Role of Innovation in Building Competitive Advantage in Food Delivery E-Commerce Platforms: Evidence from Ahmedabad City

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Abstract

This study examines the role of innovation in building competitive advantage in food delivery e-commerce platforms in Ahmedabad City. The growth of platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy has transformed consumer food ordering behavior by introducing digital convenience, faster service, personalized recommendations, and seamless payment options. The study focuses on how innovative features influence consumer awareness, preference, satisfaction, loyalty, and overall competitive advantage in the food delivery market. A descriptive research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from respondents in Ahmedabad city through a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tools such as ANOVA and Chi-square tests. The findings reveal that practical innovations such as fast delivery, digital payments, and promotional strategies significantly influence consumer satisfaction and competitive advantage, whereas AI-based personalization shows comparatively lower influence. The study also highlights that innovative service features help platforms strengthen customer engagement and maintain a competitive position in the market. The paper concludes that continuous innovation is essential for food delivery e-commerce platforms to sustain growth and remain competitive in a rapidly changing digital environment.

Keywords: *Innovation; Food Delivery E-Commerce; Consumer Preference; Zomato; Swiggy.*

Introduction

Innovation has become a critical driver of growth and competitiveness in the modern business environment. In the digital era, firms across industries are increasingly using innovation to improve customer experience, increase efficiency, and create market differentiation. In the food delivery sector, innovation has played a transformative role by changing the way consumers order food, interact with platforms, and evaluate service quality.

Food delivery e-commerce platforms have grown rapidly in India due to increased smartphone usage, internet access, digital payment systems, and changing consumer lifestyles. Platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy have introduced innovative features including real-time tracking, personalized recommendations, online reviews, cashless payments, discounts, subscription plans, and faster delivery services. These innovations have not only improved convenience for consumers but have also intensified competition among food delivery platforms.

Ahmedabad City has emerged as an important market for online food delivery due to its urban population, rising digital adoption, and the growing presence of young consumers, especially Gen Z. This generation is highly responsive to digital innovation, convenience, and service quality. As a result, food delivery e-commerce platforms are continuously innovating to attract and retain customers.

Despite the rapid growth of online food delivery platforms and continuous technological innovation, there remains a lack of clarity on how these innovations translate into competitive advantage. While existing studies have focused on consumer behaviour, technological features, and platform performance independently, limited research has examined how innovation influences consumer awareness, preferences, satisfaction, and loyalty in an integrated manner. Moreover, there is insufficient empirical evidence from localized urban contexts such as Ahmedabad, where digital adoption and Gen Z usage are rapidly increasing. This creates a need to systematically analyze the role of innovation in shaping consumer behaviour and its contribution to building sustainable competitive advantage in food delivery e-commerce platforms.

Statement of the Problem

Despite rapid technological advancements in food delivery e-commerce, there remains uncertainty regarding how innovation contributes to sustainable competitive advantage. While platforms continuously introduce technological features, consumers may prioritize practical convenience over advanced innovations. Therefore, it becomes important to examine how innovation influences consumer awareness, satisfaction, loyalty, and platform preference in the context of Ahmedabad city.

Motivation Behind the Research

The rapid expansion of food delivery e-commerce platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy has significantly transformed consumer food ordering behaviour, especially among young and digitally active consumers in urban cities like Ahmedabad. Increasing dependence on smartphones, digital payment systems, and app-based services has created intense competition among food delivery platforms, where continuous innovation has become essential for attracting and retaining customers.

The motivation behind conducting this research emerged from observing the growing influence of innovative features such as fast delivery, live order tracking, AI-based recommendations, digital payment systems, loyalty programs, and sustainable delivery practices on consumer preferences and platform selection. Although several studies have explored consumer behaviour and online food delivery services, limited research has examined how innovation collectively influences consumer awareness, satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive advantage, particularly in the context of Ahmedabad city.

Furthermore, the increasing participation of Gen Z consumers in online food ordering created a need to understand how technological and service innovations shape their perceptions and usage behaviour. The study was therefore motivated by the need to provide empirical insights into the role of innovation in strengthening competitive advantage within the food delivery e-commerce sector. The research also aims to help food

delivery platforms understand consumer expectations and adopt customer-oriented innovations that can improve satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term market sustainability.

Literature Review

The rapid growth of online food delivery platforms has significantly transformed the restaurant industry and consumer food consumption patterns. Zomato and Swiggy have played a pivotal role in this transformation by offering digital convenience, wider restaurant access, and enhanced service efficiency. **Mudaliar (2025)** observed that these platforms have shifted consumer behaviour from traditional dine-in services to online ordering, while also raising concerns related to restaurant profitability and long-term sustainability.

A substantial body of literature focuses on consumer behaviour and adoption patterns in online food delivery services. **Duggal (2020)** identified convenience, time-saving, and multiple payment options as primary drivers of platform adoption, particularly among digitally active users. Similarly, **Chandan (2020)** found that factors such as discounts, loyalty programs, and ease of payment significantly influence satisfaction and ordering behaviour among college students. **Niyati (2020)** further explained that changing lifestyles, urban mobility, and evolving food habits have increased dependence on online food delivery, especially among younger consumers. Supporting this view, **Shiun-Yi (2017)** highlighted that the demand for convenience and variety has accelerated the growth of online food ordering systems.

Another important stream of research examines technological innovation and its role in enhancing service delivery. **Jain (2025)** emphasized that innovations such as AI-driven recommendations, real-time tracking, route optimization, and digital payment systems contribute significantly to improving customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. **Amit Shankar (2022)** traced the evolution of online food delivery from basic website-based ordering to advanced mobile applications and emerging technologies such as drone delivery, indicating a continuous trend of technological advancement in the industry.

In addition to adoption and technology, several studies have explored factors influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty. **Sarvesh Jadhav (2023)** found that restaurant variety and app design play a crucial role in shaping user satisfaction and repeat usage, whereas packaging quality has a relatively limited impact. **Khan (2022)** highlighted the importance of online reviews and ratings in influencing consumer purchase decisions, indicating that customer feedback mechanisms are integral to platform success. **Berezina (2020)** further stressed the need for customer-centric strategies and branding to enhance user experience and sustain competitive positioning.

From a strategic perspective, research has also addressed competition and platform performance within the food delivery ecosystem. **Jaydataa (2024)**, through a SWOC analysis of Swiggy, identified strong delivery networks, technological capabilities, and brand reputation as key strengths, while also noting challenges such as high operational costs and intense competition. **Gera (2018)** observed that online food delivery platforms have intensified competition by enabling consumers to compare prices, reviews, and service quality across multiple providers. **Vidani (2016)** emphasized the importance of sustainable business practices, platform economics, and innovation-driven strategies in achieving long-term competitiveness.

Despite these contributions, early studies such as **Lan (2016)** pointed out that the online food delivery market lacked maturity and required stronger regulatory frameworks and stakeholder coordination. **Singh (2016)** and **Mala (2016)** highlighted the role of increasing internet penetration, smartphone usage, and changing consumer behaviour in driving the initial growth of online food delivery services, particularly among urban populations and younger demographics. Importantly, **Modi (2016)** identified a lack of localized research in the Indian context, especially concerning the impact of food delivery platforms on consumer perception and business performance in cities like Ahmedabad.

While prior studies have examined consumer behaviour, technological innovation, customer satisfaction, and competitive dynamics in online food delivery services, most of these aspects have been analyzed in isolation. Limited research has attempted to integrate these dimensions to understand how innovation influences consumer awareness, preferences, satisfaction, and loyalty, and how these factors collectively contribute to competitive advantage. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research focusing on localized urban contexts

such as Ahmedabad, where digital adoption and Gen Z consumption patterns are rapidly evolving. This highlights a significant gap in the existing literature and underscores the need for a comprehensive, integrated analysis.

Research Gap

Although prior studies have examined consumer behaviour, technological innovation, and platform performance in online food delivery services, these aspects have largely been studied in isolation. There is limited empirical evidence on how innovative features influence consumer awareness, preferences, satisfaction, and loyalty in an integrated manner, and how these factors collectively contribute to building competitive advantage. Additionally, existing research lacks a localized focus on urban markets such as Ahmedabad, where changing consumer dynamics and high digital adoption present a unique context for analysis.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the demographic profile of consumers in Ahmedabad and their online food ordering behaviour.
2. To examine consumer awareness regarding innovative features offered by food delivery platforms.
3. To evaluate the impact of innovative features on consumer preferences and platform selection.
4. To assess the influence of innovation-related factors on consumer satisfaction and loyalty.
5. To analyze the role of innovation in creating competitive advantage for food delivery platforms.

Research Methodology

Research Design

For the purpose of this research, a descriptive research design has been used to effectively analyse the data collected with respect to the research objectives. The design is appropriate for the research as it enables an understanding of consumer perceptions, behaviour, and the influence of innovation in developing a competitive advantage in food delivery e-commerce in Ahmedabad city.

Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary data and secondary data.

Primary Data

Primary data has been collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire.

Secondary Data

Secondary data has been collected from various sources such as Research papers, Company websites, Articles and online databases.

Data Collection Method

The data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire prepared based on the objectives of the study.

The questionnaire consisted of different types of questions such as Multiple-choice questions, Ranking questions, Rating scale questions, Multiple grid questions. The questionnaire was distributed among respondents through Google Forms ensuring wider reach and convenience in data collection.

Sampling Method: Convenience Sampling Method (Convenience sampling was adopted due to easy accessibility of respondents and the exploratory nature of the study.)

Sample Size

The total number of respondents selected for the study was 500 respondents.

The respondents were chosen based on their usage and familiarity with food delivery e-commerce platforms.

Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software, which were used for generating tables, charts, and performing statistical tests.

The following statistical tools were used for analysis:

- Percentage Analysis
- Ranking Analysis
- Rating Scale Analysis
- Mean Analysis
- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)
- Chi-square Test

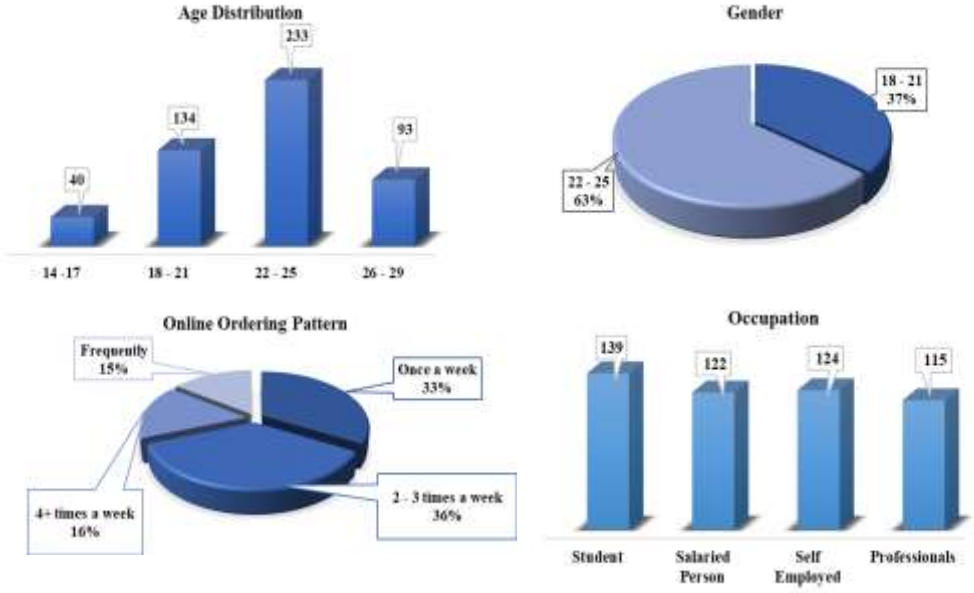
Limitations of the Study

1. The study is limited to Ahmedabad city, so the results may not apply to other cities with different habits and preferences.
2. The study focuses only on Gen Z, so it does not include the views of other age groups like older consumers or professionals.
3. The research considers overall food delivery platforms and does not compare specific platforms like Zomato and Swiggy.
4. Convenience sampling was used, so the respondents may not fully represent the entire population.
5. The data is based on self-reported responses, which may include bias or inaccuracies.

Future Scope of Research

Future studies may compare multiple cities, include other demographic groups, or examine the impact of AI-driven personalization and sustainability practices using advanced statistical techniques such as regression or structural equation modelling.

Objective 1: To analyze the demographic profile of consumers in Ahmedabad and their online food ordering behaviour.



Age: The age distribution shows that most respondents are in the 22–25 years group, indicating that the sample mainly consists of young adults.
Gender: The gender composition is nearly balanced, with a slightly higher proportion of female respondents than male respondents.
Occupation: The respondents represent different occupational categories, with students forming the largest segment of the sample.
Frequency of Ordering Food Online: The findings indicate that most respondents' order food online on a weekly basis, particularly 1–3 times per week.
Average Monthly Spending on Food Delivery: The spending pattern shows that the majority of respondents spend up to ₹3,000 per month on food delivery services.

Objective 2: To examine consumer awareness regarding innovative features offered by food delivery platforms.

Awareness of key innovative features across food delivery platforms.

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Fast/Bolt Delivery	283.00	29.60
AI recommendation	70.00	7.32
Live Tracking	250.00	26.15
One-Click Checkout	156.00	16.32
Loyalty Rewards	197.00	20.61
Total	956.00	100.00

Fast delivery (29.6%) and live tracking (26.2%) dominate awareness, reflecting consumers' priority for speed and transparency, while AI recommendations lag significantly (7.3%), indicating limited perceived value in algorithmic personalization.

Objective 3: To evaluate the impact of innovative features on consumer preferences and platform selection.
Agreement on Feature Influence
(1=Strongly Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

Statement	**Mean Rating**
Innovative features influence my choice of food delivery platform	2.07
Delivery speed is an important factor in my platform preference	2.034
AI based recommendations improve my ordering experience	2.576
Digital Payments innovations enhance convenience	3.07
Sustainable delivery practices improve brand image	3.302

Respondents showed moderate agreement towards innovative features (M=2.07) and delivery speed (M=2.03) significantly influence platform selection, followed by AI recommendations (M=2.58). Digital payments (M=3.07) and sustainable practices (M=3.30) received neutral ratings, suggesting relatively lower influence on consumer preferences.

Primary Platform Usage

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Zomato	372	74.40
Swiggy	88	17.60
Uber Eats	30	6.00
Dunzo	10	2.00
Total	500	100

Zomato dominates usage (74.4%), followed distantly by Swiggy (17.6%), indicating strong market leadership.

Rating the features according to food delivery E-Commerce
(1=Very Poor, 2=Poor, 3=Average, 4=Good, 5=Excellent)

Statement	**Mean Rating**
Delivery Speed	2.968
App Interface & Usability	2.904
Personalization	2.872
Payment Convenience	3.706
Promotional Innovation	3.794

Delivery speed (M=2.97), interface (M=2.90), and personalization (M=2.87) rated positively, while payments (M=3.71) and promotions (M=3.79) received neutral assessments.

Perceived Technological Advancement
(Check Box Question)

	Frequency	Percentage
Zomato	371	48.94
Swiggy	280	36.94
Uber Eats	69	9.10
Dunzo	38	5.01
Total	758	100

Zomato leads technological perception (48.9%), reinforcing its preference dominance over Swiggy (36.9%).

Objective 4: To assess the influence of innovation-related factors on consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Respondents identified innovative features enhancing satisfaction with food delivery platforms.

	Frequency	Percentage
Fast delivery	338	24.30
Accurate Order Tracking	213	15.31
AI-based recommendations	145	10.42
Seamless payment process	174	12.51

Attractive Loyalty Programs	175	12.58
Sustainable Packaging	174	12.51
Regular App updates	172	12.37
Total	1391	100

Fast delivery emerged as the primary satisfaction driver (24.3%), followed by accurate order tracking (15.3%). Secondary features including loyalty programs (12.6%), payments (12.5%), and sustainability (12.5%) showed comparable moderate importance, while AI recommendations ranked lowest (10.4%).

Respondents ranked factors influencing platform loyalty
(1= Most Important, 2=Important, 3=neutral, 4=Slightly Important, 5=Not Important at all)

Statement	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Score by Assigned weight**	**Rank**
Customer Support	75	22	23	85	295	2003	1
Brand and Reputations	40	66	39	275	80	1789	2
Delivery Speed	125	57	256	39	23	1278	3
Innovative Features	64	291	66	58	21	1192	4
Discounts and Promotions	211	69	114	29	77	1181	5

Customer support emerged as the top loyalty driver (Rank 1, Score=2003), followed by brand reputation (Rank 2). Delivery speed ranked third, while innovative features and discounts showed relatively lower influence on sustained platform loyalty (Ranks 4-5).

Respondents rated innovation dimensions' impact on platform preference
(1=Very Low Impact, 2= Low Impact, 3= Neutral, 4= High Impact, 5= Very High Impact)

Statement	**Mean Rating**
AI Personalization	2.426
Delivery Speed	2.728
Digital Payment Innovation	2.938
Sustainability Initiatives	3.454
App Usability & Interface	3.664

App usability (M=3.66) and sustainability (M=3.45) showed highest impact on preference, while AI personalization exhibited lowest influence (M=2.43), revealing user priority for intuitive design over algorithmic features.

Objective 5: To analyze the role of innovation in creating competitive advantage for food delivery platforms.

Respondents ranked innovation dimensions by impact on competitive advantage
(1=Very Low Impact, 2= Low Impact, 3= Neutral, 4= High Impact, 5= Very High Impact)

Statement	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Score by Assigned weight**	**Rank**
Promotional innovation	92	44	22	65	277	1891	1
Sustainability initiatives	37	88	53	250	72	1732	2

Digital Payment Systems	89	58	258	57	38	1397	3
Delivery Speed	43	250	57	96	54	1368	4
AI Personalisation	238	52	111	35	64	1135	5

Promotional innovation ranked highest (Score=1891), followed by sustainability initiatives, underscoring marketing and eco-strategies as key drivers of competitive advantage over operational enhancements like AI personalization.

Perception of Innovation in Food Delivery Platforms
(1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3=Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree)

Statement	**Mean Rating**
Platforms that frequently introduce new and innovative features are more likely to outperforms competitors in the market	1.872
The food delivery platform I use regularly introduces new technological features	2.048
Innovations such as AI based recommendations, faster delivery, and advanced payment options enhance a platform's competitive advantage	2.14

Strong agreement exists that frequent innovation (M=1.87) drives competitive superiority, with consistent perceptions of personal platform innovativeness (M=2.05) and specific tech features (M=2.14) supporting sustained market leadership.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

H_{01}: The variance of innovation in food delivery platforms is equal among different groups.
H_{11}: The variance of innovation in food delivery platforms is not equal among different groups.

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Innovation	Based on Mean	0.997	3	496	0.394

As $p - value\ (0.394) > 0.05$, we fail to reject H_{01}. i.e., The variance of innovation in food delivery platforms is equal among different groups.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the mean score of innovation in food delivery platform among different age groups of respondents.
H_{12}: There is a significant difference in the mean score of innovation in food delivery platform among different age groups of respondents.

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.017	3	0.672	1.731	0.160
Within Groups	192.729	496	0.389		
Total	194.746	499			

As $p - value\ (0.160) > 0.05$, we fail to reject H_{02}. Hence there is no significant difference in the mean score of innovation in food delivery platform among different age groups of respondents.

Chi-Square Test

H_{03}: There is **no significant association** between the age of respondents and the frequency of ordering food online.
H_{13}: There is a **significant association** between the age of respondents and the frequency of ordering food online.

Age * Frequency of ordering Food Online? Crosstabulation							
			Frequency of ordering Food Online?				Total
			2-3 times a week	4+ times a week	Frequently	Once a week	
Age	14-17	Count	7	9	5	19	40
		Expected Count	14.3	6.5	5.9	13.3	40.0
	18-21	Count	61	21	11	41	134
		Expected Count	48.0	21.7	19.8	44.5	134.0
	22-25	Count	83	38	33	79	233
		Expected Count	83.4	37.7	34.5	77.4	233.0
	26-29	Count	28	13	25	27	93
		Expected Count	33.3	15.1	13.8	30.9	93.0
Total		Count	179	81	74	166	500
		Expected Count	179.0	81.0	74.0	166.0	500.0

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.983[a]	9	.002
Likelihood Ratio	25.239	9	.003
N of Valid Cases	500		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimun expected count is 5.92.			

As $p - value\ (0.002) < 0.05$; we reject Null Hypothesis. This indicates that age significantly influences the frequency of online food ordering.

Findings

1. The study found that the majority of respondents belong to the 22–25 years age group, with students forming the largest segment of online food delivery users in Ahmedabad. Frequent ordering behaviour and moderate monthly spending indicate that young, digitally active consumers represent the primary target market for food delivery platforms.
2. Consumers demonstrated high awareness of convenience-oriented innovations such as fast delivery and live order tracking, suggesting that speed and transparency are the most valued service innovations in food delivery e-commerce. In contrast, awareness regarding AI-based recommendations remained comparatively low, indicating limited consumer engagement with advanced personalization technologies.

3. The dominance of Zomato in platform usage and technological perception suggests that consumers associate technological advancement, service convenience, and platform usability with market leadership. This indicates that practical and visible innovations play a significant role in strengthening competitive positioning within the food delivery industry.
4. Innovative features were found to moderately influence platform preference and selection. Delivery speed, app usability, and payment convenience emerged as important factors affecting consumer choice, whereas AI personalization and sustainability initiatives showed relatively lower immediate influence on platform selection behaviour.
5. Fast delivery and accurate order tracking were identified as the major contributors to customer satisfaction, reflecting consumer preference for reliability and operational efficiency over complex technological innovations. At the same time, customer support and brand reputation emerged as the strongest determinants of long-term platform loyalty.
6. The findings further reveal that promotional innovation, sustainability initiatives, and digital payment systems contribute more significantly to competitive advantage than AI-based personalization. This indicates that consumers currently value practical, user-friendly, and economically beneficial innovations more than advanced technological features.
7. Statistical analysis through ANOVA revealed no significant difference in innovation perception among different age groups, suggesting that the importance of innovation is consistently recognized across respondents. However, the Chi-square test confirmed a significant association between age and frequency of ordering food online, indicating that consumer age influences ordering behaviour patterns.

Recommendations

1. Food delivery platforms should strengthen convenience-oriented innovations such as fast delivery, real-time tracking, and seamless payment systems, as these features have the strongest influence on consumer satisfaction and platform preference.
2. Companies should conduct awareness campaigns and in-app educational promotions to improve consumer understanding and usage of AI-based recommendation features. Increasing familiarity with personalized technologies may enhance customer engagement and ordering experience.
3. Platforms should focus on hyper-personalization strategies by utilizing consumer preferences, order history, and behavioural data to provide customized offers, restaurant suggestions, and targeted promotions that improve user experience and retention.
4. Since students and young consumers form the largest user segment, food delivery platforms should introduce student-focused subscription plans, affordable combo offers, and loyalty rewards to increase repeat purchases and strengthen brand loyalty.
5. Food delivery companies should promote sustainability initiatives such as eco-friendly packaging and green delivery practices more effectively, as consumers perceive sustainability as an important contributor to brand image and competitive advantage.
6. Platforms should strengthen customer support systems and maintain consistent service quality, as customer support and brand reputation were identified as major drivers of long-term consumer loyalty.
7. Food delivery platforms should develop stronger collaboration strategies with local restaurants to enhance service variety, improve operational efficiency, and create localized promotional campaigns that strengthen competitive positioning in urban markets such as Ahmedabad.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to examine the role of innovation in building competitive advantage in food delivery e-commerce platforms in Ahmedabad. The research primarily focused on understanding how innovative features influence consumer awareness, platform preference, satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive positioning within the online food delivery market.

The findings indicate that convenience-driven innovations such as fast delivery, live tracking, digital payment systems, and promotional strategies play a major role in influencing consumer behaviour and strengthening competitive advantage. Consumers were found to prioritize practical and service-oriented innovations over advanced technological features such as AI-based personalization. The study also revealed that app usability, customer support, and brand reputation significantly contribute to customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

The research contributes to existing literature by providing localized empirical evidence from Ahmedabad city and by integrating innovation, consumer behaviour, satisfaction, and competitive advantage within a single analytical framework. The findings highlight that continuous, customer-oriented innovation is essential for sustaining market leadership in the highly competitive food delivery e-commerce sector.

In conclusion, food delivery platforms that successfully align innovation with consumer convenience, affordability, reliability, and service quality are more likely to strengthen customer relationships and sustain long-term competitive advantage in the evolving digital marketplace.

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