership opportunities. The responses were graded from 1 to 5, with a total score between 10 and 30. A higher score indicates that store owners view online platforms as having a negative impact, while a lower score suggests minimal perceived impact.

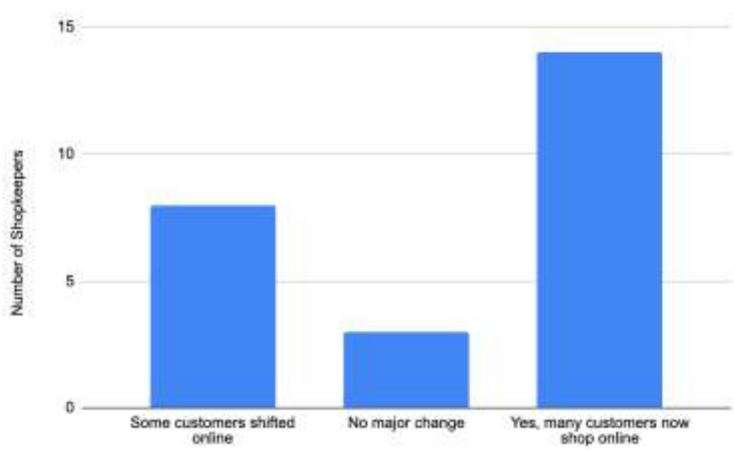

Figure 7: Perception of kirana store owners on changes in customer behaviour since these platforms came into popularity. (N=25)

Figure 7 illustrates how owners of kirana stores view consumer behaviour. 52% of store owners said many consumers prefer to shop online now. 36% reported that only a small percentage of customers switched to online platforms, and 12% said they had not noticed any significant changes.

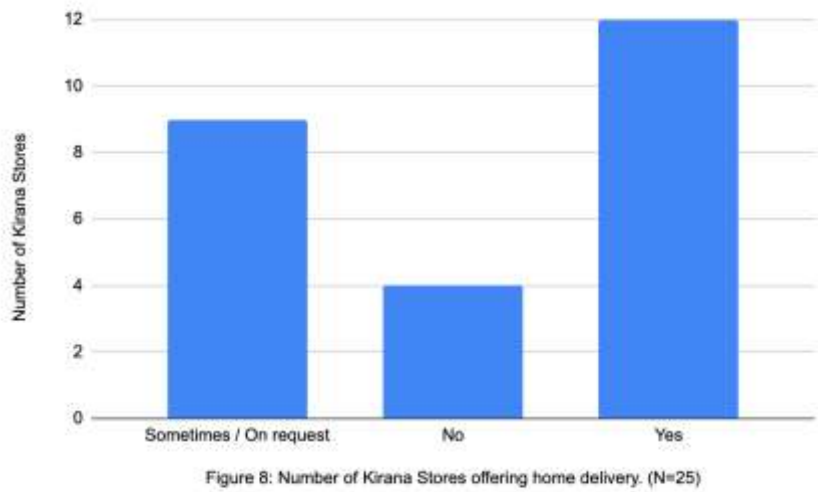

Figure 8: Number of Kirana Stores offering home delivery. (N=25)

Figure 8 shows that 48% of Kirana stores offer regular home delivery services. An additional 36% of stores provide delivery either sometimes or upon customer request. The remaining 16% of stores do not offer home delivery at all.

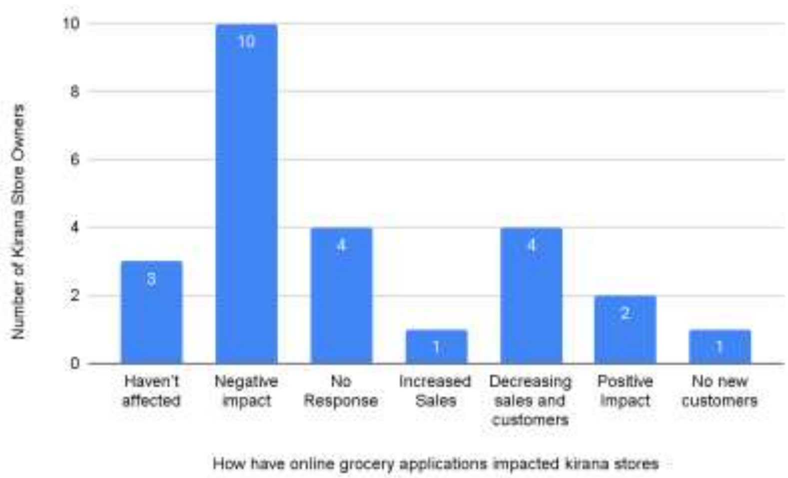

Figure 9: How have online grocery applications impacted kirana stores. (N=25)

According to the analysed data, most kirana store owners believed that the online grocery platforms have had a negative impact on their businesses due to a decrease in foot traffic and sales. Most of them reported that the sale of daily products have drastically decreased, more people prefer to place orders online, and fewer customers visit their physical stores. Some stores have not yet been impacted, as evidenced by the smaller percentage of respondents who said there had been little to no impact. Some store owners reported that online platforms helped boost their sales as more customers placed orders or used their store to sell other products like medications that aren't available on these apps.

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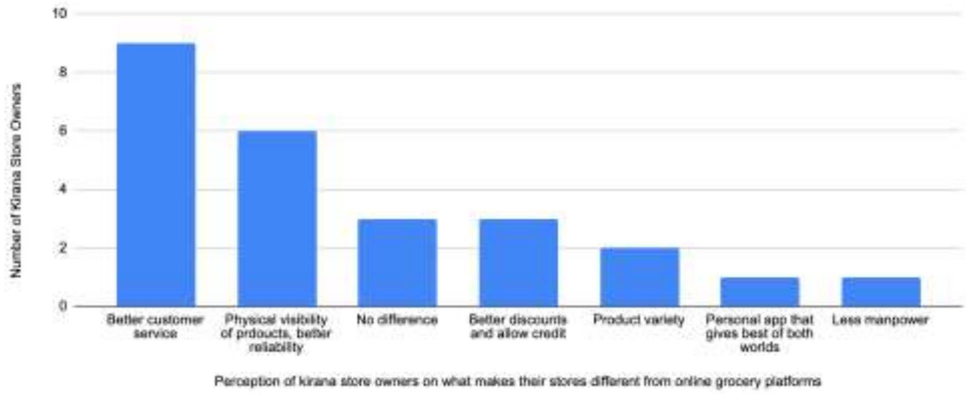

Figure 10: Perception of kirana store owners on what makes their stores different from online grocery platforms. (N=25)

The responses highlighted several themes that distinguished kirana stores from online platforms like Zepto and Blinkit. Many shopkeepers emphasised on better customer service and personal relationships, mentioning direct interaction, personal attention, and good customer retention. Many respondents mentioned the physical visibility and assurance of product quality, stating that customers can see and feel products before purchasing, giving some reassurance to them. Some kirana store owners also mentioned the flexible payment options, such as credit (khata) which online platforms don't offer. Competitive pricing and discounts were also mentioned as big differences. A few respondents stated they had their own app combining convenience with quality assurance. Some mentioned social interaction and the ability for customers to step out of their homes as advantages. A few said there was no difference between their store and the platforms. One respondent mentioned a lack of manpower as a challenge.

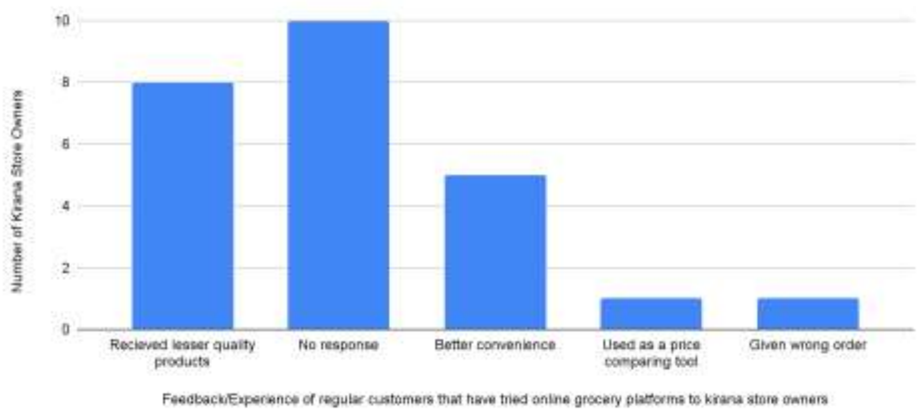

Figure 11: Feedback/Experience of regular customers that have tried online grocery platforms to kirana store owners. (N=25)

The responses showed a large range of customer feedback regarding online platforms. Many shopkeepers reported that customers shared that their own store offered better product quality, with specific mentions that products from online platforms were near expiry, difficult to replace them, of lower quality, or sometimes months passed their expiry date. Some shopkeepers said customers found online platforms convenient and appreciated the service. A few noted that customers received damaged items or incorrect orders from online services. Others mentioned that customers compared prices between their store and online platforms to make decisions. Some shopkeepers said they had never asked their customers about their online platform experience, while a small number reported they had no feedback or that customers had positive remarks about the platforms. A few mentioned that the customers felt the convenience of online platforms was much better than that of traditional kirana stores, but the quality was not as good as their own.

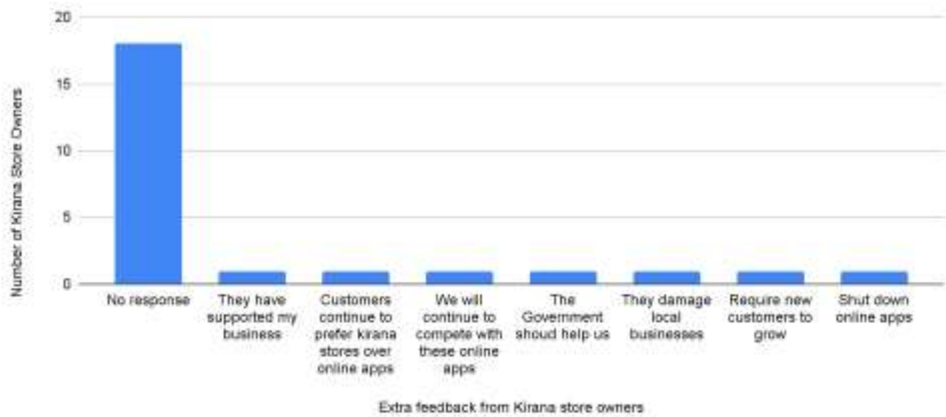

Table 3: Extra feedback from Kirana store owners. (N=25)

Support Type	Number of Responses
No Response	18
They have supported by business	1
Customers continue to prefer kirana stores over online apps	1
We will continue to compete with these online apps	1
The government should help us	1
They damage local businesses	1
Require new customers to grow	1
Shut down online apps	1

The responses showed a range of additional comments from kirana store owners. Few said online platforms supported their sales by offering more convenience than visiting the store. The others mentioned that their regular customers live nearby and preferred choosing products in person, as they are not familiar with these apps. Meanwhile, a few shopkeepers stated that their sales have dropped significantly due to digital platforms, but they're aiming to compete by modernising their shops. Others called for the government's support for small kirana shops, while others had strong opinions that online platforms take away from local businesses. A few respondents said they need more new customers instead of repeat ones. One respondent simply said “close online apps.” Several responses were left blank or unclear.

Table 4: Support that would help Kirana stores according to Kirana store owners. (N=25)

Support Type	Number of Responses
Technological Literacy	7
Human Resource	5
Financial Help	5
All Three	3
Advertisement	1
Build their own app	1
Bigger store on a prime location for more people	1
No help	1

Table 3 lists the kinds of assistance that local retailers believe would help them compete with online marketplaces. Technical literacy was the most frequently mentioned support, with 28% of respondents selecting it, followed by financial and human resources assistance, each chosen by 20%. Twelve percent of respondents said a combination of all three forms of support would be most effective. Advertisements, creating their own app, opening a larger store in a desirable area, and receiving no assistance were each mentioned by 4% of respondents, showing that while other options exist, technological and resource-based support remains the most essential.

Table 5: Following steps taken by Kirana store owners to compete with online grocery applications. (N=25)

Support Type	Number of Responses
Started digital payment options, Started WhatsApp/phone-based ordering, Provided home delivery	15
Started digital payment options only	3
Started WhatsApp/phone-based ordering, Provided home delivery	2
Started digital payment options, Provided home delivery	2
Started digital payment options, Started WhatsApp/phone-based ordering, Provided home delivery, Made our own app to compete	1

Table 4 summarises the measures Kirana store owners have taken to compete with online platforms. Among the multi-step methods used by the majority (60%) are digital payment methods, phone-based or WhatsApp-based ordering, and home delivery services. Eight percent chose to use phone-based ordering and WhatsApp in addition to home delivery, while 12% only used digital payment methods. Another 8% added home delivery to their digital payment services. Four percent implemented all of the above measures and went further by creating their own app.

The study surveyed 25 kirana store owners in Pune to examine the impact of online grocery platforms such as Zepto and Blinkit. Most stores had been operating for 6–10 years, with the majority being first-generation businesses. Most of them serve over 100 customers daily, while only a few considered taking their store online. Many shopkeepers reported that online grocery applications had a significant negative impact on their business, and several said their sales had been strongly affected. A large number also observed that many customers now preferred to shop online. To compete, most kirana store owners implemented multi-step approaches like digital payments, phone-based ordering, and home delivery, while one created their own app. Technological literacy was the most common cited support needed. Customer feedback revealed complaints about near-expiry products, incorrect or damaged orders, while some appreciated the convenience of these online platforms. Additionally, a few shopkeepers observed that online services supported their sales, while others on the other hand mentioned a decline and expressed interest in modernising their shops.

The findings suggest several implications for kirana stores, digital platforms, and policymakers. Kirana stores primarily compete through personal customer relationships, product visibility, and flexible payments, which remain their key strengths. However, the low interest in adopting digital solutions reveals a need for increased technological literacy and financial assistance to remain competitive. Policymakers could support small retailers by providing technical training and incentives to modernise. Digital platforms could improve customer trust by addressing concerns about product quality by sourcing their produce directly from kirana stores. The data also indicates that kirana stores could bridge the gap by developing their own digital applications or enhancing home delivery services, combining traditional strengths with digital convenience. Improving these areas may help kirana stores survive and thrive in the increasingly digital grocery market.

The study has several limitations that restrict the generalisability of its findings. The small sample size of 25 kirana store owners, collected through convenience sampling from Pune, does not represent larger urban or rural markets in India. The sample was also predominantly male (88%), limiting insights from female business owners. All data was based on self-reported responses, which may be subjective and potentially biased.

Conclusion

This study focuses on understanding the impact of digital grocery platforms such as Zepto, Blinkit, and SwiggyInstamart on kirana stores in Pune, Maharashtra. The findings show that even though kirana stores continue to serve a large customer base and are going strong through personal service, product visibility, and flexible payment options, many owners have reported significant negative impacts from online platforms, mainly in terms of reduced sales and customer footfall. A smaller proportion noted positive effects, either through complementary sales or customer convenience. To adapt, most stores adopted digital payments, home delivery, and phone or WhatsApp-based ordering, though very few showed interest in fully moving online. The most common form of support that was requested by the shopkeepers was technological literacy, alongside financial and human resources. Future studies could expand this work by including a larger and more diverse sample across urban and rural areas, further exploring the gendered perspectives of store ownership, and conducting a drawn-out research to track how kirana stores are adapting to quick-commerce competition over time. This would help provide further deep insights into the evolving relationship between traditional retail and digital platforms in India’s grocery sector.

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