

The Rise of Ten-Minute Delivery Apps in India

At the click of a button, a carton of milk, a bag of chips, or even a last-minute coriander bush for dinner appears at the doorstep - sometimes in less time than it takes to brew a cup of tea. The era of ten-minute grocery delivery is upon India, and consumers are lapping up the convenience. But behind the lightning-fast service lies a complex web of logistical prowess, worker struggles, and evolving consumer habits.

India's quick commerce industry's Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) surged from \$500 million in 2021-22 to \$3.3 billion in 2023-24, marking a nearly 280% increase. Leading platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart are redefining urban convenience, using hyperlocal dark stores, AI-driven inventory management, and an army of gig workers.

For many urban consumers, ten-minute delivery apps have become indispensable. Rishab Sharma, an avid user explains how he used to buy groceries monthly from wholesale markets or roadside *bazaars*, but now everything is just one app away. While the ease of it is unmatched, his weekly uddet has taken a hit - frequent small orders adding up over time. "I block these apps sometimes just to avoid impulse spending," he admits.

The quick commerce industry thrives on cutting-edge supply chain innovations. Ajay Tomar, a supply chain expert, states how real-time traffic patterns and predictive stocking based on tracking customer data, ensure that the most in-demand products are always within reach, optimizing costs. "Apps like Zepto focus on the hyper-local market, which helps in reducing delivery distances, leading to lower last-mile costs and quicker delivery. Inventory levels are closely aligned with consumer demand, minimizing excess inventory holding costs and stockout situations," he says.

Despite its appeal, this speed comes with compromises. Some users report discrepancies in product quality, with fruits arriving bruised or rotten, and frozen items melting before arrival. Others feel manipulated into ordering more than necessary. Amogh Bankar, a regular user, points out that the sheer availability of products makes impulse purchases almost inevitable. At the same time, his trust in the platforms remains strong because of their responsive customer service. “Most of the time, these issues get resolved quickly on the chatbox and customer support offered by the company. Therefore, I still trust blindly most of the time that my product will be okay in all aspects,” he explains.

The reality for delivery workers and dark store employees tells a different story, and the conditions behind the scenes can be gruelling. Dasagani Ramesh, a delivery driver in Hyderabad, describes a harsh pay structure. “Minimum pay per order is ₹15 (\$0.18), so average was like ₹85 (\$1) per hour”, he said. With no options to reject orders, delays, often caused by slow packing at stores, are blamed on the riders, who receive no compensation for the setbacks.

Even inside the dark stores, efficiency is prioritized over everything else. Bankar, who has also worked as an “order picker” at Blinkit, described the intensity of the job. Orders flood in, and workers must race against timers, packing items at intense speed. The app gamifies the experience, rewarding workers who meet aggressive packing targets while offering little to those who fall short. “If you pack 20 orders in two hours, you reach checkpoint number one. If you pack 40 orders, you reach checkpoint number three, and each has different amounts of money you get,” he explains.

Now, consumers are finally starting to recognize the limitations. “I will be honest that this model of these quick delivery apps doesn’t look good for the long term. “Not everyone is willing to pay extra for convenience, at least not yet,” Sharma mentions.

For now, India's ten-minute delivery market continues to flourish, fuelled by the country's rapid urbanization and increasing digital adoption. But as competition heats up and profitability remains elusive, companies may have to rethink their approach.

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