

## **A Study on Zepto’s Deceptive Promotional and Pricing Strategies in Mumbai’s Quick-Commerce Sector.**

**Prof. (Dr.) Sanchita Datta**

Head of Department – Commerce, Vice Principal Royal College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Autonomous)

**Mrs. Renu Khandelwal**

Asst. Professor Dept of Commerce

Royal College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Autonomous)

**Iqra Khatri,**

Tayyeba Shaikh & Andilib Zehra Sayyed

TYBCOM Students, Royal College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Autonomous)

### **Abstract**

This study examines deceptive promotional and pricing strategies used by Zepto within India's quick-commerce industry. Using a structured survey of 71 respondents and secondary literature sources, the research evaluates practices such as hidden charges, misleading cashback promotions, urgency-driven marketing tactics, and device-based price discrimination. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents perceive Zepto’s promotional strategies as misleading, particularly due to hidden fees and exaggerated discount claims. Although consumers recognize these practices, many continue to use the platform due to the convenience of rapid delivery. The study concludes that stronger regulatory oversight, improved transparency, and ethical marketing standards are necessary to sustain consumer trust in digital marketplaces.

### **Introduction**

Quick-commerce has rapidly transformed the retail sector by providing ultra-fast delivery services to consumers. Companies such as Zepto, Blinkit, and Swiggy Instamart have redefined convenience by delivering groceries within minutes. Zepto, founded in 2021, gained rapid market recognition due to its 10-minute delivery promise supported by a network of dark stores. However, the growth of such platforms has also raised concerns regarding transparency in pricing and promotional practices.

Consumers frequently report discrepancies between the displayed price and final checkout amount due to hidden delivery fees, packaging charges, and algorithmic pricing adjustments. Furthermore, promotional messages such as “limited-time offers” and “exclusive discounts” often create artificial urgency that influences consumer decision-making. Recent discussions on social media and consumer forums have also highlighted possible device-based price discrimination, where identical products appear at different prices depending on the user’s device.

These practices raise important ethical and regulatory questions under the Consumer Protection Act (2019) and advertising guidelines issued by the Advertising Standards Council of India. This study aims to analyse these concerns and evaluate their impact on consumer behaviour and trust.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on examining promotional and pricing practices adopted by Zepto in India's quick-commerce industry. It analyses consumer awareness regarding deceptive marketing tactics, hidden charges, and potential device-based pricing discrimination. The research also evaluates the impact of these strategies on consumer trust and purchasing behaviour among urban digital consumers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is limited by time constraints and a relatively small sample size of respondents. As the data was collected through online surveys, individuals without regular internet access may be underrepresented. Additionally, the research relies on self-reported responses, which may introduce subjective bias.

### Objectives of the Study

- 1.To identify deceptive promotional tactics used by Zepto.
- 2.To analyse device-based price discrimination in the Zepto application.
- 3.To evaluate consumer awareness of pricing manipulation strategies.
- 4.To examine the impact of such strategies on consumer behaviour.
- 5.To suggest policy recommendations for improving transparency.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several researchers have examined the rapid growth of quick-commerce platforms and their impact on consumer behaviour.

Sujatha and Sreeja (2025) analysed the impact of e-commerce platforms on consumer buying behaviour with specific reference to Zepto. Their findings indicate that convenience, delivery speed, and user interface significantly influence customer preferences.

Shankar (2024) conducted a comparative study of promotional strategies between Blinkit and Zepto. The study highlighted the importance of discount strategies, loyalty programs, and promotional campaigns in influencing consumer perception.

Niloy, Sarkar, Ganguly, and Banerjee (2023) explored customer satisfaction and loyalty in the 10-minute grocery delivery industry. Their research emphasised the importance of service quality, app interface, and delivery efficiency in building customer trust.

Jaiswal (2024) examined consumer buying behaviour associated with fast delivery platforms and found that speed of delivery and promotional offers significantly influence consumer decisions.

Gupta and Pandey (2022) conducted a case study on Zepto and identified concerns related to aggressive marketing spending, operational sustainability, and the long-term viability of promotional strategies.

Recent media reports and consumer forums have also raised concerns regarding hidden charges, misleading promotional claims, and device-based pricing differences on quick-commerce platforms. These studies collectively highlight the need for transparency and ethical marketing practices in digital retail.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

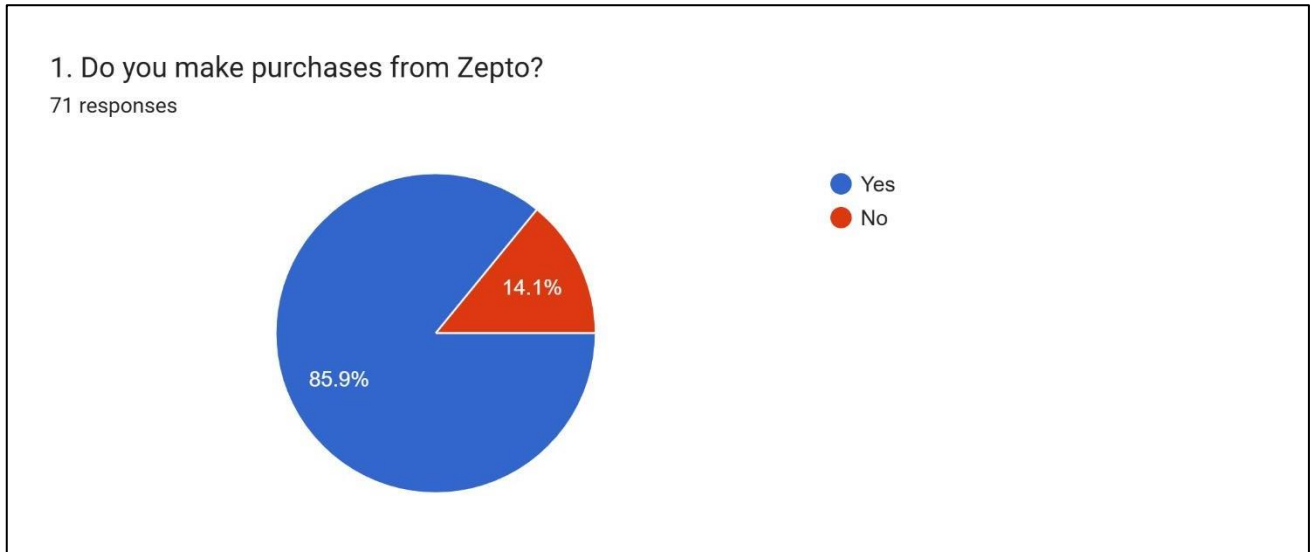
The present study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine consumer perceptions of Zepto's promotional and pricing strategies in the quick-commerce sector. The research was conducted using an online survey method to collect primary data from consumers who use quick-commerce platforms. A total of 71 respondents participated in the study, providing insights into their experiences and opinions regarding Zepto's promotional practices and pricing mechanisms. The sampling technique used for the study was non-probability convenience sampling, which enabled the researchers to gather responses quickly and efficiently through online platforms. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire developed using Google Forms, consisting of 18 questions designed to capture consumer experiences, awareness, and perceptions regarding promotional offers, hidden charges, and pricing strategies on the Zepto platform. In addition to primary data, secondary data was also used to support the research. Secondary information was obtained from various sources such as academic research journals, online databases, news articles, media reports, and industry publications related to e-commerce and quick-commerce marketing practices. This combination of primary and secondary data helped provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and strengthened the reliability of the study..

### Data Analysis (Charts)

**TABLE 1: PEOPLE MAKING PURCHASES FROM ZEPTO**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
YES	85.9%
NO	14.1%

**DIAGRAM 1:**

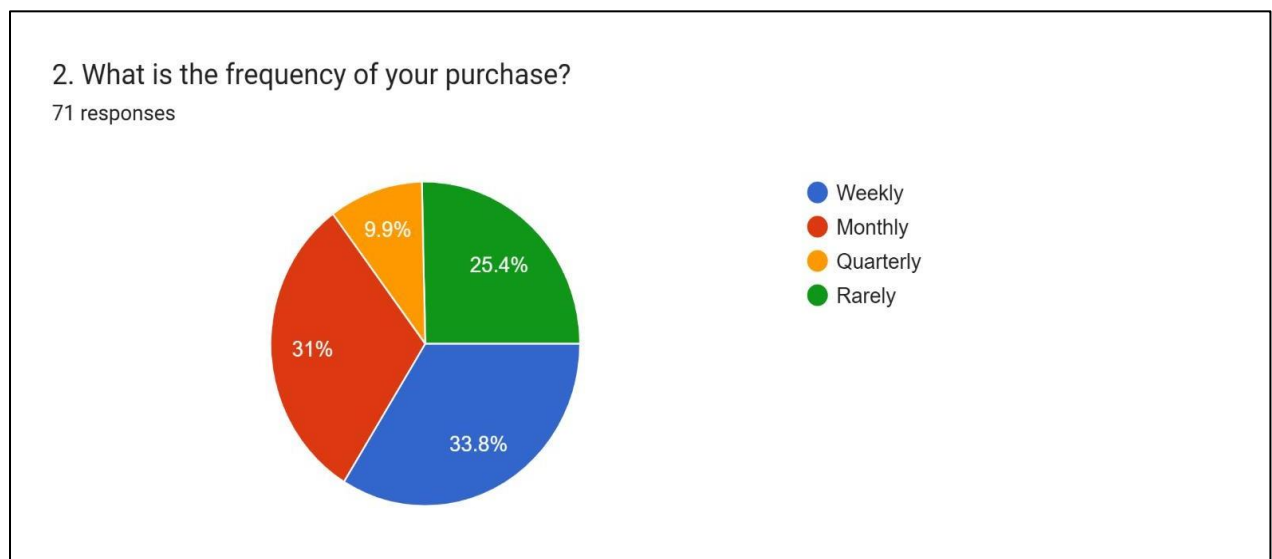


The survey reveals that majority of respondents, about 85.9%, said they make purchases from Zepto, while only 14.1% said they do not. This indicates that Zepto is widely used among the surveyed group, with only a small portion staying away, likely because of personal preference or alternative options

**TABLE 2: USER'S FREQUENCY OF PURCHASES FROM ZEPTO**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
WEEKLY	33.8%
MONTHLY	31%
QUARTERLY	9.9%
RARELY	25.4%

**DIAGRAM 2:**



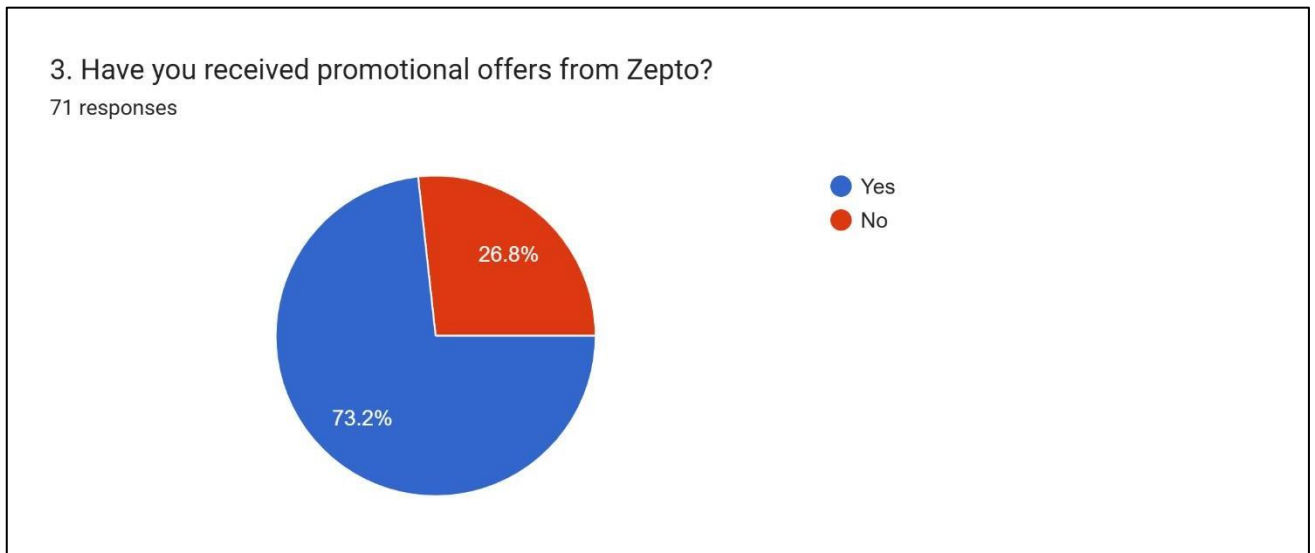
The above pie diagram clearly reflects that purchase frequency of user's varies, with 33.8% shopping weekly and 31% monthly, while 9.9% shop quarterly and 25.4%

rarely. This shows that while a large share of users depends on Zepto regularly, a considerable portion uses it only occasionally, suggesting mixed levels of reliance.

**TABLE 3: CUSTOMER'S RECEIVING PROMOTIONAL OFFERS FROM ZEPTO**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
YES	73.2%
NO	26.8%

**DIAGRAM 3:**

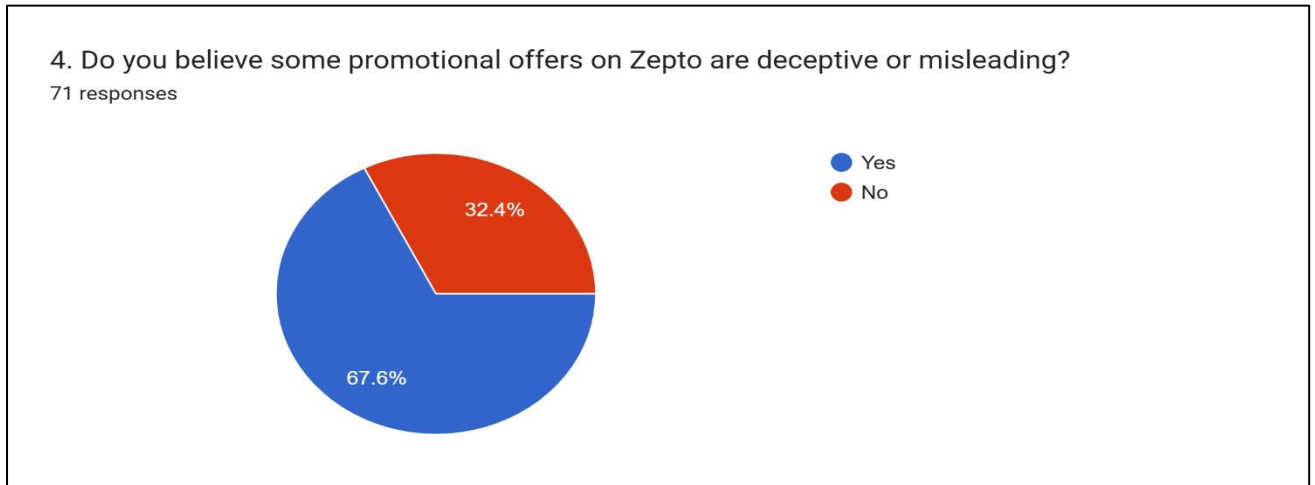


The survey reveals that 73.2% of respondents have received promotional offers from Zepto, whereas 26.8% have not. This suggests that Zepto actively pushes offers to most of its users, though some customers may be missing out, either due to targeting gaps or limited engagement.

**TABLE 4: CUSTOMERS VIEW ON ZEPTO'S PROMOTIONAL OFFERS BEING DECEPTIVE OR MISLEADING**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
YES	67.6%
NO	32.4%

**DIAGRAM 4:**

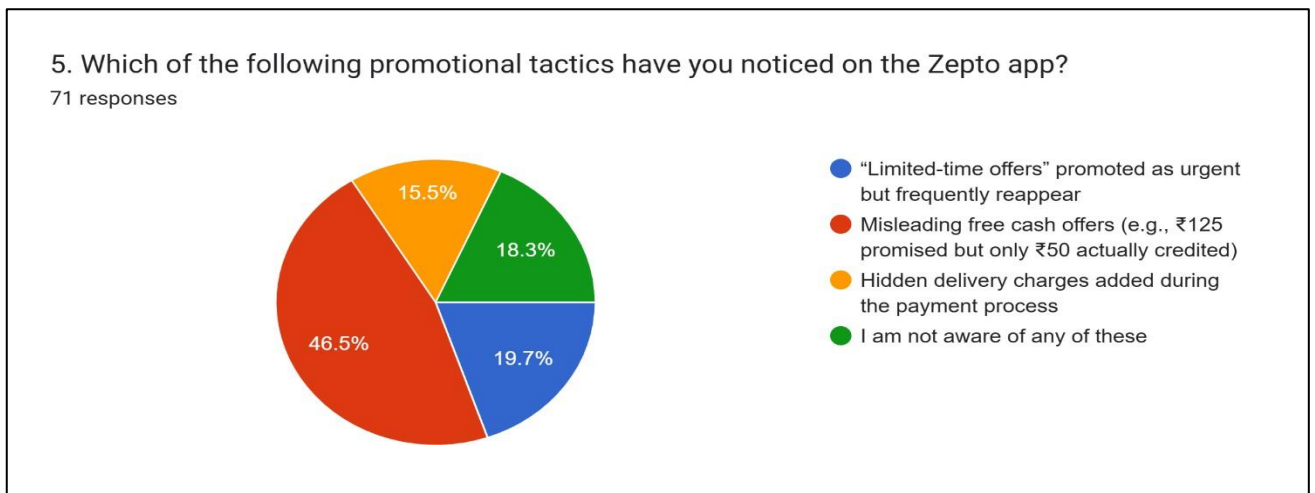


It was found that 67.6% of respondents believe that some promotional offers from Zepto are deceptive or misleading, while 32.4% do not share this view. This reflects a significant trust issue among customers, with a majority questioning the transparency of marketing tactics.

**TABLE 5: PROMOTIONAL TACTICS NOTICED ON THE ZEPTO APP**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
LIMITED-TIME OFFERS” PROMOTED ASURGENT BUT FREQUENTLY REAPPEAR	19.7%
MISLEADING FREE CASH OFFERS (E.G., ₹125PROMISED BUT ONLY ₹50 ACTUALLYCREDITED)	46.5%
HIDDEN DELIVERY CHARGES ADDED DURINGTHE PAYMENT PROCES	15.5%
I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY OF THESE	18.3%

**DIAGRAM 5:**

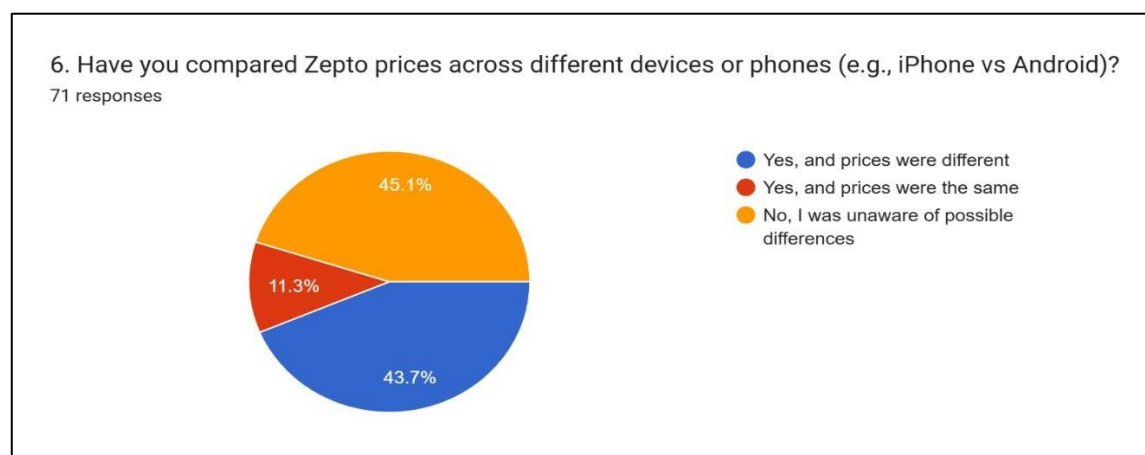


As per the survey, about 46.5% users identified misleading cashback offers, 19.7% pointed out repeated “limited-time” promotions, and 15.5% noticed hidden delivery charges, while 18.3% said they were not aware of any such tactics. This shows that a large proportion of users are sensitive to promotional strategies, and many view them as potentially misleading.

**TABLE 6: USERS VIEW ON COMPARING ZEPTO’S PRICES ACROSS DIFFERENT DEVICES.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
<b>YES, AND PRICES WERE DIFFERENT</b>	<b>43.7 %</b>
<b>YES, AND PRICES WERE THE SAME</b>	<b>11.3%</b>
<b>NO, I WAS UNAWARE OF POSSIBLE DIFFERENCES</b>	<b>45.1%</b>

**DIAGRAM 6:**

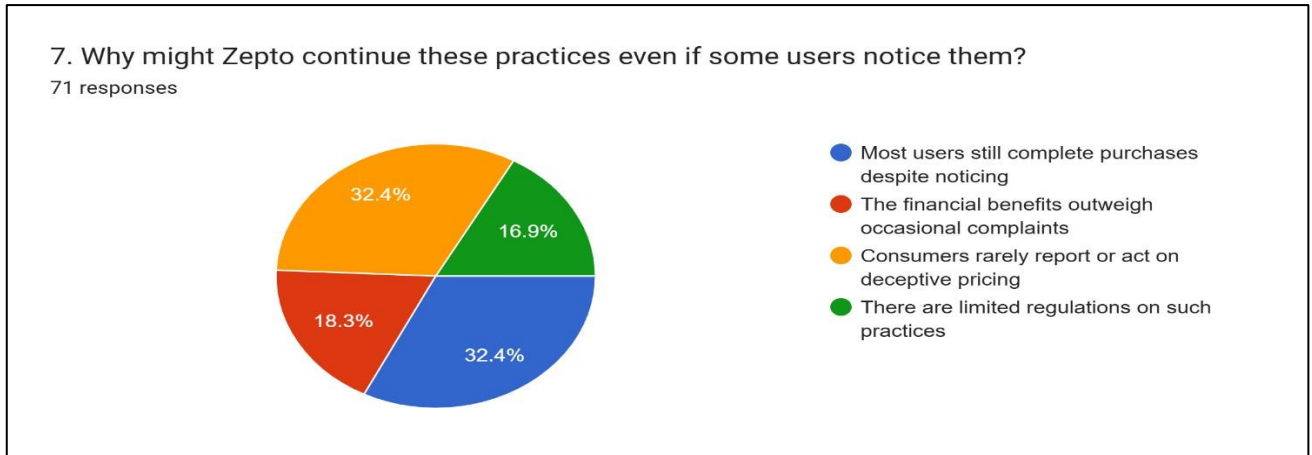


The survey revealed that 43.7% of respondents said they compared prices across devices and found them different, 11.3% compared and found them the same, while 45.1% were unaware that prices could vary by device. This shows that almost half the users are unaware of such practices, while a significant portion has noticed differences.

**TABLE 7: REASONS BEHIND ZEPTO CONTINUING THESE PRACTICES**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
<b>MOST USERS STILL COMPLETE PURCHASES DESPITE NOTICING</b>	<b>32.4%</b>
<b>THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS OUTWEIGH OCCASIONAL COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>18.3%</b>
<b>CONSUMERS RARELY REPORT OR ACT ON DECEPTIVE PRICING</b>	<b>32.4%</b>
<b>THERE ARE LIMITED REGULATIONS ON SUCH PRACTICES</b>	<b>16.9%</b>

**DIAGRAM 7:**



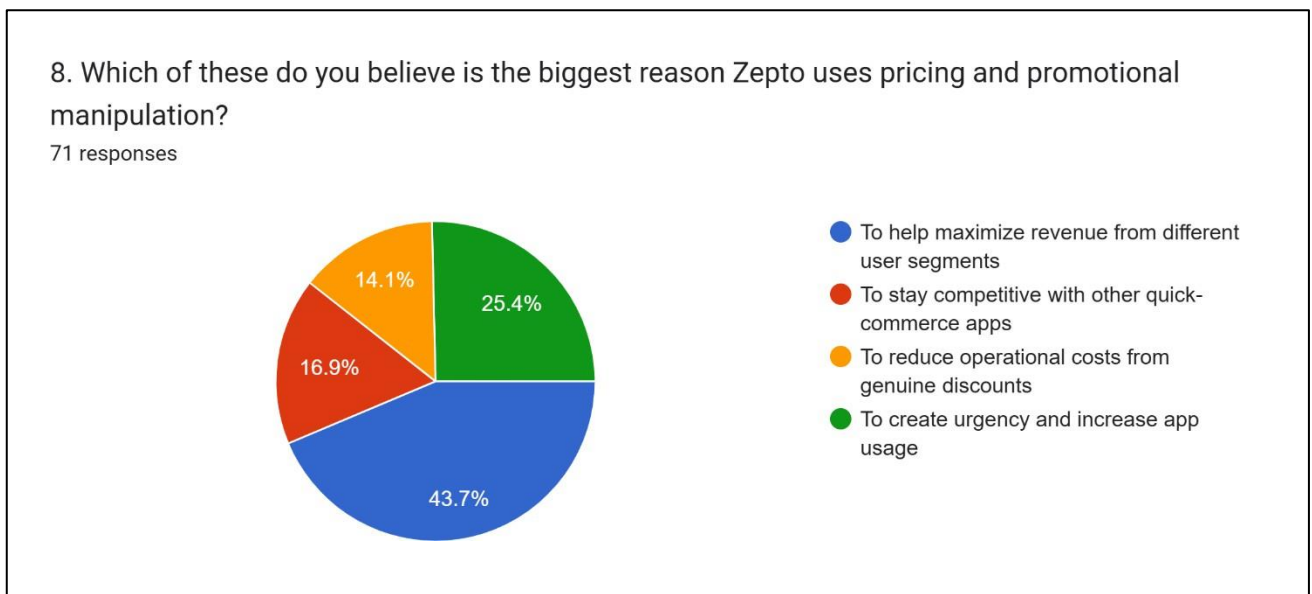
It was found that about 18.3% believe financial benefits outweigh complaints, 32.4% think most users still complete purchases despite noticing, 32.4% feel consumers

rarely report deceptive pricing, and 16.9% think it's due to limited regulations. This indicates that both customer behaviour and regulatory gaps may encourage the continuation of such tactics.

**TABLE 8: BIGGEST REASON BEHIND ZEPTO USING PRICING AND PROMOTIONAL MANIPULATION.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
TO HELP MAXIMIZE REVENUE FROM DIFFERENT USER SEGMENTS	43.7%
TO STAY COMPETITIVE WITH OTHER QUICK-COMMERCE APPS	16.9%
TO REDUCE OPERATIONAL COSTS FROM GENUINE DISCOUNTS	14.1%
TO CREATE URGENCY AND INCREASE APP USAGE	25.4%

**DIAGRAM 8:**



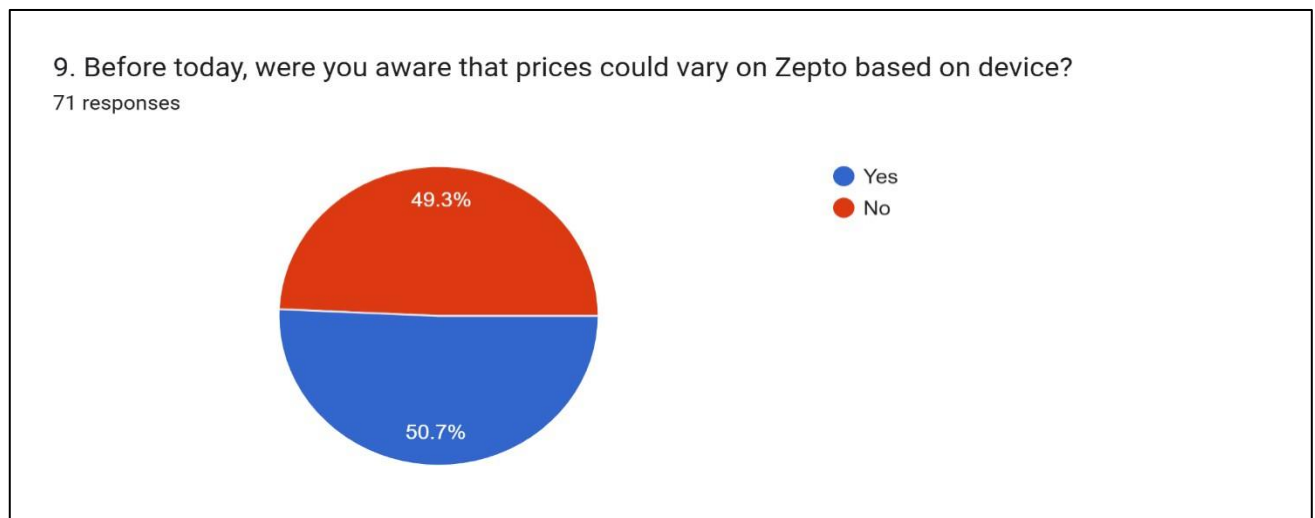
The pie diagram shows 43.7% believe the biggest reason for pricing and promotional manipulation is to maximize revenue from different user segments, 25.4% think it is to create urgency and increase app usage, 16.9% say it

helps Zepto stay competitive, and 14.1% feel it reduces costs from genuine discounts. This suggests revenue growth and user engagement are seen as the main drivers.

**TABLE 9: USER’S AWARENESS REGARDING DEVICE BASED PRICE DISCRIMINATION.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Yes	50.7%
No	49.3%

**DIAGRAM 9:**

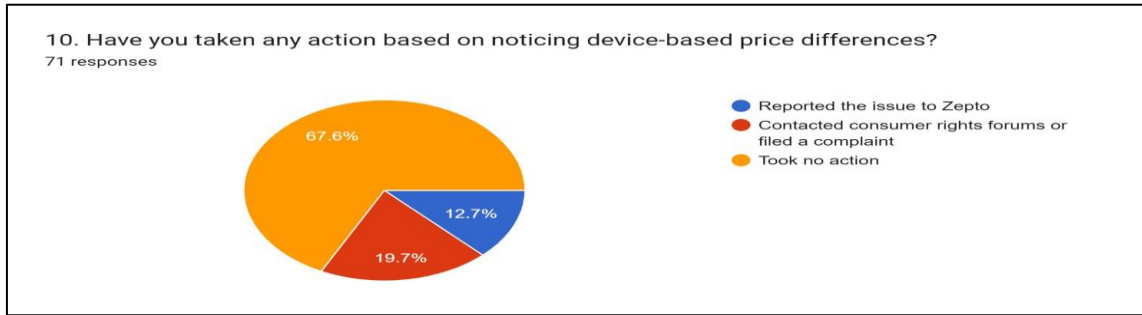


The survey data revealed that 50.7% of respondents were already aware that prices could vary based on device, while 49.3% were not. This reveals an almost even split, with awareness slightly higher but still leaving many users uninformed.

**TABLE 10: ACTIONS TAKEN BY USERS ON NOTICING DEVICE BASED PRICE DISCRIMINATION.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
REPORTED THE ISSUE TO ZEPTO	12.7%
CONTACTED CONSUMER RIGHTS FORUMS OR FILED A COMPLAINT	19.7%
TOOK NO ACTION	67.6%

**DIAGRAM 10:**

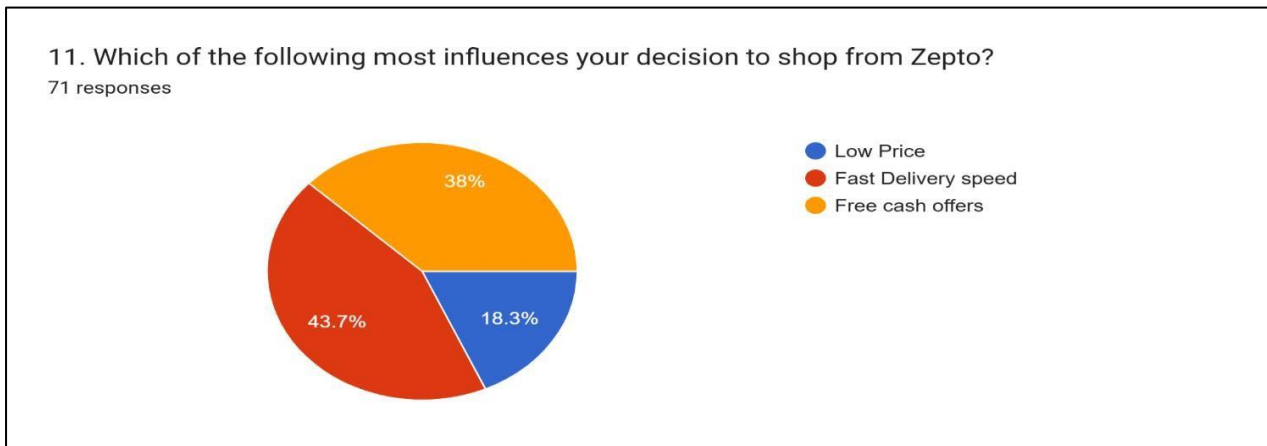


The data reveals that only 12.7% reported the issue to Zepto, 19.7% contacted consumer rights forums or filed a complaint, while a large majority of 67.6% took no action. This suggests that while users notice such practices, most do not escalate them, possibly due to convenience or lack of confidence in resolution.

**TABLE 11: FACTORS INFLUENCING USER’S DECISION TO SHOP FROM ZEPTO.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
LOW PRICE	18.3%
FAST DELIVERY SPEED	43.7%
FREE CASH OFFERS	38%

**DIAGRAM 11:**



It was found that 43.7% of respondents said fast delivery speed influences their decision to shop from Zepto, 38% are influenced by free cash offers, and 18.3% by

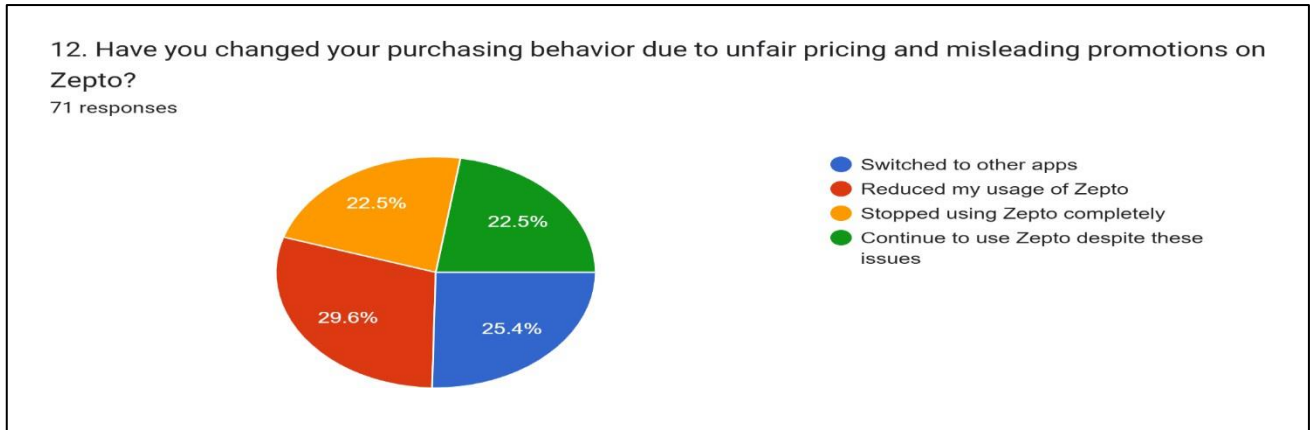
low prices. This shows that speed is the biggest driver of usage, followed closely by promotions, while price plays a smaller role.

**TABLE 12: CHANGE IN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR DUE TO UNFAIR PRACTICES.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
SWITCHED TO OTHER APPS	25.4%
REDUCED MY USAGE OF ZEPTO	29.6%

<b>STOPPED USING ZEPTO COMPLETELY</b>	<b>22.5%</b>
<b>CONTINUE TO USE ZEPTO DESPITE THESE ISSUES</b>	<b>22.5%</b>

**DIAGRAM 12:**

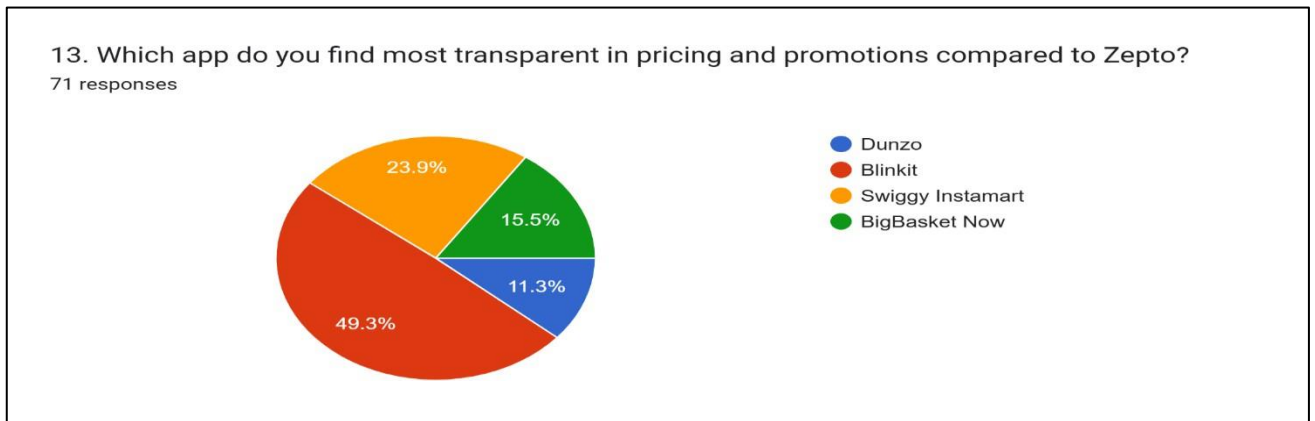


The above pie diagram shows, how users reacted to unfair or misleading promotions. About 29.6% reduced their usage of Zepto, 25.4% switched to other apps, 22.5% stopped using it completely, while 22.5% continued despite issues. This indicates that misleading tactics have a real impact on behaviour, with many reducing or stopping usage.

**TABLE 13: MOST TRANSPARENT APP IN PRICING AND PROMOTIONS COMPARED TO ZEPTO**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
<b>DUNZO</b>	<b>11.3%</b>
<b>BLINKIT</b>	<b>49.3%</b>
<b>SWIGGY INSTAMART</b>	<b>23.9%</b>
<b>BIGBASKET</b>	<b>15.5</b>

**DIAGRAM 13:**



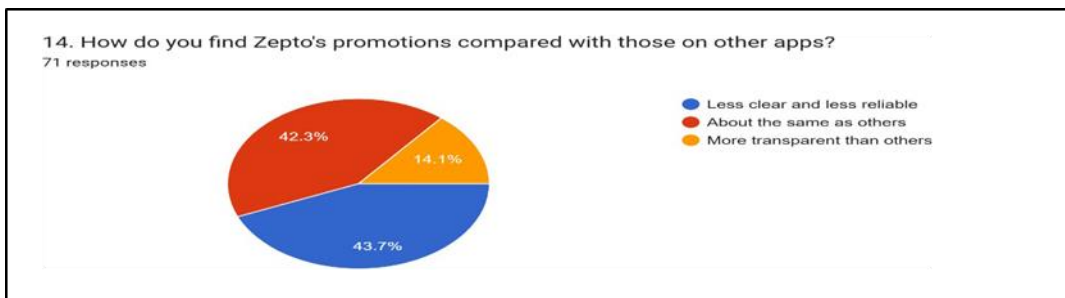
It was found that when asked which app is most transparent in pricing and promotions compared to Zepto, 49.3% chose Blinkit, 15.5% said Big Basket Now,

23.9% said Swiggy Instamart, and only 11.3% chose Dunzo. This suggests that Blinkit is seen as the most transparent competitor in this space.

**TABLE 14: ZEPTO’S PROMOTIONS COMPARED TO OTHER APPS.**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
LESS CLEAR AND LESS RELIABLE	43.7%
ABOUT THE SAME AS OTHERS	42.3%
MORE TRANSPARENT THAN OTHERS	14.1%

**DIAGRAM 14:**



The survey revealed that around 43.7% users found zepto’s promotions less clear and less reliable as compared to other quick commerce platforms, 42.3% felt they are about the same as others, and only 14.1% thought they are more transparent. This highlights that Zepto struggles with clarity compared to competitors in the eyes of many users.

**TABLE 15: ZEPTO’S QUICK DELIVERY AFFECTING USER’S LOYALTY COMPARED TO OTHER APPS IN A SCALE OF (1-5 IN ASCENDING ORDER)**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
1	28.2%
2	28.2%
3	26.8%
4	4.2
5	12.7

**DIAGRAM 15:**



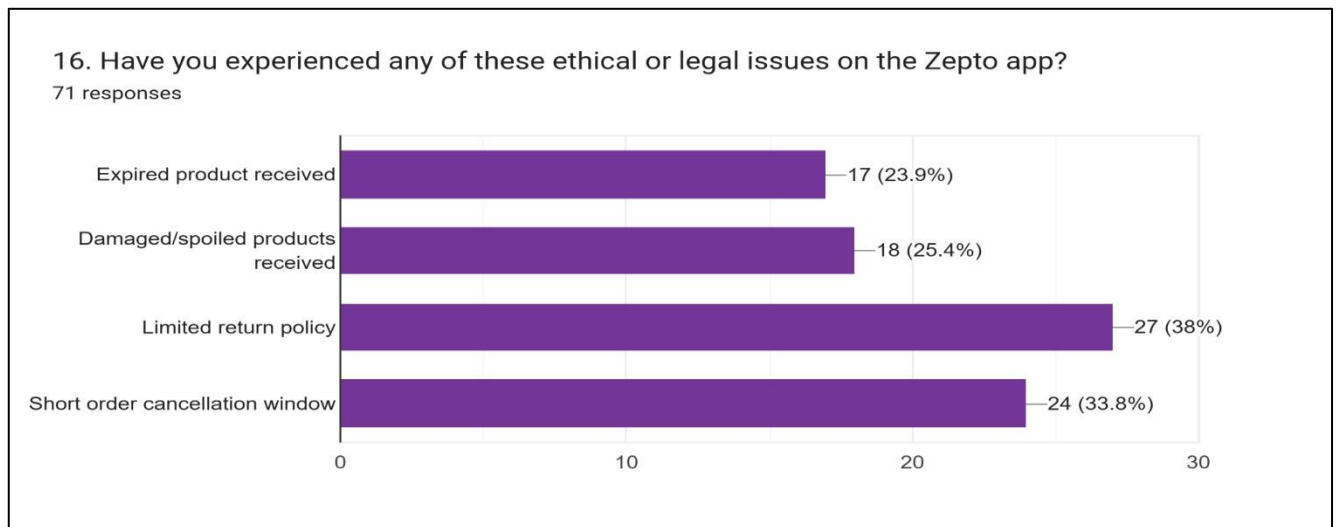
The above bar diagram measures how quick delivery affects loyalty compared to

other apps. The responses are spread across the scale, with 28.2% each rating it 1 or 2, 26.8% rating it 3, 4.2% rating it 4, and 12.7% rating it 5. This suggests that while delivery speed is valued, it doesn't strongly secure loyalty for most users, as ratings lean toward the lower end.

**TABLE 16: ETHICAL OR LEGAL ISSUES ON ZEPTO**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
EXPIRED PRODUCT RECEIVED	23.9%
DAMAGED/SPOILED PRODUCTS RECEIVED	25.4%
LIMITED RETURN POLICY	38%
SHORT ORDER CANCELLATION WINDOW	33.8%

**DIAGRAM 16:**

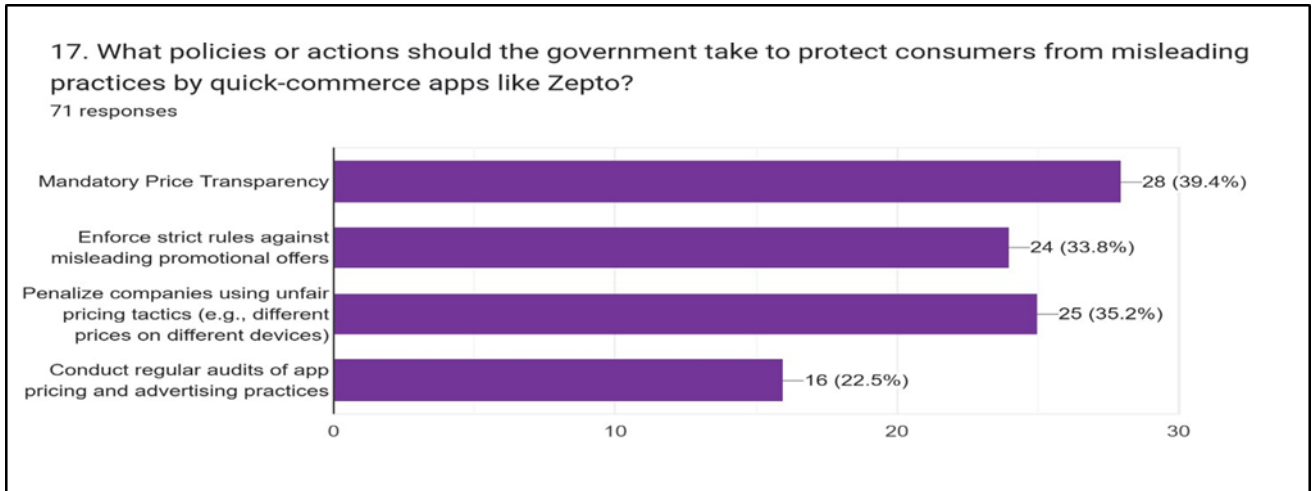


As per the survey, 23.9% of respondents reported receiving expired products, 25.4% received damaged or spoiled products, 38% faced issues with a limited return policy, and 33.8% struggled with a short order cancellation window. This suggests that policy limitations and product quality issues are common concerns for Zepto users.

**TABLE 17: POLICIES THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT USERS**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
MANDATORY PRICE TRANSPARENCY	39.4%
ENFORCE STRICT RULES AGAINST MISLEADING PROMOTIONAL OFFERS	33.8%
PENALIZE COMPANIES USING UNFAIR PRICING TACTICS (E.G., DIFFERENT PRICES ON DIFFERENT DEVICES (E.G. IPHONE VS ANDROID))	35.2%
CONDUCT REGULAR AUDITS OF APP PRICING AND ADVERTISING PRACTICES	22.5%

**DIAGRAM 17:**



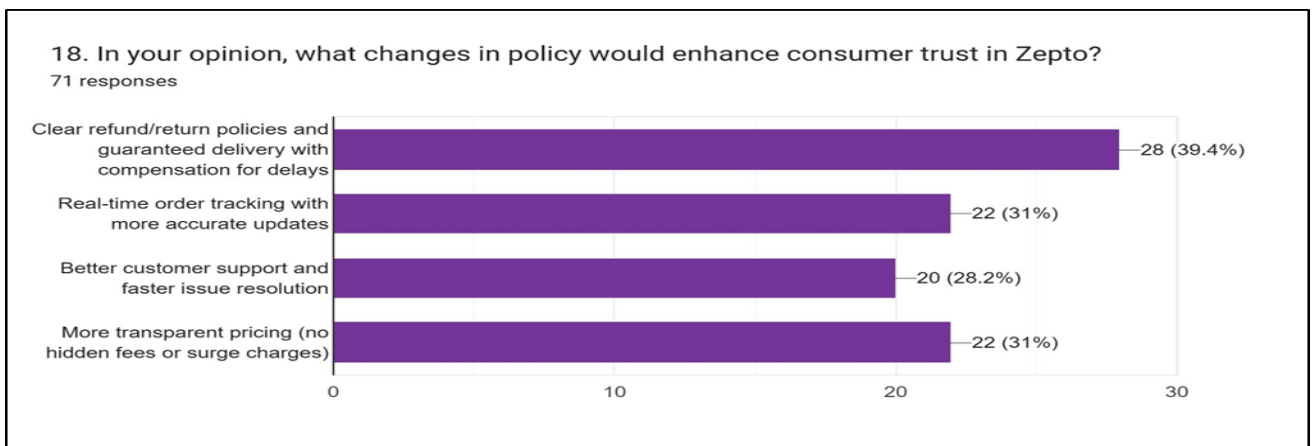
The above bar graph highlights what government actions consumers think are needed. It shows about 39.4% suggested mandatory price transparency, 33.8%

wanted stricter rules against misleading promotional offers, 35.2% recommended penalties for unfair pricing tactics, and 22.5% favoured regular audits of app practices. This shows a clear demand for regulatory oversight to protect customers.

**TABLE 18: CHANGES IN ZEPTO’S POLICY NEEDED TO ENHANCE USER’S TRUST**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
CLEAR REFUND/RETURN POLICIES AND GUARANTEED DELIVERY WITH COMPENSATION FOR DELAYS	39.4%
REAL-TIME ORDER TRACKING WITH MORE ACCURATE UPDATES	31%
BETTER CUSTOMER SUPPORT AND FASTER ISSUE RESOLUTION	28.2%
MORE TRANSPARENT PRICING (NO HIDDEN FEES OR SURGE CHARGES)	31%

**DIAGRAM 18:**



The survey revealed that 39.4% felt that clear refund and return policies with compensation for delays would improve trust, 31% wanted real-time tracking with more accurate updates, 28.2% prioritized better customer support and quicker issue resolution, and 31% asked for more transparent pricing without hidden fees or surge charges. These responses underline that transparency, accountability, and stronger customer support are key to building confidence in Zepto

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The survey captured insights from a sample of 71 respondents and primarily reflects the perspectives of young, urban, and technologically aware consumers. The demographic profile is largely dominated by individuals aged 19–25 (69%), with males constituting 54.9% of the respondents and students accounting for 62%. This group represents the primary user base of quick-commerce platforms, and their responses provide valuable insights into the overall user experience.

The findings reveal a significant gap between the platform's value proposition and its actual pricing and promotional practices. Although a large majority of respondents (85.9%) actively make purchases through the platform, a considerable number of users expressed concerns about its marketing strategies. Notably, 67.6% of respondents believe that some promotional offers on the platform are deceptive or misleading.

This perception appears to be directly associated with the presence of hidden charges. Nearly half of the respondents (46.5%) reported noticing additional fees during the checkout stage, a practice commonly referred to as “basket sneaking.” In addition, 15.5% of respondents observed that certain “limited-time offers” remain continuously active, which undermines the credibility of promotional messaging.

The issue of consumer trust is further affected by the platform's pricing strategy. More than half of the respondents (50.7%) indicated that they were aware that prices may vary across different devices. When asked about the possible reasons behind such practices, the most common response (43.7%) was that the platform aims to maximize revenue from different user segments. This suggests that consumers are not only aware of these strategies but also perceive them as unfair or profit-driven.

Apart from pricing concerns, the survey also identified several operational issues that negatively affect customer satisfaction. The most commonly reported ethical concern was the platform's limited return policy (38%), indicating dissatisfaction with post-purchase support. This was followed by complaints about a short order cancellation window (24.2%). Additionally, 23.9% of respondents reported receiving expired products, while 15.4% indicated that they had received damaged or spoiled items. These findings highlight the need for improved quality control and customer service standards.

Despite these challenges, users continue to rely on the platform, revealing a notable paradox. Approximately 33.3% of respondents stated that they tolerate such practices because the financial benefits outweigh the ethical concerns associated with deceptive pricing. This indicates that the current consumer base is largely transactional and highly price-sensitive. However, such reliance on price advantages alone may not ensure long-term customer loyalty. A significant increase in prices or attractive offers from competing platforms could potentially lead to a rapid shift in consumer preference.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Improved Transparency in Promotional Communication**

Quick-commerce platforms should clearly disclose all terms and conditions associated with promotional offers at the initial stage itself. Information such as minimum order value, validity period, and exclusions should be displayed upfront rather than being revealed during the checkout process. This will help prevent misunderstandings regarding offers such as “free delivery” or “limited-time discounts.”

#### **2. Regulation of Hidden and Discriminatory Pricing Practices**

Regulatory authorities should ensure that all charges, including delivery, packaging, or convenience fees, are displayed clearly on the product page before the purchase decision is made. Hidden or incremental charges added at checkout should be restricted. Furthermore, price variations across different devices or user segments should be regulated to ensure fairness and transparency.

### 3. **Consumer Awareness and Empowerment**

Consumer awareness initiatives should be conducted regularly through consumer rights organizations, media platforms, and in-app notifications. These initiatives should encourage users to review their bills carefully, compare prices across different platforms, and report unfair practices through official grievance mechanisms such as the National Consumer Helpline.

### 4. **Strengthening Regulatory Monitoring**

Government agencies, including the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, should strengthen their oversight of quick-commerce platforms. Continuous monitoring and strict enforcement of regulations related to misleading marketing practices and dark patterns will help maintain transparency and protect consumer interests.

### 5. **Policy-Level Consumer Protection Measures**

Stronger consumer protection policies should be introduced to address large-scale deceptive practices. Mechanisms such as class-action complaints or collective consumer redressal systems can empower consumers and hold platforms accountable for systemic issues affecting a large number of users.

## **Conclusion**

This study on Zepto's promotional and pricing practices highlights a significant gap between rapid technological innovation and the level of consumer protection available in India's quick-commerce sector. While Zepto has successfully expanded its market presence through fast delivery, aggressive promotions, and technology-driven operations, the study indicates that certain practices—such as hidden charges, misleading promotional offers, and differential pricing—raise concerns regarding fairness and transparency for consumers.

The findings suggest that although such strategies may provide short-term competitive advantages, they can gradually undermine consumer trust and weaken long-term customer loyalty. Moreover, these practices raise important ethical and regulatory questions regarding consumer rights and fair trade in the digital marketplace.

The study also indicates that relying solely on voluntary corporate responsibility may not be sufficient to address these concerns. Stronger regulatory oversight is necessary to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability within the quick-commerce industry. Policy measures should aim to limit practices such as drip pricing, ensure clarity in promotional claims, promote transparent pricing structures, and establish fair return and refund policies. In addition, periodic third-party audits, improved disclosure requirements, and effective enforcement mechanisms would help strengthen consumer protection and encourage responsible business conduct.

In conclusion, the rapid expansion of quick-commerce platforms requires a parallel evolution of India's regulatory framework. Ensuring transparency and protecting consumer interests are essential not only for ethical business practices but also for maintaining healthy market competition and long-term industry sustainability. While innovation will continue to drive growth in the digital economy, effective regulation will remain essential to ensure fairness and build lasting consumer trust.

### **Scope for Further Studies**

Future research can extend the findings of this study in several important ways. Firstly, researchers can conduct studies with a larger and more diverse sample size to obtain more comprehensive and representative insights into consumer perceptions of quick-commerce platforms. Expanding the geographical coverage and including respondents from different demographic backgrounds would help improve the generalizability of the results. Secondly, future studies may compare promotional and pricing strategies across multiple quick-commerce platforms such as Zepto and its competitors to better understand industry-wide practices and competitive dynamics.

Additionally, further research could focus on analysing algorithmic pricing models used in digital commerce to understand how data-driven systems influence price variations and consumer decision-making. Another important area for investigation is the long-term impact of deceptive or misleading marketing practices on brand trust, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Finally, comparative studies examining consumer protection regulations and policy frameworks in different

countries could provide valuable insights into best practices for regulating digital commerce and protecting consumer interests.

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