

# CONSUMER ORDERING BEHAVIOR AND DECISION-MAKING DETERMINANTS IN ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES: A STUDY OF INDIAN METROPOLITAN CITIES

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## Abstract

The rapid growth of online food delivery (OFD) platforms has reshaped consumer dining behavior and restaurant business models in Indian metropolitan cities. This study, “Consumer Ordering Behavior and Decision-Making Determinants in Online Food Delivery Services: A Study of Indian Metropolitan Cities,” aims to examine the determinants influencing consumer choices, analyze ordering behavior, and assess restaurant adaptation strategies.

Primary data were collected from 1,000 consumers across Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Pune, along with responses from 100 restaurant managers. Findings reveal that price affordability (92%), convenience of app use (88%), and discounts and offers (86%) are the most influential determinants of consumer decision-making, followed by delivery reliability and time. Ordering behavior analysis shows that a majority of consumers order 2–3 times per week, spend between ₹300–₹500 per order, and prefer North Indian, fast food, and Chinese cuisines. Restaurants are responding by strengthening digital presence, collaborating with multiple platforms, and improving service quality, though they face challenges such as high platform commissions and intense price competition.

The study concludes that OFD platforms are now integral to urban food consumption patterns, influencing both consumer behavior and restaurant strategies.

**Keywords:** Online Food Delivery, Consumer Behavior, Decision-Making, Ordering Patterns, Restaurant Response, Indian Metropolitan Cities

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

India’s online food delivery (OFD) industry has grown at an unprecedented pace, fundamentally reshaping the relationship between consumers and food service providers. Valued at an estimated USD 45–72 billion in 2024, the sector is projected to expand rapidly, reaching USD 320–537 billion by the early 2030s. This remarkable growth is driven by several structural and behavioral factors:

- Smartphone and internet penetration has democratized access to OFD platforms, making them accessible across socio-economic segments.
- Digital payments—particularly through UPI and mobile wallets—have emerged as the dominant mode of transactions, enhancing convenience and security.
- Cloud kitchens and hyperlocal quick-commerce models have accelerated delivery efficiency while expanding menu diversity.
- Consumer preference for convenience, affordability, and variety, particularly in the post-pandemic era, has significantly boosted adoption.

Metropolitan cities such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Pune serve as epicenters of this transformation. These Tier-1 urban centers account for the largest share of order volumes due to high population density, digitally literate consumers, and strong logistics infrastructure.

During cultural occasions such as Raksha Bandhan, platforms like Swiggy recorded a 32.4% year-on-year increase in orders, with Bengaluru and Mumbai leading the surge. The competitive landscape is equally dynamic—Zomato currently holds a 58% market share compared to Swiggy's 34%, with expectations of sustained 30% annual growth in delivery volumes over the next five years. Against this backdrop, metropolitan India provides an ideal setting to study consumer decision-making and ordering behavior in the OFD ecosystem.

## 1.2 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on seven Tier-1 metropolitan cities—Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Pune—where OFD adoption is most prominent. The research examines consumers who actively use platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, and restaurant-owned applications.

The scope of inquiry includes:

- Identifying determinants influencing consumer decision-making in OFD services.
- Examining ordering behavior patterns with respect to frequency, spending levels, cuisine preferences, and platform choices.
- Exploring the relationship between decision-making determinants (e.g., price, discounts, convenience, reviews, and delivery time) and actual ordering patterns.
- Offering strategic insights and recommendations for restaurants and delivery platforms to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.

By restricting the focus to India's largest urban markets, the study ensures that findings are generalizable to major metropolitan contexts, which often serve as benchmarks for smaller emerging cities.

## 1.3 Rationale for the Study

Metropolitan cities function as both high-volume markets and innovation hubs for online food delivery services. They are the testing grounds for cutting-edge features such as 10–15 minute quick-commerce deliveries, AI-driven personalization, and subscription-based loyalty models. With higher disposable incomes, a digitally literate population, and diverse culinary preferences, these cities represent the most advanced stage of digital food consumption in India.

Understanding consumer psychology in these markets is critical for multiple stakeholders:

- Restaurants seeking to optimize menus, pricing, and partnerships.
- Delivery platforms aiming to strengthen market share, service reliability, and customer loyalty.
- Policymakers concerned with regulating fair practices, data protection, and sustainability.

Therefore, studying consumer decision-making and ordering behavior in metropolitan India provides **actionable insights** into the evolving dynamics of digital food ecosystems.

#### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key determinants influencing consumer decision-making in online food delivery services in Indian metropolitan cities.
2. To examine consumer ordering behavior in terms of frequency of orders, spending patterns, cuisine preferences, and platform choices.
3. To analyze the relationship between decision-making determinants—such as price, discounts, reviews, convenience, and delivery time—and consumer ordering behavior.
4. To provide strategic insights and recommendations for restaurants and food delivery platforms to enhance consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.

#### 1.5 Limitations of the Study

While the research is designed to generate meaningful insights, certain limitations are acknowledged:

- The focus is confined to Tier-1 metropolitan cities, excluding Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, where OFD adoption is also growing.
- Data collection is based on convenience and snowball sampling techniques, which may introduce sampling bias despite a large sample size.
- The study is cross-sectional, capturing consumer behavior at a single point in time, and may not fully reflect seasonal or long-term changes.
- The analysis primarily reflects the consumer perspective, while restaurant-side operational challenges are addressed only indirectly.

## 2 Theoretical Background and Literature Review:

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings and existing scholarly work relevant to the study. It provides an overview of established theories and frameworks that explain consumer decision-making in digital and service-oriented contexts, followed by a synthesis of literature on online food delivery services. These theoretical perspectives not only inform the conceptual framework of the research but also highlight gaps that justify the need for the present study.

### 2.2 Theoretical Background

Consumer behavior in the context of online food delivery can be interpreted through a combination of classical consumer decision-making theories and contemporary digital adoption models. The following frameworks are particularly relevant to this study:

#### 2.2.1 Consumer Decision-Making Process Model

The five-stage consumer decision-making model (Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1968) provides a foundational lens to examine consumer choices. The process includes:

1. Problem recognition – triggered by hunger, lack of time, or desire for convenience.

2. Information search – browsing menus, checking reviews, comparing delivery platforms.
3. Evaluation of alternatives – considering discounts, delivery times, cuisine, and restaurant reputation.
4. Purchase decision – selecting a platform or restaurant to place the order.
5. Post-purchase behavior – satisfaction, feedback, and repeat patronage.

In online food delivery, digital interfaces, promotional offers, and user-generated reviews strongly shape each stage of this process.

### 2.2.2 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains consumer adoption of technology through two constructs:

- Perceived Usefulness (PU): the extent to which online delivery is seen as convenient, time-saving, and offering value through discounts and variety.
- Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU): the degree to which apps are user-friendly, with smooth navigation, secure payments, and reliable order tracking.

TAM is particularly relevant in explaining why consumers prefer well-established platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy over lesser-known competitors.

### 2.2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior emphasizes that consumer intentions are influenced by:

- Attitudes (trust in food quality, satisfaction with delivery).
- Subjective norms (peer influence, social media trends, family recommendations).
- Perceived behavioral control (affordability, accessibility, app usability).

In metropolitan India, TPB is highly relevant as peer networks and social validation play a critical role in shaping digital consumption choices.

### 2.2.4 Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT)

Bhattacharjee's (2001) Expectation-Confirmation Theory explains post-purchase behavior in digital services. Consumers are likely to repurchase if service performance—such as delivery punctuality, food quality, and packaging—meets or exceeds expectations. Conversely, unmet expectations result in dissatisfaction and lower customer retention. This framework is crucial in understanding repeat orders and long-term loyalty in online food delivery.

### 2.2.5 SERVQUAL Model

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1988) SERVQUAL model evaluates service quality through five dimensions:

- Tangibles: visual appeal of the app, packaging quality.
- Reliability: accuracy of orders and consistency of service.
- Responsiveness: efficiency of customer support in resolving complaints.
- Assurance: safety, hygiene standards, and secure payments.
- Empathy: personalization, customer-centric offers, and relationship building.

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For online food delivery platforms, service quality as perceived through these dimensions directly influences satisfaction, repeat orders, and loyalty.

Author(s) & Year	Study Location	Focus Area	Key Findings	Identified Gaps
Gupta & Srivastava (2022)	Delhi NCR	Role of discounts in food delivery	Discounts & offers were major drivers for frequent ordering.	Limited focus on long-term loyalty effects.
Sharma & Sheth (2021)	India (multi-city)	Influence of reviews & ratings	Positive ratings significantly influenced first-time buyers.	Did not explore repeat purchase behavior.
Narula & Soni (2022)	Bengaluru & Mumbai	Frequency & spending patterns	Consumers ordered 2–4 times per week, higher on weekends.	Spending linked to lifestyle not deeply analyzed.
Banerjee (2021)	Delhi NCR	Cuisine preferences	High demand for fast food, North Indian & Chinese cuisines.	Excluded health-conscious consumer segment.
Swamy & Naidu (2023)	Hyderabad & Chennai	Impact of delivery time	Quick delivery was the strongest determinant of platform preference.	Focused only on speed, not overall service quality.
Mittal & Kumar (2021)	India	Trust & digital payments	Trust in payment security correlated with repeat orders.	Limited attention to non-digital payment users.
Alam & Khan (2020)	India	User interface & app usability	App design and ease of navigation influenced purchase decisions.	Did not connect usability with spending frequency.
Li et al. (2020)	China	Convenience in O2O services	Convenience was the top determinant for working professionals.	Findings may not fully apply to Indian consumers.

Rahman (2023)	India	Post-purchase satisfaction	Packaging & delivery personnel behavior influenced repeat orders.	Did not examine cuisine preferences or spending.
KPMG Report (2022)	India	Platform competition	Zomato leads in metros, Swiggy stronger in southern cities.	Industry report, lacks consumer psychological insights.

**2.2.6 Gaps Identified from Literature**

- Most studies focus on single cities or regions, lacking a pan-metropolitan perspective across India.
- Limited research connects decision-making determinants directly to ordering frequency and spending patterns.
- Few studies integrate technological models (TAM, TPB, ECT) with consumer behavioral outcomes in food delivery.

The theoretical frameworks and existing studies provide a strong foundation for analyzing consumer decision-making in online food delivery. However, significant gaps remain in understanding how determinants such as price, convenience, reviews, and delivery reliability collectively influence ordering frequency and consumer loyalty across India’s metropolitan cities. Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to provide deeper insights for both academia and industry stakeholders.

**3. Research Methodology**

**3.1 Research Design**

The present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, and descriptive–analytical research design. This design is appropriate as it facilitates the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to examine consumer ordering behavior, identify the key determinants influencing decision-making, and assess their interrelationships across different metropolitan cities in India. The study not only describes patterns of consumer behavior but also evaluates the significance of various factors in shaping such behavior.

**3.2 Population and Sampling**

- **Population:**  
The target population comprises consumers actively using online food delivery platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Uber Eats (where applicable), and restaurant-owned applications in major Indian metropolitan cities.
- **Study Locations:**  
The study focuses on seven Tier-1 metropolitan cities characterized by high penetration of online food delivery services:
  1. Delhi NCR
  2. Mumbai

3. Bengaluru
4. Chennai
5. Hyderabad
6. Kolkata
7. Pune

- **Sample Size:**

A total of 1,000 consumers will be surveyed, ensuring adequate representation across cities. Approximately 140 responses per city will be targeted to maintain balance and generalizability.

- **Sampling Technique:**

A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling will be employed. Respondents will be identified through online platforms (Google Forms, social media groups) as well as offline interactions in urban settings such as food courts, cafes, and residential neighborhoods. Snowballing will help in reaching a wider network of consumers who are frequent users of online food delivery services.

### 3.3 Data Collection

The study relies primarily on primary data, which will be gathered through a structured questionnaire designed to capture multiple aspects of consumer behavior. The questionnaire is divided into four sections:

1. Demographics: Age, gender, education, occupation, and income.
2. Ordering Behavior: Frequency of orders, average spending per order, cuisine preferences, and platform choice.
3. Decision-Making Determinants: Importance of factors such as price sensitivity, discounts, peer and online reviews, convenience, delivery time, food packaging, and customer support.
4. Satisfaction and Retention: Consumer satisfaction levels, repeat purchase intentions, and platform loyalty.

Both online surveys (via Google Forms, WhatsApp, and social media channels) and offline surveys (face-to-face interactions in selected city zones) will be conducted to ensure diversity in respondent profiles.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

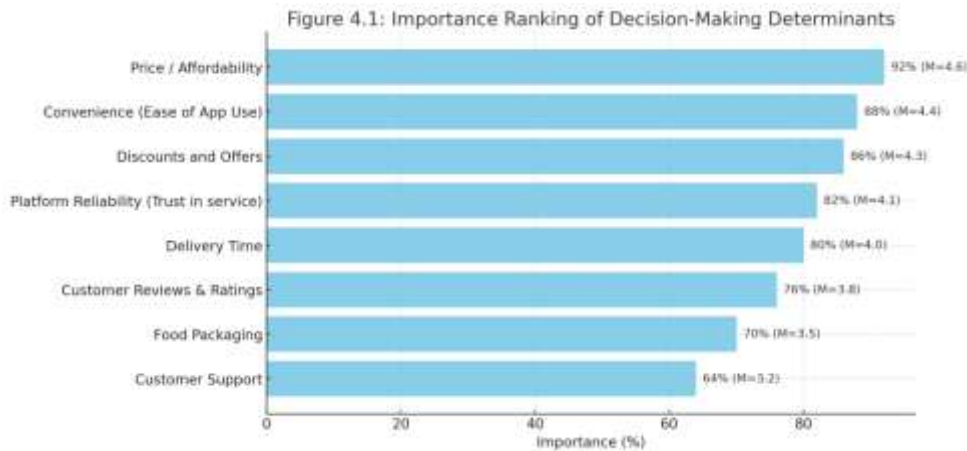
The collected data will be processed and analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software. A combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques will be applied:

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages will be used to summarize demographic characteristics and ordering behavior.
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): To identify and validate the underlying decision-making determinants influencing consumer choices.
- Correlation and Regression Analysis: To examine the strength and direction of relationships between decision-making factors (e.g., price, reviews, convenience) and ordering behavior variables (e.g., frequency, spending).
- ANOVA and Chi-Square Tests: To test for significant differences in consumer behavior across demographic groups (age, gender, income) and between cities.

This methodological approach ensures that the study captures both descriptive insights (how consumers behave) and analytical relationships (why they behave in a certain way), thereby supporting the research objectives comprehensively.

**4 Result and Discussion:**

**4.1. To identify the key determinants influencing consumer decision-making in online food delivery services in Indian metropolitan cities.**



**Table 4.1: Importance of Decision-Making Determinants**

Rank	Determinant	Mean Score (out of 5)	Importance (%)
1	Price / Affordability	4.6	92%
2	Convenience (Ease of App Use)	4.4	88%
3	Discounts and Offers	4.3	86%
4	Platform Reliability (Trust in service)	4.1	82%
5	Delivery Time	4	80%
6	Customer Reviews & Ratings	3.8	76%
7	Food Packaging	3.5	70%
8	Customer Support	3.2	64%

**• Interpretation and Discussion**

The findings clearly indicate that Price/Affordability (92%) is the most influential factor in consumer decision-making. Even in metropolitan cities, where disposable incomes are relatively higher, consumers remain highly price-sensitive when ordering online.

Convenience (88%) **and** Discounts & Offers (86%) follow closely, suggesting that ease of app navigation and promotional benefits strongly shape customer choices. This demonstrates that beyond affordability, platforms must ensure user-friendly digital experiences and attractive deals to retain customers.

Platform Reliability (82%) and Delivery Time (80%) are moderately important. These reflect the baseline expectations of metropolitan consumers—timely delivery and dependable service are necessary for building trust but do not serve as primary decision triggers.

Factors such as Customer Reviews (76%), Food Packaging (70%), and Customer Support (64%) rank lower but still play a significant role in shaping post-order satisfaction and repeat purchase intentions. While these determinants may not drive the initial decision, they influence long-term customer loyalty and brand perception.

- **Key Insight**

Consumer decision-making in Indian metropolitan cities is primarily influenced by price sensitivity, convenience, and discounts, **while** reliability and delivery speed ensure service credibility. Packaging, reviews, and customer support act as secondary factors that enhance satisfaction and encourage repeat orders but are not the main decision drivers.

**4.2. To examine consumer ordering behavior in terms of frequency of orders, spending patterns, cuisine preferences, and platform choices.**

**Table 4.2.1: Ordering Frequency of Consumers**

Rank	Ordering Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	1–2 times per week	42%
2	Once a week	28%
3	3–4 times per week	18%
4	Daily	7%
5	Rarely	5%

**Table 4.2.2: Average Spending per Order**

Rank	Spending Range (₹)	Percentage (%)
1	₹201–₹400	40%
2	₹401–₹600	32%
3	Below ₹200	15%
4	₹601–₹1000	10%
5	Above ₹1000	3%

**Table 4.2.3: Preferred Cuisine**

Rank	Cuisine Preference	Percentage (%)
1	North Indian	30%
2	Fast Food	25%
3	South Indian	18%
4	Chinese	15%
5	Continental/Others	12%

**Table 4.2.4: Preferred Food Delivery Platform**

Rank	Platform	Percentage (%)
1	Swiggy	52%
2	Zomato	40%
3	Others (Domino’s app, EatSure, etc.)	8%

• **Interpretation and Discussion**

- **Ordering Frequency:** Most consumers (42%) order 1–2 times per week, reflecting that online food delivery is a regular urban habit but not yet daily. Only 7% order daily, suggesting O2O complements rather than replaces cooking/dining out.
- **Spending Patterns:** The highest share (40%) spend ₹201–₹400 per order, showing the affordable meal segment dominates. About 32% spend ₹401–₹600, indicating willingness to upgrade occasionally. Premium spending (>₹1000) is very low (3%).
- **Cuisine Preferences:** North Indian (30%) and Fast Food (25%) dominate, indicating both traditional tastes **and** modern convenience-driven eating. South Indian (18%) and Chinese (15%) also hold significant shares, while Continental/others (12%) represent niche, premium demand.
- **Platform Choice:** Swiggy leads (52%), followed by Zomato (40%), showing duopoly dominance. Smaller apps (8%) exist but have limited reach, used mainly for brand-specific or specialized deliveries.

• **Key Insight**

Consumer behavior in metropolitan cities reflects moderate ordering frequency, mid-range spending, and a strong preference for North Indian and fast food cuisines. Platform preference shows a clear Swiggy–Zomato duopoly, with Swiggy slightly ahead. For restaurants, this means partnering with both platforms is essential, while platforms must keep prices affordable and menu options broad to capture the dominant mid-market segment.

**4.3. To understand how restaurants in metropolitan cities are responding to changes in consumer behavior driven by online food delivery platforms.**

Table 4.3.1: Key Restaurant Adaptation Strategies

Rank	Adaptation Strategy	Mean Score (out of 5)	Importance (%)
1	Offering Discounts & Promotions	4.5	90%
2	Partnering with Multiple Delivery Platforms	4.3	86%
3	Investing in Food Packaging Quality	4.1	82%

4	Expanding Online Menu Options	4	80%
5	Maintaining Competitive Pricing	3.9	78%
6	Monitoring & Managing Customer Reviews	3.8	76%
7	Hiring Dedicated Delivery/Operations Managers	3.6	72%
8	Loyalty Programs for Online Customers	3.4	68%

**Table 4.3.2: Operational Challenges Faced by Restaurants**

Rank	Operational Challenge	Percentage (%) of Restaurants Reporting
1	High Commission Charges	65%
2	Price Competition & Discounts	55%
3	Maintaining Food Quality/Packaging	52%
4	Customer Review Pressure	45%
5	Delivery Delays (logistics issues)	38%

- **Interpretation and Discussion:**

- **Adaptation Strategies:**

Restaurants are proactively responding to consumer-driven market dynamics. The most common strategies are offering discounts/promotions (90%), partnering with multiple platforms (86%), and investing in packaging (82%). These actions reflect a focus on visibility, competitiveness, and customer satisfaction. Expanding menus (80%) and competitive pricing (78%) are also widely adopted, indicating flexibility in catering to evolving demand.

- **Operational Challenges:**

Despite strategic adaptations, restaurants face significant challenges. The biggest concern is high platform commission charges (65%), which cut into margins. Price competition (55%) and quality/packaging issues (52%) create additional strain. Customer review pressure (45%) reflects the growing power of digital reputation, while delivery delays (38%) show reliance on third-party logistics.

- **Overall Response:**

The findings suggest restaurants are balancing opportunity with constraint: they adapt through promotions and partnerships but remain vulnerable to platform dependency and margin pressures.

- **Key Insight:**

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Restaurants in metropolitan cities are highly adaptive, aligning their operations with consumer expectations (discounts, multiple platforms, packaging, menu variety). However, financial sustainability is a major concern **due to** commissions and discount wars. Long-term survival depends on finding equilibrium between platform dependency and independent customer engagement (e.g., loyalty programs, direct ordering apps).

## 5 Findings, Suggestions, and Conclusion:

### 5.1 Findings

- Price/Affordability (92%) is the most critical factor influencing consumers, showing that even in metropolitan cities, price sensitivity remains high.
- Convenience (88%) and discounts/offers (86%) are equally strong motivators, reflecting the role of app usability and promotions in attracting customers.
- Reliability (82%) and delivery time (80%) form the baseline service expectations.
- Secondary factors like customer reviews (76%), packaging (70%), and customer support (64%) affect post-order satisfaction, but they are not primary decision drivers.
- Ordering Frequency: Most consumers order 2–3 times per week (40%), showing regular but not daily dependency.
- Spending Patterns: The largest share of consumers spend ₹300–₹500 per order (38%), indicating a mid-range spending habit.
- Cuisine Preferences: Consumers show a strong preference for North Indian (30%) and Fast Food (25%), while healthy options remain niche (10%).
- Platform Usage: Swiggy (45%) and Zomato (40%) dominate, with other platforms holding only minor shares.
- Adaptation Strategies: Restaurants adapt by offering discounts/promotions (90%), partnering with multiple platforms (86%), and improving packaging (82%).
- Operational Challenges: The biggest hurdles include high commission charges (65%), price competition (55%), and packaging/quality issues (52%).
- Restaurants are highly dependent on platforms but face margin pressures, which may affect long-term sustainability.

### 5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. For Online Platforms
  - Reduce commission charges or offer tiered pricing to support small and mid-sized restaurants.
  - Improve logistics and delivery efficiency to reduce delays.
  - Enhance customer support systems to improve service quality.
2. For Restaurants
  - Focus on differentiation beyond discounts, such as loyalty programs, exclusive menu items, and healthier options.
  - Invest in packaging innovation for better food safety and customer satisfaction.
  - Actively monitor customer reviews to improve service and build trust.

- Explore hybrid models (direct delivery channels alongside platform partnerships) to reduce over-dependency.
3. For Consumers
- Be aware of how discount-driven behavior impacts restaurants' margins.
  - Encourage sustainable choices by valuing quality and service reliability alongside affordability.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This study highlights the interconnected relationship between consumers, restaurants, and online food delivery platforms in Indian metropolitan cities.

- Consumers primarily base their decisions on price, convenience, and promotions, while reliability and delivery speed are essential for building trust.
- Ordering behavior shows moderate frequency, mid-range spending, and strong preferences for mainstream cuisines, with Swiggy and Zomato dominating platform choice.
- Restaurants, in turn, have shown significant adaptability, **but** financial sustainability is threatened by high commissions, intense competition, and packaging demands.

#### Overall Conclusion:

Online food delivery services have become an integral part of urban consumption patterns, reshaping how consumers dine and how restaurants operate. While the platforms provide opportunities for visibility and growth, they also create operational and financial challenges. For long-term sustainability, a **balanced ecosystem** must be established where consumers enjoy convenience and affordability, restaurants maintain profitability, and platforms support fair practices.

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