FINANCE

A Case Study on Comparison of Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart: Business Models, Competitive Strategies and Operational Challenges

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Abstract

India's retail landscape is being reshaped by quick commerce (Q-commerce), a model that combines app-based ordering with neighbourhood fulfilment facilities to deliver everyday products rapidly. Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart are prominent examples of this model. This comparative case study examines how the three businesses organise their operations, compete for customers and address the economic pressures associated with rapid fulfilment. It uses a qualitative, descriptive design based on publicly available company filings, annual reports, investor disclosures and industry research available up to 17 November 2026. The analysis considers business-model design, dark-store networks, product assortment, customer engagement, operating scale and reported profitability indicators. FY2025–26 disclosures show substantial scale across all three businesses, but the measures are not fully comparable because each company uses different definitions and reporting presentations. The evidence suggests that the next phase of competition will depend less on delivery speed alone and more on basket quality, store productivity, demand density, supply-chain discipline and customer trust. The study concludes that sustainable quick commerce requires a careful balance between convenience, cost efficiency, responsible working practices and financial performance.

Keywords: Blinkit; dark stores; India; last-mile delivery; operational efficiency; platform business models; quick commerce; Swiggy Instamart; Zepto

1 Introduction

A familiar urban situation illustrates the appeal of quick commerce. A household runs out of milk, a working professional needs a few ingredients for dinner, or a student realises that a daily-use item is missing. Rather than planning a larger shopping trip, the customer opens an app, selects the product and expects it to arrive soon. The transaction appears simple. Behind it, however, is a tightly coordinated system involving digital demand signals, local inventory, picking and packing, payment processing, delivery partners and route decisions.

Quick commerce, often described as Q-commerce, refers to digitally enabled retail fulfilment designed to deliver products within a short period, commonly from nearby micro-fulfilment facilities known as dark stores. It is distinct from conventional e-commerce not merely because delivery is faster, but because inventory and fulfilment are positioned close to clusters of consumers. The model therefore connects retail merchandising, technology, logistics and neighbourhood-level demand planning.

The Indian market provides a particularly relevant setting for examining this model. Smartphone adoption, digital payments, dense urban catchments and consumers' growing familiarity with app-

based services have supported the expansion of on-demand retail. Bain and Flipkart's 2025 report (Bain and Company, 2025), as reported by Reuters, estimated that quick commerce accounted for more than two-thirds of India's e-grocery orders in 2024 and represented a market worth approximately US$6–7 billion (Reuters, 2025). These figures indicate a major change in the way online grocery demand is being served.

Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart offer a useful comparative lens. They compete in overlapping consumer markets but have developed within different organisational contexts. Blinkit operates within Eternal Limited's wider consumer internet portfolio; Zepto developed as a dedicated quick-commerce business; and Instamart is part of Swiggy's broader on-demand platform. Their strategic choices reveal the managerial complexity of scaling a service in which customers expect both speed and reliability.

2 Statement of the problem

Quick-commerce platforms are expanding rapidly, but sustaining fast and reliable delivery while controlling fulfilment costs and achieving financial viability remains difficult. This study compares Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart to understand how their business models and operating choices respond to this challenge.

3 Objectives of the study

1. To examine the development of quick commerce in India.
2. To compare the business models and competitive approaches of Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart.
3. To analyse the role of dark stores, inventory management, technology and last-mile delivery.
4. To examine the financial and operational pressures associated with scaling quick-commerce operations.
5. To identify managerial practices that may support customer trust and long-term sustainability.

4 Research questions

1. What market and operational conditions have supported the growth of quick commerce in India?
2. How do the selected companies differ in their operating models and strategic priorities?
3. What role does dark-store productivity play in service quality and cost efficiency?
4. What do recent company disclosures indicate about the relationship between scale and profitability?
5. What managerial priorities are important for sustainable growth?

5 Review of literature

Research on quick commerce is still developing, but recent studies have begun to organise the subject around fulfilment infrastructure, consumer behaviour and the economics of rapid delivery. Anaswara and Rajeswari (2025) conducted a systematic review of literature on dark stores and last-mile delivery. Their review identifies operational efficiency, logistics, automation, customer convenience,

pricing and cash-burn concerns as connected themes. This is relevant to the present study because it positions dark stores as a central part of the Q-commerce operating system rather than simply as small warehouses.

Agrawal and Narayanan (2026) examined consumer reactions to dark patterns in quick-commerce interfaces. Their experimental study reported that interface practices such as basket sneaking, false scarcity and confirm-shaming increased perceived betrayal, punitive intent and negative word-of-mouth. The study is important because it broadens the discussion beyond speed and price: digital design and transparent customer communication can influence trust and future customer behaviour.

Nagwal et al. (2026) examined barriers to sustainable transformation in Indian quick commerce using a hybrid entropy–ISM approach. Their work reinforces the need to consider interconnected barriers to sustainability rather than treating operational problems in isolation. For managers, this means that technology, store location, delivery systems, infrastructure and stakeholder practices should be assessed as a connected system.

Industry evidence provides context for the scale of the opportunity. Bain and Flipkart's How India Shops Online 2025 report, reported by Reuters, found that Q-commerce had become a significant channel for online grocery orders in India. The growth has attracted additional competition and encouraged firms to broaden product categories and geographical coverage. At the same time, company disclosures show that expansion requires substantial investment in dark stores, technology, inventory and fulfilment capacity.

The literature therefore points to four connected themes: (a) convenience and changing purchase behaviour; (b) dark-store and last-mile operating efficiency; (c) unit economics and profitability; and (d) consumer trust and responsible platform design. The present study brings these themes together through a comparison of three major Indian platforms.

6 Research methodology

Research design: The study adopts a descriptive and comparative case-study design. It compares three organisations operating in the same broad Indian quick-commerce market while recognising differences in corporate structure and accounting presentation.

Data type and sources: The study relies on secondary data drawn from the FY2025–26 annual report of Eternal Limited, the FY2025–26 annual report and shareholder disclosures of Swiggy Limited, Zepto Limited's Updated Draft Red Herring Prospectus–I dated 8 June 2026, industry research and peer-reviewed journal articles. The information cut-off date is 17 November 2026.

Period of analysis: The principal company comparison focuses on FY2025–26 (year ended 31 March 2026), with selected earlier-year indicators used to explain trends where reported consistently.

Method of analysis: The study uses document analysis, descriptive comparison and thematic interpretation. The themes are business-model design, customer proposition, fulfilment infrastructure, operating scale, monetisation, profitability and sustainability.

Reliability and comparability: Company-reported indicators are attributed to their respective disclosures. Gross Order Value (GOV), Net Order Value (NOV), Net Receivables Value (NRV), revenue from operations and adjusted EBITDA are not treated as interchangeable. Where definitions differ, the study reports the figures separately and avoids direct ranking. Company-defined adjusted

EBITDA is a non-GAAP/management measure and may not be calculated identically across companies.

Limitations: The study is based on public disclosures and does not include confidential operating data, primary consumer surveys or interviews with employees and delivery partners. Company metrics are prepared under different definitions and business structures. Consequently, the analysis is indicative rather than a like-for-like audit of unit economics.

7 Industry and company context

7.1 The Indian quick-commerce environment

The quick-commerce proposition has grown from grocery delivery into a broader convenience retail model. Platforms increasingly offer fresh produce, packaged food, household essentials, personal care, electronics and selected general merchandise. This wider assortment can increase basket size and customer relevance, but it also makes inventory planning more complex. A business must decide which products to stock in each catchment, how much inventory to hold, and how to avoid tying up working capital in slow-moving items.

The model is based on proximity. Dark stores are generally not designed for walk-in shopping. They are organised for rapid order picking, packing and dispatch. The closer a store is to a dense group of customers, the shorter the potential delivery distance. However, proximity also has a cost: rent, fit-out, staffing, utilities, technology and inventory must be supported by sufficient order throughput.

7.2 Blinkit

Blinkit, formerly Grofers, evolved from an online grocery business into a quick-commerce platform. It became part of the Zomato group in 2022; the parent company later adopted the name Eternal Limited. Eternal's FY2025–26 annual report describes quick commerce as its largest business-to-consumer segment by Net Order Value. Blinkit's model combines a large dark-store network, expanding product assortment, technology-enabled fulfilment and a focus on demand density. The FY2025–26 annual report reports 2,243 stores across more than 250 cities at year-end and quick-commerce NOV of ₹48,567 crore. It also reports 917 million orders during the year. The company attributes growth to order-volume expansion, customer acquisition and wider geographical coverage (Eternal Limited, 2026).

Blinkit's strategic challenge is to ensure that the expansion of its store network produces sufficient throughput and contribution. The company's annual report notes that adjusted EBITDA loss for quick commerce reduced to ₹277 crore in FY2025–26, with an adjusted EBITDA margin of -0.6% of NOV, and that the segment reached adjusted EBITDA break-even in Q3FY26 and a positive 0.3% margin in Q4FY26. These are company-defined measures and should be interpreted as management indicators rather than statutory profit (Eternal Limited, 2026).

7.3 Zepto

Zepto was founded by Aadit Palicha and Kaivalya Vohra and built its proposition around app-based access to groceries and everyday products through a network of dark stores. Its June 2026 Updated Draft Red Herring Prospectus describes a technology-driven platform with merchant partners, dark stores and delivery partners. It reports that the network expanded to 1,139 dark stores across 66 cities as of 31 March 2026. The prospectus also describes a densification strategy: clustering stores

can shorten delivery distances, improve delivery-partner throughput and reduce cost per order (Zepto Limited, 2026).

Zepto's FY2025–26 disclosures report 640.18 million orders, Net Receivables Value of ₹24,815.5 crore and revenue from operations of ₹22,623.6 crore. Its adjusted EBITDA was reported at a loss of ₹5,041.6 crore, equivalent to -20.32% of NRV, under its own stated definition. The company also reported 1,677 orders per dark store per day for the year. These measures indicate rapid platform scale alongside substantial investment and operating pressure. The figures are company disclosures in an offer document and should not be confused with a final listed-company annual report (Zepto Limited, 2026).

7.4 Swiggy Instamart

Swiggy launched Instamart in 2020 and developed it within an existing food-delivery and consumer-platform ecosystem. The service uses Swiggy's technology and delivery capabilities while operating a dedicated quick-commerce fulfilment network. Its FY2025–26 annual-report disclosures describe a strategic shift towards larger baskets, broader non-grocery assortment and more disciplined network expansion. For FY2025–26, Instamart reported GOV of ₹28,496 crore, NOV of ₹20,210 crore and 412 million orders. Average order value reached ₹691, and the average monthly transacting user base reached 12.3 million. At year-end, the network comprised 1,143 active dark stores across more than 125 cities (Swiggy Limited, 2026a).

Instamart's FY2025–26 contribution margin improved to -2.8% of GOV and adjusted EBITDA margin was -12.3% of GOV, according to the company's annual-report disclosures and its Q4 FY2026 shareholder letter (Swiggy Limited, 2026b). The company also described a shift from rapid footprint expansion towards better utilisation of existing stores and selective additions. This illustrates a different phase of operating strategy: after building network capacity, management attention turns towards improving throughput, basket quality and cost leverage (Swiggy Limited, 2026a).

8 Comparative analysis

8.1 Business-model comparison

All three platforms connect digital demand with nearby fulfilment infrastructure, but their organisational starting points differ. Blinkit benefits from being part of Eternal's broader consumer internet portfolio. Zepto is a focused quick-commerce company with its own merchant and fulfilment ecosystem. Instamart draws on Swiggy's existing platform, customer reach and delivery experience. These differences can influence access to customers, shared technology, brand partnerships, capital allocation and the pace at which each company expands.

8.2 Operating scale and selected FY2025–26 indicators

Table 1 summarises selected indicators reported by the companies for the financial year ended 31 March 2026. Values are reproduced from company disclosures and converted to ₹ crore where appropriate.

Table 1. Selected FY2025–26 company-reported indicators.

Indicator	Blinkit	Zepto	Swiggy Instamart
Primary value metric	NOV ₹48,567 cr	NRV ₹24,815.5 cr	GOV ₹28,496 cr

Indicator	Blinkit	Zepto	Swiggy Instamart
Orders	917 million	640.18 million	412 million
Dark stores at year-end	2,243	1,139	1,143
Adjusted EBITDA	-₹277 cr	-₹5,041.6 cr	Margin -12.3% of GOV
Margin denominator	-0.6% of NOV	-20.32% of NRV	-12.3% of GOV

The table is not a direct league table. Blinkit's NOV, Zepto's NRV and Instamart's GOV/NOV are different measures. Adjusted EBITDA definitions and denominator bases also differ. Blinkit's reported quick-commerce revenue rose sharply in FY26 because the business shifted substantially towards inventory ownership; Eternal explicitly states that FY26 revenue is not comparable with earlier years. The comparison is therefore intended to illustrate reported operating scale and differing economics, not to establish a precise ranking of financial performance.

The values in Table 1 are taken from Eternal Limited (2026), Swiggy Limited (2026a) and Zepto Limited (2026).

8.3 Dark-store strategy and fulfilment productivity

Dark stores are the physical foundation of quick commerce. Their performance depends on location, assortment, stock accuracy, picking speed, labour planning, replenishment and dispatch. Zepto's prospectus provides a particularly clear account of its densification approach and reports that its orders per dark store per day increased from 1,325 in FY2024 to 1,565 in FY2025 and 1,677 in FY2026. This suggests that store productivity is a key performance measure, although the figure should not be directly compared with competitors unless definitions and active-store-day calculations are aligned (Zepto Limited, 2026).

Blinkit's FY2026 store network grew to 2,243 stores, while its average NOV per day per store was reported at ₹756,000. Instamart, meanwhile, emphasised larger formats and selective expansion, reporting 1,143 active stores and 4.8 million square feet of active store area. The figures suggest different network strategies: scale and geographic coverage, density and throughput, and larger formats to support assortment and basket expansion. Each approach involves a trade-off between reach, cost, inventory complexity and utilisation.

8.4 Marketing and customer engagement

Quick-commerce marketing is built around convenience, availability, perceived speed, assortment, price and app experience. Promotions can encourage trial, but excessive discounting may weaken margins or attract customers who are less loyal. Personalised recommendations and sponsored product placements can improve discovery and create advertising income, but they must remain transparent. Agrawal and Narayanan's (2026) study of dark patterns is a reminder that interface design should not create misleading urgency, conceal costs or manipulate customer choices. In a market built on trust and repeated use, transparent communication is a long-term competitive asset.

8.5 Financial sustainability

The central financial question is whether each order contributes enough to cover the costs of procurement, fulfilment, delivery, payment processing, technology, customer acquisition and store infrastructure. Larger baskets can help spread fulfilment costs across more items. Better demand forecasting can reduce waste and stock-outs. Higher store throughput can improve fixed-cost absorption. Advertising and brand partnerships may provide additional monetisation, but these cannot substitute for sound core unit economics.

The FY2025–26 disclosures show different profitability positions and should be read carefully. Blinkit reported a relatively narrow adjusted EBITDA loss margin on NOV and a positive quarter in Q4FY26. Zepto reported a much larger adjusted EBITDA loss relative to its NRV. Instamart reported an adjusted EBITDA margin of -12.3% of GOV. These measures are not perfectly comparable, but they demonstrate that high order volumes and network expansion do not automatically produce positive operating results. Sustainable performance requires a combination of basket quality, monetisation, store productivity and disciplined investment.

9 SWOT analysis

Blinkit — Strengths: large store network; strong brand visibility; integration within Eternal's wider consumer platform; broad product assortment. Weaknesses: significant physical infrastructure requirements; complexity of managing a large network; exposure to intense competition. Opportunities: deeper presence in new localities; higher store throughput; advertising and assortment expansion. Threats: aggressive rival expansion; rising real-estate and labour costs; regulatory, food-safety and service-quality risks.

Zepto — Strengths: focused quick-commerce proposition; technology-led operations; rapid network growth; disclosed emphasis on store densification and productivity. Weaknesses: substantial adjusted EBITDA losses; continued funding and infrastructure needs; operational complexity across a growing network. Opportunities: improving order density; increasing advertising and brand partnerships; broader customer and product segments. Threats: price competition; cash-flow pressure; regulatory and execution risks; customer switching.

Swiggy Instamart — Strengths: connection to Swiggy's established platform; existing customer and delivery ecosystem; growing assortment and larger-format stores. Weaknesses: continuing adjusted EBITDA losses; need to balance quick-commerce investment with group-wide priorities. Opportunities: cross-platform customer engagement; improved basket size; better utilisation of mature stores. Threats: strong competitors; high fulfilment costs; discount pressure; changing consumer expectations.

The SWOT assessment is an analytical interpretation of public information, not a company-approved assessment.

10 Major findings and discussion

First, quick commerce has moved beyond a narrow grocery-delivery proposition. The selected companies now position their platforms as broader convenience destinations. This expands the addressable use cases but increases the complexity of assortment, inventory and replenishment decisions.

Second, network size alone is an incomplete measure of competitive strength. Store location, orders per active store-day, inventory availability and average basket value influence the productivity of the network. A store that is poorly matched to local demand can add cost without generating sufficient order volume.

Third, the companies are following different strategic paths. Blinkit's FY2026 disclosures highlight scale, geographical expansion and improvement in adjusted EBITDA margin. Zepto's prospectus emphasises densification, store productivity and growth in annual orders. Instamart's FY2026

disclosures highlight larger baskets, broader assortment and a shift towards optimising the existing network. These are distinct responses to a common industry challenge.

Fourth, growth and profitability need to be assessed together. Large order volumes can strengthen customer reach and brand visibility, but they also increase fulfilment workload and may require more stores, inventory and delivery capacity. The quality of growth matters: repeat customers, higher basket value, lower cost per order and responsible customer acquisition are more useful indicators of sustainability than promotional growth alone.

Fifth, customer trust is part of operating performance. Clear pricing, accurate product availability, reliable delivery estimates, fair complaint resolution and responsible interface design can strengthen repeat use. A short-term increase in conversion is not necessarily beneficial if it is achieved through misleading interface practices.

Finally, the human and environmental dimensions deserve greater attention. Delivery partners and store employees are essential to the promise of quick fulfilment. Responsible scheduling, safety, fair treatment, food handling, packaging management and local regulatory compliance should be treated as part of the operating model rather than as peripheral concerns.

11 Managerial implications and recommendations

1. Manage each dark store as an economic unit. Review order density, basket size, stock-outs, wastage, picking time and cost per order before approving expansion.
2. Use localised demand forecasting. Assortment should reflect neighbourhood preferences, seasonality, festivals and weather rather than relying on a uniform national product mix.
3. Prioritise basket quality over discount-led volume. Bundling, relevant recommendations and reliable availability can encourage useful basket-building without excessive price incentives.
4. Improve replenishment and inventory accuracy. Better supplier coordination, cycle counting and demand sensing can reduce stock-outs and expiry-related losses.
5. Build customer trust through transparent design. Show all charges clearly, avoid deceptive urgency cues and make substitutions, refunds and complaint channels easy to understand.
6. Treat delivery-partner safety and store-worker conditions as operational priorities. Service promises should be designed around safe and realistic processes.
7. Measure environmental performance. Track packaging intensity, food waste, energy use and delivery efficiency, and publish measurable improvement targets.
8. Use disciplined expansion gates. New stores should be opened when catchment demand, contribution potential and supply-chain readiness justify the investment.

12 Conclusion

Quick commerce has changed the expectations attached to everyday retail in India. Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart show how digital platforms can combine neighbourhood inventory, technology and last-mile delivery to make routine purchases more convenient. Their FY2025–26 disclosures demonstrate substantial operating scale, but also reveal that the economics of rapid fulfilment remain challenging and differ across companies.

The comparative evidence suggests that the future of the sector will not be determined by delivery speed alone. It will depend on how well companies match inventory to local demand, improve store

productivity, build larger and more valuable baskets, monetise their platforms responsibly and manage fulfilment costs. Customer trust, workforce safety and environmental responsibility must also be built into the model.

The broader managerial lesson is that convenience creates value only when the system delivering it is efficient and sustainable. For quick-commerce businesses, the next competitive advantage may come from disciplined operations and customer confidence as much as from speed.

13 Limitations and scope for further research

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and by differences in company reporting definitions. It does not establish causal relationships between specific strategies and profitability. Future research may use primary interviews with store managers, delivery partners and consumers; compare city-level economics; examine customer retention and price sensitivity; or investigate the environmental effects of packaging and rapid delivery. A future quantitative study could also test the relationship between order density, average basket value, delivery distance and contribution margin using a consistent dataset.

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