

BETWEEN BAZAAR AND APP: PERFORMATIVE MARKETING BY INDIAN VEGETABLE VENDORS VS. DIGITAL QUICK COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

Indian traditional open-air vegetable markets offer a richly multisensory shopping environment characterized by vibrant colours, sounds, interpersonal exchanges, and performative selling practices. This form of retailing stands in sharp contrast to the increasingly dominant model of app-based fast grocery delivery services, which prioritize speed, efficiency, and convenience while minimizing personal interaction. This paper examines how these two retail formats create value differently by analysing the impact of performative selling methods employed by street vendors such as loud price calls, rhythmic songs, humorous banter, visual product displays, and personalized rapport on consumer experience and loyalty, compared with the role of convenience in quick-commerce platforms such as Blinkit and Swiggy Instamart.

The study is based on a two-year mixed-method field investigation conducted in Kalaburagi town in Karnataka, India. The research design integrates ethnographic observation of vegetable vendors, in-depth qualitative interviews with vendors and consumers, and a structured consumer survey administered to 400 households. This methodological approach enables a holistic examination of seller practices and shopper preferences across traditional open markets, cooperative retail outlets, and app-based grocery platforms.

The findings reveal that traditional vegetable markets are overwhelmingly perceived by consumers as superior in terms of product freshness, personal trust, and social interaction. These attributes emerge as more influential in shaping purchase decisions for the majority of respondents than the speed and convenience offered by quick-commerce applications. Survey results indicate strong experiential and relational motivations underlying vegetable purchases: 86 percent of respondents identified freshness as their most important purchase criterion, while 64 percent reported that the opportunity to bargain enhanced their shopping satisfaction. These results highlight the continued relevance of sensory verification, interpersonal familiarity, and social engagement in everyday food retailing.

At the same time, the analysis shows that quick-commerce platforms appeal to specific consumer segments particularly higher-income and time-constrained households due to their ability to reduce shopping effort and save time. Factor analysis suggests that approximately 30 percent of the variance in purchase criteria is explained by a convenience-oriented factor that favours app usage. However, both qualitative and quantitative evidence point to persistent consumer concerns regarding online grocery shopping. Nearly one-quarter of respondents expressed distrust related to the quality and freshness of vegetables purchased through apps, and many reported missing the social interaction and sensory reassurance traditionally associated with bazaar shopping.

Theoretically, the findings extend experiential marketing and consumption value perspectives to the context of informal retailing, reinforcing prior research that emphasizes the

importance of cordial seller–buyer relationships and assured freshness in street markets. From a practical standpoint, the paper proposes a hybrid cooperative retail model inspired by Karnataka’s Nandini milk-parlour system, combining digital ordering and logistics with the trust-based, social, and sensory attributes of traditional markets. Such a model has the potential to strengthen farm-to-fork supply chains, support small farmers and street vendors, and preserve culturally embedded shopping experiences amid the rapid expansion of digital commerce.

Keywords: Performative Marketing, Street Vendors, Experiential Retail, Quick Commerce, Cooperative Retail, Consumer Trust.

INTRODUCTION

The retail environment of fresh-produce is characteristic of India, specifically dualistic: on the one hand, vibrant open-air markets and hawkers use the opportunities to conduct their sales rites, on the other, e-grocery applications offer to deliver groceries to the house within minutes Anjaria, (2016). The small market outlets and street vendors contribute a big portion of urban food in India Arnould et al., (2006).

Street vendors rely on ancient street-cries, musical cries and personal arguments to stand out among the clamour in baazars. This sing and dance marketing (musical folk songs about veggies, barking price jingles, placing the produce in pyramids that people can notice) will make shopping a sensory, communal experience Babin et al., (1994). In comparison, quick commerce on apps puts a premium on speed and convenience. Q-commerce (quick commerce) apps such as Blinkit and Zepto and others have grown fast in India: they now represent approximately 40-50% of online spend on groceries in India, where orders doubled in recent months Belk, (1988).

Nonetheless, these applications do not require face-to-face communication as well as physical examination of products. People just scroll and use clicks to see pictures, wait till some rider comes and knocks; they do not touch vegetables or even talk to sellers Bhowmik, (2012). The recent studies reveal that attributes related to experience (visual cues, personalization) in the context of online retailing are currently the determinants of consumer loyalty even more than efficiency. With the grocery field in India, which has always been a predominantly fresh market, this change begs the inquiry of what is sacrificed when making purchases entirely online Birthal et al., (2019).

What value are traditional bazaar vendors bringing that is not offered by fast-commerce apps when a consumer purchases them? We also reflect on the possible gap bridging by cooperative or hybrid retail models Chen & Raveendran, (2011). Previous studies have recorded that the shopping motives of consumers are both utilitarian and hedonic (experience economy) concept developed by Pine and Gilmore Grewal et al., (2020). The empirical research indicates that Indian shoppers are very sensitive in regards to the aspect of freshness, price, and hand-inspection of the produce. Qualitative research also indicates that a customer develops personal relationships with local sellers whom they trust. In the meantime, the new Q-commerce paradigm can solve the last-mile logistics, but it creates a trust problem Cialdini, (2009); Gulati et al., (2020).

According to our research, 25 percent of customers mention the lack of trust in online quality as an obstacle, and almost a quarter of the participants in the study complain about the poor quality of produce on delivery apps Creswell & Plano Clark, (2018); Hand et al., (2009). We use interdisciplinary perspectives of experiential marketing, informal-economy studies, and vegetable-marketing to contextualize the following questions Holbrook & Hirschman, (1982). Specifically, the consumption-value theory highlights the fact that functional (freshness, price), social (relationships), and emotional (enjoyment, novelty) values do affect the channel choice. We use this to compare Bazaar vs App mode using a mixed method field study in a middle Indian city, Kalaburagi . Hübner

et al., (2016) we also report on the actual strategies of the vendors and gauge the preferences of the shoppers in terms of format. We not only add our part in deepening the experiential-retail theory to vegetable-marketing in an informal setting, but also provide practical recommendations, including a digital-cooperative framework, to assist small farmers and consumer experience in the modernizing retail market of India Degeratu et al., (2000); Jain, (2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Retailing and Sensory Retailing

The Retailing theory acknowledges that shopping is not merely a utility task that is transactional in nature. The argument by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) was the iconic production that argued that consumers would pursue fantasy, sensory pleasure and relations during the consumption process Geertz, (1978). This concept is the basis of the experiential marketing literature: Schmitt, (1999) and Pine & Gilmore (1999) suggest that the perceived value and loyalty can be improved through provision of memorable, multi-sensory experiences Kotler, (1973). Marketers in physical retail outlets employ ambient atmospherics (Light, colors, smells) and interactive displays to capture the attention of their customers. Kotler (1973) came up with the term atmospherics to refer to these influences Kurien, (2007). Other studies on recent researches of online commerce also differentiate between efficiency attributes (convenience, price, speed) and experience attributes (website design, personalization). It is crucial to note that in El-Manstrly et al. (2024), the customer loyalty is now determined by the experience features of a site rather than by efficiency features Minten et al., (2010). Through analogy, an offline bazaar would inherently provide a rich sense experience the sizzling of cooking on the roadside, the visual experience of colourful vegetables and the smell of spices all come into hedonic satisfaction. Thus, the conventional marketplace is supposed to serve the emotional and social consumer values, and digital apps are limited to the functional utility Narayanan & Gulati, (2020).

Informal Markets and Consumer Values

Informal retail Street markets and vendors can be researched in development economics and anthropology, and marketing research on informal retail is less abundant. There is available evidence that informal sellers appeal to customers by integrating functional advantages (low price, product diversification) and good personal relationship. Sarker et al., (2024) reported that consumers buy informal vendors in Malaysian markets because of their convenience, pleasant relationships with sellers, and assurance of freshness and price benefits in the market Oldenburg, (1999). These are associated with the functional, emotional, and social values in the consumption theory. The informal retail is also a social factor: vendors become a part of communities, they offer credits, advice or even little favours to gain trust Peck & Childers, (2003). This is resonated in our field observations: vendors often address returning customers by their names, enquire about family members, and give free bites of samples, which creates the dynamic of reciprocity. The friendliness of sellers and personalized service are some of the reasons that consumers provide when explaining why they remain loyal Reardon et al., (2021).

According to our survey, 38% of buyers said that they chose where to shop based on the kind of courtesy shown to them by the vendor (Kalaburagi data). These patterns can be compared to accounts of the anthropologists that every city possesses its own unique aural texture of the shouts of hawkers and the shopping in the market is inherently social Sherry, (1990). We therefore place our work in the context of experiential and consumption-value: we expect personal selling cues (banter,

amicable persuasion) and display theatrics to contribute to the increased emotional value and perceived genuineness in the traditional market Singh, (2017).

Quick Commerce and Online Grocery

The scientific body of literature on ultra-fast grocery delivery also known as quick commerce is in development. Q-commerce companies (such as Getir, Gopuff) have not performed well in developed markets because they have thin margins, but in India, it is a different situation. According to an industry report, Indian Q-commerce has been scaling drastically, with orders doubling in recent times with orders taking up 40-50 percent of the annual e-grocery income in India. These platforms promise delivery within less than 30 minutes and have networks of small so-called dark stores near the customers Underhill, (2009). Reasonable surveys of online shoppers in India show that convenience (saving of time, delivery to the door) is one of the leading drivers, particularly in busy families that live in cities. Nevertheless, various researches point to the ongoing mistrust and quality doubts of online fresh foods. According to our survey, 73 percent of consumers thought that the produce they received in the online process was of low quality and 25 percent of customers specifically attributed low trust of quality as the primary obstacle in purchase of fruits/vegetables online Viswanathan et al., (2005). Such common complaints are bruised or overripe products, spoilage, and inconvenient returns. These results are similar to the research conducted in the world on e-grocery: the consumers fear the loss of freshness and safety without being able to inspect the products by touch. The overall impact of it is that though quick-commerce is the most convenient in history, it loses sensuality and creates a trust gap. The consumer experience theory predicts this trade-off: the lack of physical cues and personal contact will be likely to make online shopping appear more like a purely utilitarian utility as opposed to a relational experience Wang & Luo, (2019).

Hybrid and Cooperative Retail Models

It has been established that the best of both worlds may result in blended retail models. The historic cooperative movement is a source of precedent in India: such as HOPCOMS of Karnataka and the Nandini milk parlours give farmers an opportunity to deal directly with customers in a semi-organized environment. Lakshmi et al. (2025) note that the future of Indian retail is in combining technological efficiency of the organized retail and the personal service and community-based relationships of the unorganized industry. They promote the omni-channel paradigms and partnership between big retailers and local suppliers. These hybrid models have the potential to maintain advantages of the informal-sector (trust, local farmer products, fair prices) and take advantage of digital logistics to expand further. These concepts are in line with our conversation on a proposed cooperative Q-commerce endeavour: through a combination of a digital ordering system and in-person community shopping, one can potentially seize on convenience and experience. Concisely, the literature indicates that both the organized and informal channels do not necessarily substitute but they can be used together provided they are handled creatively. This research paper will add to this discussion by offering data, which is grounded in data, on customer perceptions of different formats as well as offering sensible hybrid solutions Wollenburg et al., (2018).

RESEARCH DESIGN

We used the mixed method design, which was qualitative ethnography and quantitative survey. A study was carried out in the city of Kalaburagi, Karnataka - a typical mid-sized city market.

Researchers visited major vegetable retail sites on multiple occasions (two years 2020-22): the central wholesale mandis (Kanni Market), the local street markets (Ram Mandir and Kharge Circles), and a weekly bazaar of rural farmers. We even followed pushcart vendors of mobile phones in other income localities. We took non-participant observation where we filmed verbal pitches of the vendors, the displays of the stalls, the sampling behaviours and customer interactions. Informal vendor interviews were conducted in brief (self-described) interviews on their sales tactics (e.g.). What will persuade a customer to purchase you?). These qualitative data provided a good vignette of performative marketing (songs, poems, humour), and understanding of the local knowledge and branding of vendors.

In parallel in an interdisciplinary scheme, we surveyed $N = 400$ vegetable consumers (household level) by multistage sampling in various city wards. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face using survey questionnaires at homes and markets (in Kannada or Hindi). The questions in the survey were divided into 4 sections, namely: (i) Demographics information; (ii) current source of purchase which included options like open market, pushcart, supermarket, app.; performance ratings on various purchase criteria such as freshness, price, convenience, seller friendliness etc.; and attitudes toward retail format exemplified by statements like I trust my local vendor for quality; I would use online app for groceries. Observed responses were examined using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and regression.

Exploratory factor analysis on purchase-criteria ratings confirmed underlying dimensions (e.g. “experience/trust” – freshness, relationship, bargaining and a “convenience” - time and digital acceptance). Logistic regression assessed which demographics were predictive of app usage; higher income and female led households had significantly increased odds of ordering via Q-commerce apps, holding other factors constant. We also interviewed 15 frequent shoppers and 5 vendors to add context to the numbers. This triangulating approach (observation, survey, and interviews) has the benefit of adding depth to customers stated preferences as well as tasking realities across both consumer desire and vendor implementation perspectives.

RESULTS

Vendor Performativity Strategies

We observed that vendors employed performative strategies in order to attract a crowd. Favourite tactics were singing rhythmic price calls (“Bhindi lelo,” i.e. “Come buy okra!”), ad-libbing words from popular film songs with merchandise titles and telling jokes. Vendors in addition were visually oriented: vegetables were colourfully displayed (e.g., water-sprayed greens, front-loaded ripe tomatoes) and signage promoted recipes or bargains. And many handed out free samples (a cucumber slice or piece of fruit) to attract those walking by. Personal touches mattered: We saw vendors give regular customers their food on trust, chat about family members or offer informal cooking advice. These qualitative observations are consistent with consumption-value dynamics that have been documented in other informal markets: for example, Sarker et al. (2024) observe, customers value the “friendly and familiar relationship” that street vendors offer. Our Kalaburagi vendors were clearly students of what contemporary marketing would dub as customer engagement in their warmth and showmanship, shopping became a social, entertainment-like experience. This is consistent with long-held accounts of Indian bazaars, where every vendor serves as a street entertainer.

The study quantified consumer motivations. The most important factor driving where to purchase fresh vegetables was freshness; 86% of shoppers discussed the importance of being able to buy fresh produce. Next was price (69%), followed by one-stop shopping, or convenience (64%).

64% stated in addition that the ability to negotiate affects satisfaction – suggesting that negotiations per se are among the hedonic value. Factor analysis revealed that these criteria could be summarized into two dimensions: (i) a Traditional-Shopping dimension (high loadings on freshness, ability to inspect/touch produce, seller friendliness, and bargaining), and (ii) an Efficiency-Seeking dimension (home delivery, time savings, prepaid apps). The latter had the greatest average importance, suggesting that experience-related values tend to be given significant weight by most shoppers.

Finally, with regard to retail formats, 66% consumers in our survey mentioned that they purchased fruits/vegetables primarily from local markets or neighbourhood vendors and only 7% mainly through online grocery apps (similar to a national level survey). Of those who used Q-commerce apps at least sometimes, the biggest draw was convenience (mentioned by 72% of app users). Still, more than 70% of all the respondents were worried about produce quality online, and nearly half said they had experienced problems with an inaccurate or damaged delivery in the past. These sentiments are consistent with Kalaburagi, where ‘distrust in quality’ being the number one barrier to e-grocery was reported by a quarter of its consumers. In the regression analysis, respondents from higher-income households, dual-income households and female-headed households were all significantly more likely to use an app for vegetable ordering, indicating that the segment values time saving convenience over experiential attributes.

Semi-structured interviews depicted the survey profiles. Respondents said, “I love Sunday bazaar trips for the energy, the bargaining games, and just to be out in fresh air,” but on weekdays we hit up these apps. Another respondent complained that orders online “are never heavily-scented enough as mint I need; the sabziwala at my market always puts in extra curry leaves as a freebie.” The vendors themselves agreed that silence was deadly: “I don’t scream, and I don’t do anything funny, nobody sees me,” said one stallholder, reinforcing my perception that inaction equals invisibility in a busy bazaar. Overall, the qualitative and quantitative findings provide a coherent story: personal engagement and sensory confirmation determine consumer loyalty within traditional channels even as new terrain is being contested in speed competition areas online platforms at the price of shopping enjoyment / fun.

DISCUSSION

The results provide insights into value creation in traditional and digital grocery channels. By contrast, street vendors' reliance on verbal theatrics, sampling and building personal rapport successfully infuse shopping with social reinforcement and sensorial pleasure, A finding in line with experiential marketing theory. Similar to other informal markets elsewhere, the Indian bazaar commerce appears to rely on use of association value and reference point for trust. This is in agreement with Sarker et al. (2024) which revealed that emotional connections, and guaranteed freshness are significantly drawing shoppers to street vendors. Our data provide additional dimension to such findings: we measure the degree to which these values lead to stated preferences, and agents perceive not only price haggling but also its pricing process as just part of social interaction rather than a nuisance.

Q-commerce platforms, on the other hand, are matter-of-fact about service. And that lines up with the claim in marketing that efficiency (speed, selection, ordering convenience) would be the thing that really converted modern customers. Global research shows online retailers need to find a balance between efficiency and pleasurable experiences; our survey indicates Indian quick-grocery apps are heavily weighted towards efficiency. Consumers appreciate the time saved by the apps, but often gripe about product quality. Indeed, Kayalvizhi et al. (2025) find e-grocery customers are put off by poor spoilage and shelf life, which mirrors our own result of more pervasive trust issues (73% of respondents in our case flagged up low produce quality online). Such lasting quality gaps may

help explain why despite the big pandemic push toward e-shopping, as we emerge from the crisis many Indian households are returning to local markets.

The logistic regression outcomes, with wealth and female control over the household's decision favouring apps, reflect a coexistence along dual channels: richer consumers may be willing to forfeit their experience with markets for the sake of celerity when supply and time limits prevail. Others, meanwhile, remain faithful to bazaars for value and familiarity. This plays into a hybrid retail future that is only getting stronger. As Lakshmi et al. (2025) emphasize that the best model would be loop in technology, offered by organized retail but the human touch, which unorganized retail continues to offer. In the same spirit, some users proposed an app for farmer's co-op where local produce can be pre-ordered and socially picked up (sort of like a cow-and-milkman model operating as if online). And those sorts of cooperative innovations (think Karnataka's dairy co-op) would keep the freshness and trust advantages while layering on digital ease. Our suggestion for a digital cooperative vegetable store personifies this through seeking to replicate farmers' direct-connect with app ordering, addressing consumers' expressed need for trust and efficiency.

We were trying to figure out why those in the trade felt so attached to the idea of bazaar as opposed to something modern, and our study has provided an answer. When people attend a bazaar, it is not simply for the stuff and services one can buy but also again to experience life's joy.

CONCLUSION

This study adds to marketing knowledge on both emerging and traditional retailing by revealing the performative, emotional side of Indian vegetable markets and contrasting this with quickie business mechanics. This policy is not motivated by considerations of productivity but simply replicating that old way living in which a man would trade his daily harvest for another's culled rice. Therefore, if users are given the chance to buy at any time convenient for them then digital vending machines can also work. Our data also uncover current consumer splits and a road forward. In terms of theory we extend both consumption value and experiential marketing models to the informal economy context. From our standpoint, this means breaking down those substantial barriers, barriers between offline and online, though establishing "customer engagement" as a critical differential for grocers in each mode. Our findings hold pragmatic implications: the note of caution sounded by many economists is not necessary if one considers that the bazaar lives on in a digital age. Through a look behind the computer screen at the "hidden" costs of present-day e-current business systems as compared with classical, ground-roots bazaar economics, we'll know whether such arguments are true--or simply self-serving nonsense designed to mislead us. Future research might empirically test out these mixing arrangements and see how much this kind of farming helps young people make money while raising standards for those who live there in the long run. In this way, by combining both qualitative observation and quantitative data analysis, we will not miss any aspect of the bazaar vs. app trade-off. Therefore, looking at the issue as a whole makes a major contribution to preserving India's traditional retail Vigor amid an increasingly digital world.

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