

IMPACT OF DEEP DISCOUNTING STRATEGY BY ORGANIZED RETAILERS OVER KIRANA (GROCERY) SHOPS IN PUNE CITY AREA

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Abstract

Retailing has been undergoing various transformations worldwide. Typically, a retailer is a nearby shop providing all sorts of daily requirements for the families. These brick-and-mortar shops are small in size which is less than 500 sq. ft. and mainly operated by a single family. In India, you may find such 14 million shops serving the society from morning 7 till late evening. The last century saw the uprising of large-scale retail shops trying to change the way people purchased their daily requirements. The frequency of purchase changed from 2-3 days to a week a fortnight or a month. Today these large-scale retailers are also named organised retailers and can have nationwide or multinational operations. For almost the last decade we have seen the transformation of the physical transaction to online transactions. Orders can be processed online as well as the payments can be transacted online.

This technological advancement of Online technology, has created an opportunity for organized retailers to buy in bulk. These retailers offer the items nationwide with extremely heavy discounts. These deep discounts attract customers because the prices are too low but at the same time expect to buy more than usual quantities. The mall culture has led to a weekend affair where the customers buy their monthly utilities in a mall spending half or a full day in a mall with family. This becomes their family outing where they enjoy meals and some entertainment in these big malls. This has led to heavy business reduction for the traditional grocery shops threatening their very existence. We are trying to see how the Kirana shop owners look towards these threats and adopt strategies to counter this threat.

Keywords: Deep Discounting, Retail Industry, Technological Advancement, Kirana Shop, Digital Economy.

1. Introduction

Retailing is not new to mankind. Traditionally, retailers have provided society with the required items that are needed for daily usage. Retailers or traders play a vital role in the producer-to-consumer value chain. The role is an important part that controls 3 Ps out of the 4 Ps of marketing. A retailer controls price, place, and promotion while the manufacturer still majorly controls the P of

the product. A traditional trader typically shops in the vicinity of the consumers giving them the convenience of buying near their homes and at needed quantity, with good payment terms as well as at the time when they need the items.

In 1962, the USA experienced the introduction of large-scale trading by Walmart and slowly it picked up as a disruptive change in the trading market. As we experi-

enced the price was given utmost importance by the trading giant Walmart. In 1994, Walmart started using the slogan “Always Low Prices, Always.” as a part of its advertisement campaigns. As the leader of the bandwagon, Walmart thus put low prices as the main strategy for selling the goods. Most of the multinational and giant retailers use the same strategy to sell the products and attract more and more customers to them.

In today's perspective, the strategy has been augmented with yet another aspect due to the technological advancement of online trading. Low or Lowest prices have been transformed into deep discounts offered by organized retailers. These strategies seem to have posed threats to the traditional grocery stores or the Kirana shops in India. While explaining the importance of this sector, Manisha Bapna says “Statistically, over 14 million outlets operate in the country and only 4 percent of them are larger than 500 sq. ft. in size. India has about 11 shop outlets for every 1,000 people. These are typically family-owned and operated stores that lack the scale to grow. Hence, the sector presents a dire need for more investments towards its modernization.” Modernization is needed more to encounter the threat posed by organized retailers in the form of deep discounts.

The present paper tries to understand how the traditional traders or Kirana shop owners trying to equip themselves to protect them from this life-threatening situation. The scope is limited to the shop owners from Pune as it can represent any city in India. In the study, the main focus is on the Kirana shops which mainly deal in the day-to-day household requirements of the nearby locals.

2. Literature Review

The extant literature available on the subject is been studied for this study and listed below their related comments. The literature is in the form of web publications, research papers, and theses submitted for doctoral degrees.

Patel (2021) has observed that digital commerce has positively impacted urban as well as rural areas in terms of overall business transactions and retailing dealings in particular. She further states that the internet users in India were 696.77 million in 2020 which is expected to rise to 974.86 million in 2025. There are roughly 29% population using smartphones in 2018 which has risen to almost 35% in 2023. The fact is that a large number of mobile users use the internet on smartphones. This means that there is a significant number of app-based transactions in the retail sector. Thus, she concludes that the current retailers have to make efforts to convert their users into app-based users and keep on attracting them to these apps from time to time for frequent purchases. Accepting the fact that both the small and large vendors i.e. organized retailers and Kirana shops have the opportunity to attract customers online through apps, the one who can get maximum advantage of this fact is the

winner.

Juneja (2023) in her paper relates that selling in the retail industry has to do more on discounting, even though it may not succeed always. The idea is to attract customers to buy larger quantities. It can go to such an impactful strategy that some buyers can recklessly buy huge quantities just with the feeling that they are paying less to obtain more. The circumstances are created such that the customer feels that this is a one-time opportunity to buy at this low price and if the opportunity is not grabbed it will be lost forever. On the seller's front, they are so obsessed with this idea that they can offer prices at a loss sometimes in the force of getting better topline. With organized retailers, it may work as they can make up for the loss in another inventory item or the next season. One caution needs to be taken here that this cannot become a sustainable strategy. Kirana shop owners do not have this luxury of deep discounting and tend to lose the market to organized retailers. The author has rightly pointed to some new behavioral patterns of 'not-stocking' or 'not buying if not deep-discounted'. In the first case, customers buy what is needed at present and not for the future. In another case, the customer has developed a habit of waiting till the item gets deep-discounted. The other part is the loss of brand loyalty. Customers have stopped being product &/or shop loyal. In this race for deep discounting, the customer only looks towards price. Thus, there can be problems related to the door delivery. It can be a short delivery or a wrong delivery, which goes unnoticed by the customer in the rush to grab the discount. Most of the time the discount is covered by the minimum quantity purchase condition of the deep-discounting. All these drawbacks also lead to teach a lesson to the buyers making them aware of the probable drawbacks of such discounts. The author finally concludes that in the long run deep discounting has ruined the retail industry.

Phutela et. al., (2016) in their article “Who Leads the Game in Indian Retail: Web or Apps? – a Case of Flipkart”, stated the Indian Government's lead in taking the Digital India policy very seriously. As the world-famous UPI system's success, India is rightly placed to lead the world in making the laws as well as policies for digital transactions in payment as well as order processing. The payment innovations from these policies have encouraged cashless and mobile transactions for both small and large businesses. This innovation is very important from the digital point of view because earlier digital transactions were computer-based which are transformed into mobile phones with various apps.

Shukla and Nigam (2018) studied customer behavior concerning the use of Apps and the Internet or web purchases. In other words, they concentrated on the user experiences on e-purchases. The fact they mentioned is that there is rapid growth in the e-business with 235 million customers using app-based smart mobile phones. Thus, they conclude that the e-business is getting

transformed into app-commerce. On the expectation front of these apps, they comment that the customers prefer good front-end tools giving ease in operation, which is the result of an effective user interface. The study also reflected that e-retailers must provide a multi-channel distribution strategy. Sometimes customers can use app-based smartphones just to get the opportunity to see the product instead of buying. The purchase can take place either online or offline. The crux here they conclude is to have a better UX with superior UI on the app of a smartphone. This better UX will get converted into customer confidence leading to the purchase decision.

A report from KPMG (2014) states that there are some challenges for the organized retail industry that are crucial. They include lack of storage and logistic infrastructure, increased real estate costs and rents, lack of trained manpower, competition from unorganized sectors, taxation issues & complex FDI rules, and issues due to wrong deliveries/ product returns. All these lead to problems in starting in India for an MNC but India being an ever-increasing and 5th largest consumer market, the growth of e-commerce and online retailing is inevitable .

The web report by Team Entrackr deals with the Governmental efforts to manage the deep-discounting issues in the retail industry. The Government of India has rightly understood the problems of Grocery shops or brick & mortar shops. They are the ones who cannot offer the levels of deep discounts the organized retailers offer and hence lose the business in the process. Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) & Retailer Association of India (RAI) work towards protecting the interests of the grocery shops. CAIT has asked for bringing the Anti-Predatory Pricing Act that will protect the grocery shops. Discounts are the driving forces of Indian e-retailing in India, Ministry of Corporate Affairs is looking towards making a policy. But it is very difficult how to differentiate between deep discounts from normal discounts or predatory discounts. So currently a total ban on such pricing looks difficult (Entrackr Team, 2018).

Sazid (2017) in his paper deals with the situation of the cashless economy after the 2016 demonetization declared by PM Modi. He states that cashless economy to be successful, there are various aspects to be in place. They include interconnected electronic equipment including smartphones, accessibility of the internet facility at all places, security in these electronic transactions protecting privacy and loss of money, making the population aware of the new technology and the risks thereof, etc. If these things are in place, the cashless economy can be here to stay and profit everyone involved.

The paper by Shamim (2016) on digital India discusses the points related to the Government and society. To have a digital economy successful, there need to be a few metrics observed and controlled. If these metrics that define the digital economy in terms of infrastructure, digital services, and efficiency as well as the people's

awareness of these technologies are in place then the same can be adopted to the retail industry in a better way.

The paper by Mallapragada et. al., (2016) deals with e-retailing software handling various products and the functions of the websites. The front end of the software, the user interface, and the customer experience on the software are very crucial aspects of e-tailing. The ease of use in handling online platforms and how to place orders on the same are important in adapting the online platform at retailing.

The paper by Shankar et. al., (2016) deals with the mobile App from its spread point of view and what the expectations are of the consumers as far as the user experience is concerned. They defined this Marketing as 'the planning and execution of all the mobile-based marketing activities that influence a shopper from mobile shopping trigger, to purchase, consumption, repurchase and recommendation stages.' They found out that about 25% of their overall purchase is from this Mobile App purchase. Their observation is that the outcome of this study can be regarded as 4 major important points as the learning from the study. The first is concerned with the process of the purchase- ample choices are available, the ease of purchase, and the equation between the purchaser and the shop. The second point is related to surfing experiences as a good User Interface (UI) giving excellent ways to check earlier customers' evaluation of the purchase, easy access, good comparison of other available products, and then the information about buying it. The third one is about what accessories/ promotional items come along with the product that attracts the preferences of the buyer and overall analysis of the product to finally choose between the comparable ones. The fourth one is about after buying, how the buyer shares his/ her experience with friends and on the net making others buy or not buy it. Thus, the authors conclude that the User Experience is very important because if this experience is happy, then it is going to remain with the customer for a long time and that can bring him/ her back to purchase the same again and again as well as it will be shared with the friends creating positive resonance about the product.

Considering the above reviews, we can conclude that the impact of the deep-discounting on the grocery shops can be found in the following points so that they can be effectively used as guiding tools for setting marketing strategy for Kirana shops:

1. There exists a practice of deep discounting by organized retailers and online sellers in the B2C space
2. The practices of deep discounting are intended to create a monopoly in the market and eliminate competition, thus they are predatory in nature for the grocery shops.
3. Laws and government policies do not support the creation of a level playing in the FMCG retail space considering the presence of organized retail in offline and online modes.

4. Door delivery mode is adopted by the organized players wherein many times the conditions about the cost are not informed to the customer.
5. The condition of minimum order quantity is put forth for free home delivery. The minimum order quantity anyway ensures recovery of transit cost. The unorganized retailers many times are not able to compete with the organized players on this count.
6. Adoption of marketing communication techniques such as SMSs to customers for discount sales, greeting customers during festivities, or organizing events.

3. Research Gap

The following Research Gap is found through the review of the literature:

1. There is a conducive environment in India today for the digital economy. This includes product promotion, sales & order processing, order tracking & delivery, and finally sales service/ complaints. The unorganized retail industry seems to have accepted the digital platforms for B2B operations but not so effectively implemented for B2C. there is a gap in the study of how we can use this deep discounting by big players using the latest technology platforms to the benefit of the Kirana shops (grocery store).
2. Deep discounting involves various other aspects of an order like home delivery, minimum quantity, and payment terms. There is a gap in most of these aspects of the deep discounting schemes other than home delivery.
3. In the case of home delivery there exists a very important aspect of wrong delivery. The literature study also points out that there is no sufficient consideration given to wrong deliveries and how to handle them.
4. There is a general acceptance that the tactics of deep discounting by organized retailers have impacted unorganized retail shops or Kirana shops. One of the studies by Juneja also concludes that it has ruined the retail industry. However, they did not touch upon whether the Kirana (grocery store) shops can apply the same tactics effectively. There is only a reference to the usage of digital platforms (web or App). In these available technologies which one is better to compete with the existential threat created by the deep discounting by the organized sector?
5. The next point of gap is in terms of the products themselves. Grocery shops can adopt white-labeled low-cost products with small investments or partnerships. There can be a situation where a selected few of these products can be introduced in the product line of the Kirana (grocery store) shops. This can give a competitive advantage to Kirana shops over organized retailers as they are dealing with the product where they can provide the best service as they have a special level agreement with the manufacturer.

4. Problem Definition

The literature review brought us to the above points that are important from Deep-Discounting from Organized Retailers and how those impact the Kirana shops. As discussed earlier the above points refer from the Kirana Shop owner's point of view. So, we decided to conduct a study and make some suggestions to form strategies for the Kirana Shop Owners.

The study tries to look into the impact of deep discounting on the retail industry and the main focus will be from the point-of-view of a Kirana (grocery store) shop owner. It also looks into the application of digital technologies (web/ Apps) as a strategy to counter the deep discounting from organized retailers.

5. Research Methodology

Objective of the study: The objective was to study the impact of the deep discounts by Organized Retailers on Kirana (grocery store) shops and find working strategies for the Kirana Shops.

6. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Deep Discounting offered by Organized Retailers impacts the Kirana Shop (Grocery Store).

Hypothesis 2: The existing laws related to Deep Discounting can control Anti Predatory Pricing.

Hypothesis 3: The application of the technology platforms by Kirana shops (Grocery Stores) can help them effectively counter the Deep Discounting by Organized Retailers.

Hypothesis 4: The application of a white-label low-cost product can be an effective strategy for a Kirana shop (Grocery Store) to counter the deep discounting by an Organized Retailer.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Research Plan: A Research Plan is an overall outline of the study that explains the logical steps that are followed in the study to arrive at a logical conclusion. They are as follows:

- Research Design: Explorative
- Type of Research: Quantitative
- Population: The Kirana Shops in the Pune City
- Sample: A sample of 50
- Sampling: Non-probabilistic
- Source of Data: Primary Data
- Research Instrument: Structured Questionnaire
- Data Collection Method: Personal Interviews of the Kirana Shop owners

7.2 Sample Size: A sample size of 50 is sufficient as the objective of the research is to find the impact of Deep-Discounting by Organized Retailers on the Kirana Shops. The area under scope was the Pune city area.

7.3 Questionnaire: A questionnaire was formed with discussions with some experts and statistical advisors. With the discussions with the industry experts and a few

Grocery shop owners, we realized two more important aspects of this study. They are as follows:

1. White-labeled low-cost products are promoted by organized retail whereas unorganized retail is not able to sell these products owing to the lack of marketing skills. No explicit commitment to the quality of the products to customers is noteworthy.

2. Online B2B sales are not helping retailers across the country. Online B2B apps like Udaan did help in certain urban pockets for a while with their practice of discounting, replacement, and credit for selective retailers.

The Structured Questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions having pre-determined answers. The questions were kept very simple, as short as possible, and free of jargon. The same questions were asked to every interviewee and the answers were mostly dichotomous or nominal data.

The 26 questions as grouped below:

1. Demography questions:	04
2. Existence and Impact of Deep Discounting Practice:	03
3. Depth & Profitability of Deep Discounting:	03
4. Laws related to Deep Discounting:	02
5. Deep Discounting and Home Delivery:	04
6. Online Existence of Grocery Shops:	02
7. White Label low-cost products:	04
8. Online B2B Apps used by Grocery Shops:	03
Total	25

Thus, there are overall 25 Questions divided into 8 groups. The analysis is discussed in the next paragraph.

8. Data Analysis & Findings

The data were collected and analyzed for its collective replies to conclude the points under study. Most of the replies were self-explanatory giving rise to the obvious conclusions.

1) Existence and Impact of Deep Discounting Practice:

a.	Does there exist a Deep Discounting practice?	100%	Yes
b.	Who practices it?	100%	Organized Retailer
c.	Whom does it affect?	100%	Grocery Shops

Finding: All the respondents agreed that there exists a Deep Discounting Practice followed by Organized Retailers that impacts the Kirana shops. Thus, the Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

2) Depth & Profitability of Deep Discounting:

a.	Does Deep discounting create a monopoly?	100%	Yes
b.	How deep are the discounts?	100%	Cost-
c.	Is it profitable	100%	No

Findings: As per the responses, Deep Discounting by Organized Retailers is not a profitable practice from the point-of-view of a Kirana Shop (Grocery Store) as the price is less than the cost. This further strengthens the above findings in point no.1.

3) Laws related to Deep Discounting:

a.	Do we have laws to prevent Deep Discounting?	100%	Yes
b.	Does is help?	90%	No
		10%	Yes

Findings: The respondents agree that their exit laws prevent Deep Discounting. But at the same time, they feel that the existing laws in India fail to prevent the Deep Discounting impacting the Kirana shop (Grocery store). Thus, the Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

4) Deep Discounting and Home Delivery:

a.	Deep Discounts include Home Delivery?	100%	Yes
b.	Is it at an extra cost?	100%	No
c.	Does home delivery involve minimum order quantity?	100%	Yes
d.	Can you compete with organized retailers on this account?	100%	No

Findings: As per the responses, Deep Discounting involves Home Delivery without extra cost, but for a minimum quantity. This practice cannot be practiced by Kirana shop (Grocery store). If the customers are convinced against this minimum order compulsion, then the Deep Discounting practice can be curbed

5) Online Existence of Grocery Shops:

a.	Do you have customer data?	100%	Yes
b.	Do you send SMS to them on special occasions?	100%	Yes

Findings: The respondents have agreed that they have the customer data and use that to maintain the relationship with them by sending SMS. Thus, the Kirana shops can send promotional messages to the customers to attract them to buy additional products or in additional quantities. So, the Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

6) White Label low-cost products:

a.	Do you sell white-label low-cost products?	90%	No
b.	If not, why?	90%	No expertise
c.	If yes, how do you ensure quality?	10%	Hiring experts
d.	Can organized retailers provide quality assurance?	50%	No
		50%	Yes

Findings: As per the responses, most of the Kirana shops (Grocery stores) do not sell store-white-label lost products, as they lack the expertise required to sell & support those products. The remaining who can assure quality service to customers depend upon hiring experts for the same. They also responded that half of the Organized Retailers provide quality assurance while the remaining half do not provide it. Thus, the Hypothesis 4 is rejected.

7) Online B2B Apps used by Grocery Shops:

a.	Have you tried any apps for B2B nation-wide sale?	50%	Yes
b.	If yes which one?	50%	Udaan
c.	For how long period?	50%	Less than 1 month

Findings: The responses reveal that the Kirana shops (Grocery stores) have tried the B2B nationwide app and the famous one was Udaan. The usage was less than one month for half of the respondents and more than one month for the remaining half of the respondents.

9. Conclusion

As per the analyses, we can conclude that: There exist Deep Discounting practices in the retailing market. The Organized Retailer is the one who offers such discounted practices. The Grocery shops or the Kirana shops are the ones who get impacted by the practices of Deep Discounting.

The very aim of Deep Discounting is to capture the entire market by economies of scale which can lead to a monopolistic situation for the Organized Retailer. To achieve this the offered prices are most of the time below the cost of the product. The deep discounting practice for a product is never a profitable proposition. Most of the

time the profits are booked after the monopolistic aim is achieved. In some cases, the profits of other items are transferred to this business unit to cover the transactional losses.

We do have some policies in place to prevent deep discounting. There is a very thin line between discounted pricing and predatory pricing, so it is difficult to implement the policy effectively. The advances in technology have provided huge potential for large economies of scale allowing very heavy discounts, and hence Organized Retailers also tend to offer prices below costs to achieve monopolistic targets.

Most of the deep discounting offers include home deliveries. The prices include home delivery charges. The organized retailers normally include the home delivery charges in the condition of minimum quantity to be purchased to get the deep discounted prices. In such a situation the grocery shops cannot afford the economies of scale and hence cannot match these deep discounted prices.

The grocery shop owners are also trying to use the online Apps and try to compete in the marketplace. So, at their level, every grocery shop owner tries to use the data of their customers and send SMSs. These SMSs are on various occasions like promotions for important festive seasons or the important dates of the customer like birthdays or anniversaries.

Most of the grocery shops i.e. 90% of the respondents cannot sell white-label low-cost products. These products are more sophisticated and expert persons to maintain or repair. This is the reason why most of the grocery shop owners (90% in this response situation) cannot afford to keep such experts, and hence cannot deal in these products. Some of the richer grocery shop owners (10% in this situation) can afford and hence can offer white-label products. There are some grocery shop owners (50% in this response situation) who can offer service and hence quality assurance to their customers. Some grocery shop owners (50% in this response situation) cannot afford to hire the experts needed and hence cannot assure the customers of quality.

Some grocery shop owners are trying to use some B2B Apps to check whether they can cover additional areas nationwide for promoting their products. Half of the respondents have been trying B2B Apps for their promoting their products. All these respondents have tried Udaan as the B2B App for this promotion. Their usage period was less than one month. Hence the B2B App in such situations has not been very successful.

10. Recommendations

With the interactions with the Kirana shop (Grocery Store) owners, the researcher feels that the following recommendations can be helpful to the Kirana shops to counter the Deep Discounting practice by the Organized Retailers:

1. Educate the customers about the drawbacks of the

Deep Discounting Practices such as minimum order quantity. Kirana shop owners must explain how the quantity most of the time absorbs the margins for the Organized Retailers. This is very much essential as the main advantage of a Kirana shop is letting customers buy at low quantities near the house. If the benefits are explained well then, the customers may consider refraining from using Deep Discounts.

2. The other aspect of Deep Discounting is Home Delivery which can lead to a Wrong Delivery/ under delivery. In these cases, the customer has to spend time and energy to get back the right delivery. Let the customer be educated on this serious point also.

3. The best strategy to counter Deep Discounting can be the usage of a technology platform. Today you can find that Indian digital infrastructure is conducive to digital promotion, selling, order processing, and related logistics. Kirana shop owners can use this to ensure that regular customers can get interesting information and compelling messages from Kirana shops regularly. This will ensure that the customer will be reminded of the Kirana shop all the time and the related information may instigate them to buy.

4. The digital technology can be used by the Kirana shop to customize weekly/ monthly purchases of the customers. Use customer History data to find out what they buy regularly and create a customized package for them with bundled pricing that will attract them to buy in bulk from the Kirana shop.

5. digital technology can be used to locate good suppliers from B2B apps like Udaan. The app can provide better products, better prices, better information available online, and better availability.

6. The digital technology can be augmented with

various other tools to automate accounts, inventory management, inventory location tracking, customer order processing, and delivery tracking.

7. Use digital technology, google, and related search engines to find suitable white label low-cost products, that will attract your customers. Talk to customers to find their reaction to the introduction of these products. Tie-up with such manufacturers who do not have a local presence. Also, sign an agreement with them for proper support online/ offline by their technical expert.

11. Limitations

Utmost care is taken in the entire research for data, interviews, and statistical calculations. However, some limitations can be out of the control, or unavoidable from the research point of view. They are:

1. Respondent's reluctance to answer questions asked by unknown interviewers about things they consider private
2. Busy people may not want to take the time for a survey
3. Persons may try to help by giving pleasant answers
4. Persons unable to answer because they cannot remember or never gave a thought to what they do and why they have done that
5. A person may wrongly interpret the question
6. A person's own bias may reflect the true answer
7. There can be some error due to convenient sampling used by the researcher
8. The interviewer's perception may add ambiguity to the question
9. Personal moods (interviewer & interviewee) may affect the outcome of the interview
10. Persons may answer to look smart or well-informed.

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