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Rewiring Retail: How Indian E-Commerce is Reshaping the 4Ps in Kolkata

Pramanik S[1*]

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[1*] Sujan Pramanik, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Commerce, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

The Indian retail ecosystem is undergoing a dramatic structural transition, moving rapidly from centralized marketplace monopolies toward hyper-local Quick Commerce (Q-Commerce) platforms and government-backed decentralized frameworks like the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC). While macroeconomic data heavily documents this exponential market growth, a significant academic gap exists regarding how these structural disruptions fundamentally break and reshape traditional marketing strategy frameworks. This research article aims to bridge this theoretical gap by empirically investigating the re-configuration of the classic 4Ps marketing-mix: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – within this evolving landscape.

This study is strictly isolated to the culturally distinct and historically dense consumption markets of the Kolkata metropolitan area in West Bengal.

The expected outcomes of this research will provide fresh empirical models explaining consumer adaptation to dynamic pricing and vernacular promotional channels, ultimately delivering a modernized, agile 4Ps marketing mix framework tailored for hyper-dynamic digital economies within the Global South.

Keywords: centralized marketplace, e-commerce, quick commerce, 4Ps of marketing mix

Corresponding Author

Sujan Pramanik, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Commerce, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.
Email: sujanpramanik362@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

The Indian retail ecosystem is currently experiencing a volatile and fascinating structural shift. Over the past decade, e-commerce has matured from a novel alternative into a hyper-competitive, trillion-rupee digital economy driven by smartphone ubiquity, ultra-low-cost data, and the normalization of digital payments via the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). However, the real story is the velocity of transformation and market fragmentation. Traditional e-commerce giants are now competing with hyper-local Quick Commerce (Q-Commerce) platforms like Blinkit and Zepto, emerging Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) brands, and government-backed decentralized frameworks like the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC). India's e-commerce industry, valued at Rs. 10,82,875 crore (US$ 125 billion) in 2024, is projected to grow to Rs. 29,88,735 crore (US$ 345 billion) by 2030, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18.4% [3][4].

In 2021, the number of annual online shoppers was about 185 million across India. This was a significant increase as compared to the previous year. The annual number of shoppers is likely to increase to 425 million in 2027 [2].

My objective is to investigate how contemporary E-Commerce firms adapt their core marketing strategies by redesigning the traditional 4Ps of Marketing Mix (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion). To ensure methodological rigor and empirical feasibility, this study will focus its geographic and consumer scope on the unique demographic landscape of West Bengal.

2. Literature Review

The digital revolution has transformed the global economic landscape, and India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing digital economies in the world. Among the major contributors to this transformation, e-commerce has played a significant role in reshaping traditional business practices, consumer behavior, and market operations. E-commerce refers to the buying and selling of goods and services through electronic platforms such as websites, mobile applications, and digital marketplaces [13].

In India, the rapid adoption of internet technologies and smartphones has accelerated the growth of online commerce across urban and rural regions. India's booming e-commerce market is driven by affordable smartphones and low-cost data plans, leading major retail and consumer goods makers to increase their investments in the online space [3] [4].

The pain-of-paying hypothesis [9] posits that there is a psychological cost to every monetary transaction hence, this acts as a control to consumption habits. This regulatory impact is systematically dependent on the modality of payment, cash induces the most pain of payment, and digital technologies like UPI alleviate it by making the transactions invisible, instant, and routine. The evolution of commerce in the digital age has witnessed a profound transformation, with the world increasingly turning to online shopping as a primary means of acquiring products and services. This shift accelerated by advances in communication technology and further propelled by the global COVID-19 pandemic, has reshaped the landscape of consumer behavior and retail practices [8].

The e-commerce sector in India includes various business models such as Business-to-Consumer (B2C), Business-to-Business (B2B), Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C), and Direct-to-Consumer (D2C). Online shopping platforms offer products and services related to fashion, electronics, groceries, healthcare, education, travel, entertainment, and financial services [13].

The Bharat Interface for Money-Unified Payment Interface (BHIM-UPI), one of the ground-breaking digital platforms under Digital India, according to NITI Aayog, has made it possible for e-commerce to reach more customers, especially in rural India [6].

The rapidly expanding Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) segment is driving growth, with India's D2C market projected to grow at a 40% CAGR, reaching US$ 60 billion by 2030. E-commerce in India is expected to surpass US$ 145 billion in 2025, powered by mobile commerce and AI-driven hyper-personalization enhancing customer experiences [3][4].

Q-Commerce supply chain works on the principles of three interconnected levels: a mother warehouse that is used as the collection centre of goods delivered by retailers, farmers, and wholesalers, a network of distribution centres and dark stores that maximise customer proximity, and last-mile delivery

done with the help of two-wheelers, electric scooters, and bicycles adapted to the dense urban environment [12]. The democratisation of mobile internet, increase in e-commerce penetration and omnichannel distribution has led to an expansion of the e-commerce industry. The COVID 19 pandemic and the subsequent control measures like lockdowns and social distancing led to disruptions in the e-commerce. This has also influenced consumer behaviour and led to an increase in the online purchase of perishables and groceries by customers. A part of the shift can be attributed to the diversion of spending from clothing and lifestyle to household essentials. The demand was accompanied by instant delivery expectations, leading to the emergence of the quick commerce business 12]. Quick commerce as a niche area within the e-commerce sector began in 2013 in India but grew exponentially post-COVID pandemic, marking a significant change in the urban Indian economic space both spatially and in terms of business model and consumer expectations [5]. Focused on ultra-speedy deliveries in as little as 10-20 minutes (as seen by research by the likes of Redseer Consulting and Mordor Intelligence and reports by operators such as Zepto and Blinkit), quick commerce platforms are growing at warp speed [7}.

Today, many players operate in the quick commerce business. Some are new players like Zepto and Pickily while others are an extension of established players like Swiggy Instamart, Blinkit, Dunzo Daily, Country Delight, and Big Basket Daily among others. These players use different business models based on business dynamics and customer requirements to process orders instantly with efficiency and accuracy. Warehouses are a key element of the quick commerce supply chain [12].

Customers are mostly concerned with their shopping practices and are not promotion conscious. In addition, this study shows that the average customer of Kolkata in our sample was very conscious about online shopping, people are very conscious about extra facilities and services provide by online shopping; they also want clarity in condition from online shopping. Students are quite conscious about any type of satisfaction factors [1].

Millennials and Gen Z are seen to be leading adopters in metro cities, in line with their affinity for on-demand services and digital-first lifestyles.

Occasion-driven promotions at times like Diwali or sports events drive sales, and category expansion widens scope beyond grocery to beauty, electronics, and home decor. Platforms for quick commerce deepen customer loyalty through better service [7].

India’s quick commerce segment has emerged as a US$ 7–8 billion market in FY25, expanding at a CAGR of 110–130% over 2021–25. The segment is projected to reach US$ 65–70 billion by 2030, contributing nearly half of incremental e-retail growth, reflecting a structural shift toward high-frequency, convenience-led consumption [3][4].

Being digital natives, Gen Z consumers, are the most enthusiastic adopters of Q-Commerce, and it has been determined that it is the primary target group, namely, the young generation, time savers, convenient seekers and one of the most financially vulnerable to its behavioural design architecture [12].

Quick commerce’s arrival in Kolkata was both late and cautious. Grofers - the Blinkit predecessor - launched in Kolkata in 2015-2016, but the platform’s scheduled-delivery model achieved only modest share against the dominant kirana and para-market networks. Swiggy Instamart entered in late 2021, leveraging the Swiggy food-delivery network that had built meaningful brand presence in Salt Lake, New Town, Park Street, and Ballygunge. Zepto was the last of that trio, arriving in late 2022. The defining cultural feature of Kolkata’s commerce is the para - the neighbourhood - which is not merely a geographic unit but a social institution. The relationship between a household and its local grocer, sweets shop, fishmonger, and milk vendor often spans generations, and these relationships function as real switching barriers against modern retail channels in general and quick commerce in particular. No other Indian metro has this dynamic at this scale [11]. India's e-commerce market is fuelled by 500 million shoppers and increased internet access, especially in rural areas. By FY26, over 1.18 billion people are expected to have smartphones, enhancing digital transactions. Rural areas will drive over 60% of demand, particularly from tier 2-4 towns [3][4]. Due to favourable exchange and return policies and prompt delivery services, particularly advantageous for remote locations [10].

3. Objectives of the Study

3.1 To compare configuration of the 4Ps of marketing mix of the traditional E-Commerce and the quick commerce in attracting consumers across core Kolkata.

3.2 To examine the effect of quick commerce on consumer satisfaction, purchasing behaviour and impulsiveness among consumers.

3.2 To what extent is quick commerce replacing relationship-based neighbourhood kirana retail and its business performance and sustainability.

4. Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and is based on secondary sources collected from published literature in books, magazines, journals, newspapers and websites. In addition, the well-known wholesale and retail market system of Kolkata have been visited to observe their business activities.

5. Findings

This research article finds the hyper-local, impulsive and ultra-fast delivery models of quick commerce act differently in terms of business strategy compared to the centralized, diverse and cost-efficient E-Commerce ecosystem. Findings are:

5.1 Product: Acceptability

5.1.1 E-Commerce Product Lines in Kolkata

Traditional E-Commerce platforms (such as Amazon, Flipkart, and regional/D2C online brands) utilize centralized warehouses with delivery windows spanning 1 to 5 days. Their product lines focus on planned purchases, higher average selling prices, and bulky items:

- Fashion and Apparel: Ethnic handloom sarees (e.g., Balaram Saha, Jamdani by Karomi), designer wear (85 Lansdowne, Simaaya), western wear, and footwear (Sreeleathers, Turtle).
- Electronics and Appliances: Gadgets, mobile accessories, large home appliances, and computing hardware.
- Home, Living, and Furniture: Mattresses (SleepyCat, Kozynap), wooden/modular furniture (Mobel Furniture), and handcrafted lifestyle goods (Kadam Haat, Rare Planet).
- Specialty Tea and Gourmet Foods: Long-shelf-life regional specialties like Darjeeling and Assam teas (Goodricke, Dorje Teas, The Tea Shelf) and packaged sweets.
- Beauty and Natural Skincare: D2C natural and organic skincare lines (e.g., WishCare, Kass).

5.1.2 Q-Commerce Product Lines in Kolkata

Q-commerce platforms (such as Blinkit, Swiggy Instamart, and Zepto) focus on hyper-local dark stores delivering goods in 10 to 30 minutes. Their product lines emphasize immediate consumption, high reorder rates, and compact sizing:

- Groceries and Staples: Daily use items like milk, bread, eggs, vegetables, and cooking essentials.
- Snacks and Beverages: Packaged chips, biscuits, cold drinks, energy drinks, and instant noodles.
- Personal Care and Essentials: Toiletries, sanitary products, baby care items, and quick-run-out cosmetics.
- Health and OTC Medicines: Over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, basic first-aid, and wellness items.
- Local Bakery & Specialty Items: Regional quick-treats (such as items tied to local bakeries like Mio Amore).

5.2 Price: Affordability

5.2.1 E-Commerce Pricing Strategy in Kolkata

Marketplaces like Amazon India and Flipkart, utilizing centralized warehousing outside city limits (like Dankuni or Uluberia hubs). Regional players like Sreeleathers or Balaram Saha and other Kolkata's popular stores are also available in online platforms with their popular products. This drastically lowers their storage costs and allows them to pass savings to consumers.

- Algorithmic Dynamic Pricing: Prices shift multiple times a day based on automated tracking of competitor prices, stock levels, and browser history. Lower unit margins compensated by massive sales volume. Also provide deep discounts on products during the festive seasons.

- Bundling & Bulk Disincentives for Q-Commerce: Traditional E-Commerce thrives on high Average Order Value (AOV). They employ multi-buy discounts (e.g., "Buy 3, Get 10% Off") and volume pricing on large packs (e.g., 5kg or 10kg monthly grocery staples) that Q-commerce dark stores cannot easily stock or transport on delivery bikes.
- Loss-Leader Strategy: Selling highly sought-after electronic items (like smartphones during the Big Billion Days, Amazon Great Indian Festival) at or below cost to acquire new users. Many major e-commerce platforms, tech manufacturers, and subscription services offer dedicated student discount programs for study-related items like laptops, software, and books.

5.2.2 Q-Commerce Pricing Strategy in Kolkata

Platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart prioritize delivery velocity over deep discounts. Because they fulfill orders via highly localized, rent-heavy dark stores across Kolkata (e.g., Salt Lake, Gariahat, New Town), their pricing models incorporate specific convenience premiums.

- Dynamic Convenience Fees: Base delivery fees fluctuate based on real-time demand, late-night hours, or inclement weather (like Kolkata's monsoon waterlogging). Surge pricing is applied to delivery fees during high-demand festival seasons like Durga Puja.
- Hidden SKU Premiums: Everyday items (like milk, bread, and fresh vegetables) often carry a 5% to 15% markup compared to local para (neighborhood) bazaars. Platforms offset this by offering steep discounts strictly on high-margin, low-frequency impulse buys (like gourmet chocolates or premium ice creams).
- Pack-Size Optimization: Focus on smaller, lower-ticket single-use variations (e.g., 250g or 500g vegetable packs). This keeps the absolute transaction value palatable while yielding a much higher margin per kilogram.

5.3 Place: Accessability

5.3.1 E-Commerce Place related Strategy in Kolkata

Marketplaces like Amazon India and Flipkart, alongside major fashion retailers of the city completely bypass the inner-city real estate market for their primary inventory.

- Periphery Fulfillment Centers (FCs): Massive warehouses spanning hundreds of thousands of square feet are located well outside Kolkata's municipal borders. They are clustered along major national highways in industrial areas like Dankuni, Uluberia, and Hooghly.
- Unlimited Geographic Reach: Unlike Q-commerce, which simply refuses service if you live outside a dark store's tight boundary, traditional E-Commerce uses centralized logistics to service 100% of the Kolkata metropolitan area, including peripheral suburbs and neighboring districts.

5.3.2 Q-Commerce Place related Strategy in Kolkata

Platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart map their physical presence to Kolkata's dense residential geography. They operate hidden micro-warehouses known as dark stores.

- Hyper-Local Micro-Zoning: Dark stores are strategically placed within a 2 to 3-kilometer radius of high-density residential hubs. Key clusters are heavily concentrated in affluent or IT-dominated zones like Salt Lake (Sector V), New Town, Gariahat, Ballygunge, and Tollygunge to capture high-disposable-income demographics.
- Low-Cost, High-Accessibility Real Estate: To keep rent manageable inside the city, these dark stores are located in back alleys, basements, or older commercial complexes rather than prime high-street locations. However, they require immediate access to main roads so delivery riders can exit and navigate Kolkata's narrow lane (para) layout without getting stuck in traffic bottlenecks.
- Micro-Inventory Customization: To meet the area specific demand of consumers Q-Commerce created a micro inventory management system in their SKU to deliver the product quickly. Like a place where traditional Bengali daily staples (specific brands of mustard oil or local dairy), ready-to-eat meals, and tech accessories are ready in stack where it would be required to deliver.

5.4 Promotion: Awareness

5.4.1 E-Commerce Promotion in Kolkata

Marketplaces like Amazon India and Flipkart, alongside regional D2C brands, approach promotions by nurturing a longer customer decision journey built on savings and variety.

- Mega Annual Shopping Festivals (The "Big Reveal"): Promotional spending relies heavily on massive annual events like the "The Big Billion Days" or "Amazon Great Indian Festival". Marketing starts weeks in advance with "price reveal" countdowns, pre-booking tokens, and wishlist incentives for high-ticket items like smartphones and television sets.
- Nostalgia-Led & High-Production Video Campaigns: Traditional E-Commerce focuses on cinematic, emotional video storytelling centered around family homecoming (Agamani), gifting relatives, and buying Pujo-r Jama (new clothes for the festival). These multi-channel ad spots run across television, regional YouTube channels, and high-traffic highway billboards leading into the city.
- Affiliate, Influencer Lookbooks, and Long-Tail Content: Fashion and lifestyle segments rely on local Bengali lifestyle influencers to create structured "lookbooks", "GRWM" (Get Ready With Me) reels, and unpacking videos.

5.4.2 Q-Commerce Promotion in Kolkata

Platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart, and Flipkart Minutes use psychological triggers focused on immediate gratification and location-specific cultural hooks.

- Real-Time & Weather-Triggered In-App Banners: Promotions change based on current events. If a sudden thunderstorm hits Kolkata during monsoon season, the app interface instantly pivots to promote raincoats, umbrellas, and hot khichuri ingredients or tea packets. Late-night push notifications trigger impulse purchases (e.g., "Craving ice cream at 11 PM? Delivered in 10 minutes"). Experiential On-Ground Activations & VIP Perks: During Durga Puja, Q-Commerce platforms offer physical rewards to bridge the online-to-offline gap. Platforms gamify the shopping experience by letting users score VIP Pandal Pass entry.
- Hyper-Local Visual Tributes: Instead of broad national ads, Q-Commerce platforms focus on specific Kolkata iconography to build neighborhood connection. For example, Blinkit commissioned large, vibrant street murals featuring local motifs like trams and yellow taxis to anchor their presence in the heart of the city.

5.5 Consumer Behavior

In contrast to the conventional E-Commerce systems, which give the consumer time to think, shop, read reviews, and re-evaluate, Q-Commerce systems are designed in such a way that the buyer decision process is reduced to less than two minutes. Delivery time counts, algorithmically selected top picks sections, push notifications about flash deals, or instant UPI checkout all create the sense of continued urgency. Arousal and pleasure have been consistently identified as the most critical mediating affective states, with time pressure and quantity pressure operationalised through flash sales and scarcity indicators shown to heighten arousal by exploiting fear of missing out (FOMO).

5.6 Business Sustainability of Generation Old Retail Shops and Popular Market

Local stores were in the past affected by E-Commerce but they survive now in the present they have to compete with the hyper-local, impulsive and ultra-fast delivery models of quick commerce. Research finds that the defining cultural feature of Kolkata's commerce is the para - the neighbourhood - which is not merely a geographic unit but a social institution. The relationship between a household and its local grocer, sweets shop, fishmonger, and milk vendor often spans generations, and these relationships function as real switching barriers against modern retail channels in general and quick commerce in particular. No other Indian metro has this dynamic at this scale. In Kolkata there exist various popular markets, each market is popular for its special category of products. Some of the popular markets are:

1. Burrabazar (Bara Bazar): India's largest wholesale market for bulk sourcing, textiles, apparel, spices, hardware, and wedding lehengas.
2. New Market (Hogg's Market): Famous for western wear, ethnic apparel, shoes, artificial jewelry, bags, cosmetics, dry fruits, and the historic Nahoum & Sons Jewish bakery.

3. Gariahat Market: A sprawling south Kolkata street market known for traditional Bengali sarees, kurtas, jewelry, home decor, and footwear.
4. College Street (Boi Para): The world's largest second-hand book market and primary hub for academic publishers and literary finds. Wholesale and retail market.
5. Mullick Ghat Flower Market: Asia's largest wholesale flower market located near the base of the Howrah Bridge.
6. Chandni Market & Ezra Street: Specialized hubs for electronics, computer hardware, electrical appliances, and decorative lighting.
7. Sealdah and Koley Market: Sealdah and Koley Market acts as the primary transit point where tons of seasonal vegetables arrive from the rural districts of West Bengal every single night. Scale of wholesale distribution that feeds the entire city's smaller local neighborhood bazaars.
8. Mechua: Located near Burrabazar, it is the primary trading floor for massive crates of seasonal fruits (like mangoes, apples, oranges, and melons) coming from all across state West Bengal and India.
9. Bowbazar (Bohubazar): Bowbazar is the ultimate destination for traditional Bengali gold craftsmanship. It houses the flagship showrooms of legendary legacy jewelers alongside hundreds of small artisan workshops (karigars). It is globally famous for intricate filigree work, bridal gold chokers, and heavy wedding jewelry sets.

6. Conclusion

A systematic assessment reveals that in a market as historically rich and demographically diverse as Kolkata, the elements of the marketing-mix: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – are undergoing transformation in this era of digital retail. In India there are basically three types of retail business: local retail stores, E-Commerce Company and recently a version of E-Commerce with an ultra-fast delivery model known as Q-Commerce. When E-Commerce businesses came into the Indian retail market researchers, analysts, and economists were predicting that the local retail business would face very tough competition with E-Commerce in terms of their market shares, and it happened. To compete and maintain relevance with E-commerce the traditional and modern retail businesses have diversified their business by adopting omni-channel delivery models, digital payment systems, and integrating online-to-offline strategies.

Now in recent years the centralized, diverse and cost-efficient E-commerce businesses are also facing competition with the hyper-local, impulsive and ultra-fast delivery models of quick commerce which are the extension or another version of E-Commerce. Since the three retail business phasing competitions with each other the market competition day by day became tougher for both of them. There is a harsh market mantra "To exist in the market business has to diversify". To succeed in the market the retail market segment has taken the mantra as life-giving for their business. And they have diversified their business activities and adapted to the market changes. This shift and the associated competition are also evident in Kolkata. However, compared to other Indian cities, local retail shops and popular markets in Kolkata have managed to endure, even in this new era of E-Commerce and Q-commerce. Kolkata's local retail shops and traditional markets remain resilient against E-Commerce and quick-commerce due to several distinct socioeconomic and cultural factors like:

1. Retail shops have the generation-old buyer-seller relationship
2. Strong community ties & personal credit
3. Value-seeking and bargaining culture
4. Vegetables are direct from the wetlands
5. Fishes are guaranteeing absolute freshness

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