

Pioneering Food Delivery in the Aftermath of a Global Pandemic: A Case Study of Zomato and Swiggy

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ABSTRACT

The Indian unicorns in the food delivery sector, Swiggy and Zomato, have seen tremendous growth in recent years. This success is attributed to not only their service innovation but also to their exemplary marketing strategies. These companies stand as an inspiration for many upcoming startups. This article gives an insight into the overall market scenarios of the food delivery sector with a special focus on Swiggy and Zomato and their growth trajectories. With delivery services currently being seen as a hotbed for investments, certain fundamental lessons emerge from these two technology-based delivery services, especially in the context of the uncertainty brought about by a pandemic and its aftermath. Focus has also been given to specific practices adopted by Zomato and Swiggy during the pandemic era, that set the tone for their future growth.

Keywords: Food delivery; Swiggy; Zomato; Marketing; Services.

1.0 Introduction

The Indian food delivery market is huge. Many people have become habituated to ordering food online. The sector has experienced immense growth in recent years. As of 2019, the organized Indian food market that includes restaurants was worth \$22 billion, of which online food delivery only made up about 15%. That shows the huge growth potential of the food delivery sector in the country. In 2020, India's online food delivery market was valued at approximately \$5 billion. The number of users in this segment in India is expected to amount to 492.9m users by 2025. (glginsights.com, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic helped in the growth of the sector, with the urban population being confined to their homes, work from home being the new norm, closure of dine-in facilities, isolation and safety and social distancing taking priority. This sector is expected to reach about \$21 billion by 2026 at a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of nearly 30% (statista). It is interesting to note, however, that such growth is mainly concentrated in large metro cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, among others.

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The top 7 to 10 cities make up about 70% of the business and the remaining 490 cities fill in the rest but are growing (glginsights.com, 2021). We've seen an aggressive movement of people to smaller cities, and with the hesitancy of online food ordering decreasing, smaller cities as potential markets are rapidly accelerating. There is higher awareness in these places of the fact that people can get food delivered instead of going to a restaurant. Older parents, who are not the original target generation for food delivery firms, are now starting to place orders. More delivery-oriented companies are seeing opportunities to open in this sector. Greater access to the internet and the extensive use of smartphones resulted in the success of this sector. The revenue of the online food delivery market in India is projected to reach \$13,988mn in 2022. The number of users is expected to amount to 492.9m users by 2025 (Statista).

The food delivery market in India is currently dominated by Swiggy and Zomato which have highly competitive market shares with usage shares being 35% for Zomato and 25% for Swiggy in 2020 (Statista). This highly competitive nature makes it impossible to declare one of them as a market leader in the food delivery sector. Their service innovation, effective marketing strategies and long-term initiatives positioned them as market leaders in the food delivery sector.

1.1 Objectives of the study

- To understand the market scenario of the food delivery sector in India
- To analyze the pandemic performance of Swiggy and Zomato
- To understand the reasons for the popularity of Swiggy and Zomato
- To understand the valuable marketing lessons offered by Swiggy and Zomato

2.0 Review of Literature

Kanteti (2018), in her research paper titled "Innovative strategies of startup firms in India - A study on online food delivery companies in India" attempts a conceptual study to understand the innovative strategies followed by online food delivery startup companies in India like Swiggy, Zomato, Food Panda and Faasos. She notes that the food industry's growth relies heavily on technology and innovation. Restaurant partners benefit from significant cost and efficiency savings thanks to technology. It is critical to concentrate on creating scalable revenue streams in order to be profitable. She believes that the Indian food tech startup industry is ripe for growth and these startups are here to stay in the race. Operations and procedures must be examined and stabilized as well as recognizing and seizing the best opportunity to expand and profit.

Yadav & Muraleedharan (2021), in their research paper titled "Zomato's game plan: Marketing strategies of Zomato" studied the marketing strategies adopted by Zomato and attempted to analyze how these strategies affected the growth of the company. They found that innovation, agility, and effective communication are at the heart of Zomato's marketing tactics. Their voice has a playful, funny, and sometimes even counterintuitive tone to it,

which helps them stand out. Interaction with their audience is their main goal. The study also identifies Zomato's marketing efforts during COVID. Zomato established the Feed the Daily Wager fund to help families of daily wage laborers who are unable to generate any money during these difficult times. They set a goal of 50 million dollars, of which they have already raised approximately 28.13 million dollars. This money is used to provide food packages to households that can feed up to 5 people for a week. In order to ensure that the food reaches the proper individuals, they've worked with a network of NGOs and other groups.

Tribhuvan (2020), in his paper titled "A study on consumers perception on food apps" attempts to find out what is the consumer's perception of online food delivery apps and investigates the factors that have influenced consumer perception of online food delivery apps. The study uses primary and secondary research techniques. The study outlines the important facts about the Indian food delivery industry. By 2023, the Indian internet food market is anticipated to be worth \$12.3 billion. The global growth rate is 9.01 percent, whereas India's online meal delivery sector is increasing at a pace of 15%. Swiggy makes \$1.5 billion in sales, while Zomato makes \$800 million. Between April 2017 and March 2018, both companies delivered 96 million orders. (*Visakhapatnam News*, 2020).

Kumar (2020), in his paper titled "A study on the impact of COVID-19 on home delivery of food items through food delivery platforms" found that the pandemic condition induced by the coronavirus had a significant influence on the online food delivery system. Many restaurants and food delivery partners have created new business models as a result of the traditional means of cooking and delivering food. Furthermore, morale and safety issues about food delivery staff, as well as concerns about the safety of delivery personnel, were severely impacted. He noted that after a few months of lockdown, general usage of online food delivery platforms increased, but many small enterprises had to bear the consequences.

Saxena (2019), in her paper titled "An analysis of food ordering applications in India: Zomato and Swiggy" attempted to identify the pros and cons of the online food delivery apps from the point of view of restaurants and analyze the pros and cons of the online food delivery apps from the viewpoint of customers. She observed that Consumers are most attracted to the feature of Doorstep Delivery, which is available at any time and in any location. Customers are most attracted when they obtain Rewards & Cashbacks, which are followed by loyalty points or advantages. Bad past experience, reviews, and word of mouth are all reasons that deter customers from trying online food delivery applications. This concept with innovation can thrive if it provides continuous and excellent services.

Raj & Kumar (2021), in their article titled "Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Zomato: A case study" analyzed the financial performance of Zomato in comparison to its competitors during the pandemic. A SWOT analysis is used for this purpose. The study also described the COVID-19 initiatives undertaken by Zomato. The authors opined that even if there has been a slowdown in the market due to client buying habits being influenced by the threat of COVID-19 spreading and the deployment of Lockdown, there has been a slowdown in the market. Following the relaxing of the hotel-related industry's lockdown, we've seen an

upsurge in demand for online meal delivery services. Zomato has made a number of steps to recover from the COVID-19 problem, as well as initiatives to assist its partners.

Kaviya *et al.*, (2021), in their paper titled “A study on digital marketing strategy towards food delivering apps during pandemic” attempted to study the digital marketing strategies of Swiggy and Zomato, their comparison, and the covid's impact on food deliveries. They stated that Zomato has grown in popularity to the point where it now claims to be the industry leader in food delivery. They've surpassed a monthly run rate of 21 million people. Zomato's incredibly designed user interface is appealing to users, simple and easy to navigate, and this has helped it stand out from its competitors. Swiggy has a hyperlocal product delivery technique. They're even concerned about the tiniest details. Swiggy places a strong emphasis on the logistics of the business. Swiggy realized from the start that the best way to break into the delivery market was to develop a strong logistics network, and as a result, Swiggy has built a solid and long-term company logistics structure. It has its own increasing fleet of delivery partners, which presently numbers 1.25 million active partners.

3.0 Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Growing by leaps and bounds

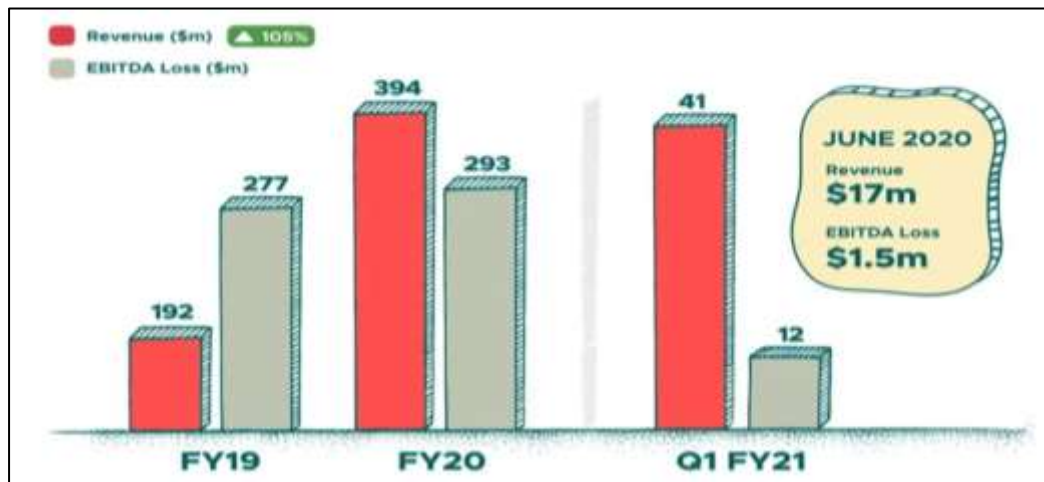
The Indian food delivery industry is experiencing fast-paced growth spearheaded by Swiggy and Zomato. They are the leading brands in the food delivery sector. Their effective marketing strategies and competitive offerings successfully kept the traffic coming, thereby driving sales. Their focus on innovation and agility proved extremely yielding.

Zomato is the first unicorn in India to go public on the stock exchanges. It has come a long way and evolved to be one of the greatest in the industry, from being known as Foodiebay in 2008 to being renamed Zomato in 2010 to being what it is now (date2compete.com, Sep 28, 2021). Its business strategy has transformed from that of a restaurant discovery company to one that focuses on delivery and operations.

As of September 2021, Zomato had about 173,000 eateries, up to 43,000 in 2019. In the first half of FY2020, Zomato's income increased by 225 percent, setting a new high. According to the company's biannual report, revenue was \$205 million, up from \$63 million in the first half of the previous year. (Feedough.com, 2021). Since its commencement in the food delivery sector in 2015, it has delivered 1 billion orders (The Economic Times, Aug 11, 2021). Zomato has experienced its fair share of peaks and valleys and has successfully recovered from numerous failures and life-threatening catastrophes.

To grow its operations, UberEats was acquired for \$350 million (The Economic Times, 2020). Zomato has a 45 percent market share in the meal delivery business and operates in 24 countries. In FY 2020, the average order value was 286.9 dollars, while in FY 2021, it was 395.4 dollars (Q4). When comparing the financial year 2019 to the financial year 2020, Zomato's revenue increased by 105 percent. However, throughout the same time span, its prices only climbed by 47%. In 2018, it made \$68 million in revenue, rising to \$206 million in 2019 and \$350 million in 2020. (Feedough.com, 2021).

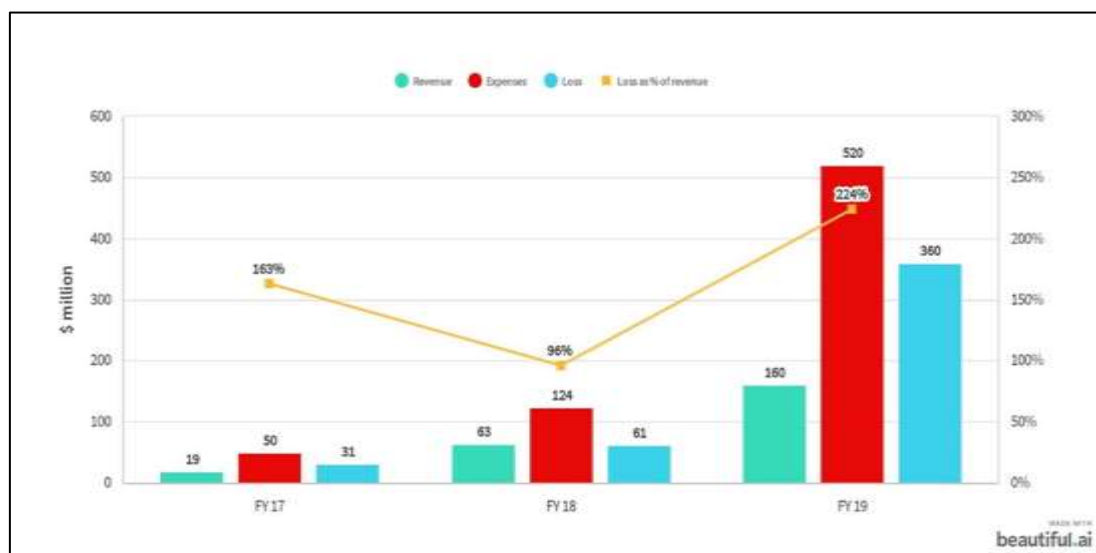
Figure 1: Zomato's Revenue



Source: www.feedough.com

Swiggy, which was launched in 2014, has risen to the top through successful entrepreneurship, new initiatives, cost-effective operations, dynamic environment adaptation, and exceptional marketing methods. Swiggy Company reported a revenue of 133 crores and a loss of 200 crores for the fiscal year 2016-17. The Better Awards were given to Swiggy by The Economics Times in 2017. Swiggy was also included in Forbes magazine's 2017 edition of the Forbes 30, UNDER 30 INDIA. (The Economic Times, Nov22, 2021).

Figure 2: Swiggy's Revenue and Losses



Source: www.crosstalk.investopad.com

As of September 2021, Swiggy had 1,28,000 restaurants on its platform. Between June 2020 and June 2021, the company's revenue increased 2.8 times (Business Insider, Aug 13, 2021). Swiggy made \$2,776 crores in sales in the fiscal year that ended in March 2020. As of 2019, it processes over 45 million orders per month and plans to expand to 520 Indian cities by 2020. (The Economic Times, Nov22, 2021).

It has launched a new business called 'Swiggy Instamart,' which specializes in groceries delivery. In addition, it has launched a local courier service called 'Swiggy Genie' to bolster its post-pandemic market.

Swiggy has had its fair share of delivery agent and staff issues, but it has always tried to resolve them and maintain maximum stakeholder satisfaction. Swiggy's success may be ascribed to a "customer-backward" mindset, service innovation, dynamism, competitive efforts, successful marketing and collaborations, and a laser-like concentration on client orientation and satisfaction.

3.2 A test of resilience- the pandemic experience

During the coronavirus pandemic, many businesses, especially those involved in the delivery of basic commodities, had to deal with several setbacks. During the lockdown, many people did not have the appropriate permits to operate their businesses. Against all obstacles, India's resilient companies have stepped up to help not only their customers but also others.

Food delivery companies had an advantage during the pandemic in terms of remote functioning and technology-based operations since everything was moving from offline to online. With restaurants being shut down for many months, food delivery platforms served as a lifeline for restaurants to ensure some business continuity. The increase in customers' ordering-in during the pandemic serves as a testament to the surge in demand for food delivery apps and the subsequent increase in their market. Many restaurants and hotels which have delivered through online platforms were able to grow their delivery revenue throughout 2020. Ready-to-eat food delivery has emerged as a key industry, thanks to the introduction of appealing, user-friendly apps and tech-enabled driver networks, as well as changing consumer expectations. Early on in the pandemic, lockdowns and physical separation rules provided the food delivery sector a huge boost, with delivery being a lifeline for the struggling restaurant industry.

3.2.1 The rise of contact-less delivery

During the pandemic, assuring customers of safety was the need of the hour. Key safety policies such as no-contact delivery, greater delivery partner hygiene, and best safety standards practices for restaurants were established to overcome the fear factor and restore consumer confidence, while also conveying these measures and proper food handling practices to consumers. Consumer awareness of food ordering has spread over time, thanks to the WHO and other sources, resulting in a resurgence of demand. To ensure safety, Swiggy and Zomato conducted regular temperature checks of the delivery personnel and tracked the same of the restaurant staff.

Contactless Delivery has become the norm during the pandemic. Swiggy and Zomato have been at the forefront, heavily emphasizing this to assure customers of safety. The goal of contactless deliveries is to reduce the distance between the delivery partner and the customer. The fewer people a delivery partner interacts with, the lower his risk of catching a virus, and even lower his risk of spreading it to other customers or restaurant executives.

3.2.2 Maintaining the evolving hygiene standards during the pandemic

Swiggy and Zomato ensured that Restaurants promote a high level of hygiene. Every four hours, restaurants scrub down every possible touchpoint, including chairs, tables, doorknobs, worktops, and sinks. 3-ply face masks were distributed to all staff involved in food preparation (bytes.swiggy.com, May 8, 2020). At collection areas, hand wash facilities were set up to allow delivery partners to practice proper hand hygiene. All orders were packed in a separate bag to ensure that the food container does not come into contact with anyone during transportation. This was rigorously monitored to ensure maximum safety.

3.2.3 The emergence of cloud kitchens

Another significant phenomenon observed during the pandemic is the emergence of cloud kitchens or delivery-only restaurants that effectively beat the pandemic blues and thrived during these times. A cloud kitchen is a delivery-only restaurant business with no physical premises, no dine-in facilities, and no takeout counter. In other words, it's a restaurant kitchen that only accepts delivery orders and doesn't have a regular dining area. There is no expensive infrastructure, no waitstaff, no tables, no furniture, nothing. (unengage.in).

Customers can place orders online using online food aggregator applications or restaurant apps and get food delivered to their respective locations. Such a model worked perfectly well for food delivery aggregators during the pandemic times as well as in the current times. Seeing this as a great revenue opportunity, Swiggy and Zomato are heavily investing in such models.

3.2.4 Pioneering marketing communication

Rather than traditional brand marketing, Swiggy and Zomato focused their communication strategies and campaigns throughout the pandemic on doing their part for consumers and the restaurant and delivery partner ecosystem. The communication was designed with the consumer's sentiment in mind throughout the crisis. The pre-lockdown and early lockdown periods concentrated on cleanliness and safety procedures, with the goal of informing customers about how ordering in is safe and what precautions they should take. (Thedrum.com, Dec 3, 2020)

In times of crisis, customers turn to companies they know and trust. These are the times that put a company's value and trust to the test. With the use of technology, logistical prowess, and a thorough awareness of hyper-local trends, the food delivery platforms were

able to establish themselves as necessary services during the lockdown and following unlock stages.

3.2.5 Displaying action-oriented corporate social responsibility

Swiggy has announced the creation of the Swiggy Hunger Saviour COVID Relief Fund, which will be utilized to safeguard the safety and well-being of its delivery partners and their families. Sriharsha Majety, Swiggy's co-founder and CEO, has pledged half of his annual income to the fund. Swiggy's goal for this fund is to raise Rs 10 crore, and it has already raised over Rs 4 crore from initial contributions from Swiggy's founders and staff. In another initiative, Swiggy plans to deliver food and essentials to daily wage workers from partner restaurants, which are also at risk of shutting down due to a lack of revenue. It states that it has been helping thousands of kitchen workers, waiters, and chefs to earn a living in these times. This initiative was launched in partnership with Milaap. (yourstory.com, April 5, 2020).

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic's 21-day shutdown, Zomato has launched Zomato Market, a grocery delivery service. Zomato Market, like its counterpart Swiggy Stores, is a hyperlocal grocery delivery service. At the moment, it is only available in Delhi, Punjab, and Kerala. Zomato also announced earlier in April 2020, the introduction of a Gold Support Fund to help millions of restaurant workers in the food industry cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, all earnings from the sale of Zomato Gold annual memberships will be used to support restaurant housekeepers, cooks, and waiters, as well as their families, in these trying times. (yourstory.com, April 5, 2020).

A lot has changed in the food delivery landscape with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The initial setbacks and challenges were inevitable but the consistent and innovative efforts of food delivery giants like Swiggy and Zomato during this period ensured survival and growth. Their ability to tap into the advantages of technology, remote conditions, customer trust, and loyalty proved to give successful results during the pandemic. Most importantly Swiggy and Zomato have been able to retain customer trust and attract new ones by assuring them of maximum safety which is another factor contributing to their success.

Both organizations have achieved their current status as a result of a clear focus on delivering customer value and ensuring customer happiness. They work along similar lines and are in direct competition with one another. Their outstanding marketing methods and activities have greatly boosted their popularity, distinguished their services and attributes, and aided their expansion in the food delivery business. Swiggy and Zomato have valuable lessons and ideas to impart to any company considering entering this market.

3.3 Some valuable marketing lessons offered by Swiggy and Zomato

3.3.1 Customer empowerment

It is not a new saying that the customer is the king. However, he is the king not just because he consumes but also because he reviews. Customers are becoming more sophisticated with increased levels of awareness and availability of choices and information.

Their feedback, ratings and reviews play a great role in influencing potential customers. It is important to cater to all the needs of the customers, exceed their expectations by providing a multitude of services and ensure quality. The success of Swiggy and Zomato in the food delivery industry is primarily due to positive customer response and feedback and high customer satisfaction and service value delivery.

3.3.2 Holistic marketing

From a contextual point of view, Holistic marketing requires external, internal and interactive marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

External marketing describes promotion, pricing, etc (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the food delivery space, external marketing plays a pivotal role and its success ensures competitive advantage. Both the firms have excelled in this area, especially through digital media.

Internal marketing describes the training and motivation of employees to serve the customers well. Pioneering in this area will guarantee quality customer service and positive customer feedback (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Interactive marketing describes the employee's skill in serving the client (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Functional quality matters along with technical quality. It is not enough to deliver food to the customer's doorstep. The food must be fresh, hygienic, delivered on time and properly packed.

3.3.3 Service quality

It is very important to understand that no amount of promotional techniques will work unless there exists high-quality service. User-friendly interface, easily available customer service, employing the right technology, etc, play a role in ensuring quality. The determinants of service quality⁵ - Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangibles must be emphasized on and companies must work towards enhancing quality through these determinants. At the same time efficient use of technology in service delivery becomes inevitable to ensure superior service quality.

3.3.4 Relevance

The importance of staying relevant to current trends, issues, events, etc cannot be stressed enough. This is so due to the changing scenarios and the dynamic nature of the economy and the consumer markets. In fact, Zomato has successfully marketed its service by staying relevant and using techniques like moment marketing, understanding the audience's nature, sensing the audience's pulse and always managing to attract their attention. Similarly, Swiggy is introducing new services to meet the changing and growing customer demands- 'Swiggy Instamart' for grocery delivery and 'Swiggy Genie' for hyperlocal courier service. One intriguing aspect of their marketing communications is that both Swiggy and Zomato deliver relatable content to their audience.

3.3.5 Differentiation

This is important to stay ahead of your competitors. Differentiation of service offerings can take place in many ways, through people and processes that add value. The service offering must include innovative features. Secondary services can be added to the primary service package. Zomato started off as a restaurant booking and reviews service and later entered the food delivery sector. This move has made food delivery a primary service package and restaurant booking and reviews as its secondary service.

4.0 Conclusion

It can be said with no doubt that Swiggy and Zomato are successful in the food delivery sector due to their service innovation, service quality, customer orientation, service differentiation, successful efforts in staying relevant and adapting to the dynamic environment and most importantly due to their holistic marketing efforts and strategies. Their strong adherence to customer-oriented values and efficient service delivery motive have positioned them at the top. Swiggy and Zomato have an excellent track record with regard to their marketing communications which is evident on social media. Newcomers into the food delivery industry have much to learn from the leaders and their ways of delivering not just food but also great customer satisfaction. Their initiatives and approaches to fighting the pandemic are commendable and make the organizations more resilient than ever. The pandemic and the resulting lockdown caused a shift in how people consume products and buy food. The demand for secure, easy-to-access, and convenient services aligns perfectly with the existing food delivery app models. The food services industry led by Swiggy and Zomato has effectively moved forward by streamlining their services to satisfy the increased demand.

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