Understanding the Influence of Mobile In-App Price Promotions in Food Delivery Apps on Customer Engagement and Advocacy

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Abstract

Purpose : With the emergence of e-commerce, food ordering through mobile-app also witnessed significant growth akin to other products. However, the consumers' switching rates for online food service provider was found to be high. Traditional marketing wisdom suggested various forms of promotion to counter this. The form of promotion mainly suggested was price promotion. The objective of the present study was to understand the role of in-app price promotion between consumer engagement and advocacy relationships in the context of food delivery applications.

Methodology : The descriptive research design was adopted to further the study. A research model depicting the proposed hypotheses was developed based on social exchange and incentive theories. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 293 users of food delivery applications from the Delhi-NCR region. PLS-SEM was used to test the hypothesized relationships between the constructs.

Findings : The study established that in-app price promotion was positively associated with consumer advocacy and fully mediated the relationship between consumer engagement and advocacy.

Practical Implications : This study strongly recommended that food delivery app managers should frequently offer in-app price discount coupons to their existing customers. Availing of promotional benefits would help spread positive word-of-mouth about food and service quality. Positive advocacy would be beneficial to attract new customers. This study would also be helpful to future researchers in the conceptualizing study in another e-commerce context.

Originality : This study was the first to determine the role of in-app price promotion between consumer engagement and advocacy relationships in the online food-delivery app context.

Keywords : **customer engagement, consumer advocacy, in-app price promotion, food delivery apps**

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With retailers' mobile applications (apps) in the twenty-first century's first decade, the physical store transformed into a digital space (Degeratu et al., 2000; Dirsehan & Cankat, 2021). Consumers once purchase by visiting the physical store are now accessing it through the retailer's mobile app.

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Undeniably, visiting a physical store was an interaction-based transaction, where customers could see, feel, and purchase on the salesperson's recommendation. Conversely, a mobile application retailing platform is a non-interactional transaction with retailers. In this situation, curiosity arises about ensuring continuity in consumer purchasing with mobile apps (Kannan & Li, 2017).

The motivation behind most of the retailers embarking on mobile apps was customer acquisition, engagement, and retention (Inman & Nikolova, 2017). The retailers realized they must increase customer value through technology usage (Gill et al., 2017) to stay relevant in the competition. According to Kannan and Li (2017), the mobile application is an important technological invention that provides a richer and deeper shopping experience than a physical store, further fostering consumer engagement with their preferred brands (Liu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018).

Consumer engagement (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Vivek et al., 2012) is a new concept that emerged due to the shift in customer interaction and relationships from transactional to relationship marketing (Boulding et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2017; Thakur, 2018). Consumer engagement fully captures consumer/brand (service) interaction dynamics, explaining involvement and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011). The engaged customer manifests attachment and loyalty (Islam et al., 2018; Islam et al., 2019; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) posits that customers reciprocate positive feelings on receiving specific benefits from the retailer. Additionally, these consumers share their feelings with others and get involved in advocacy (Chelminski & Coulter, 2011; Japutra et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2012). The importance of consumer advocacy has been evident in brand research, but a scant study examined consumer engagement and advocacy in the mobile app context (Bhati & Verma, 2020; Shimul & Phau, 2022). This study is an effort to examine the impact of consumer engagement on consumer advocacy in the mobile application context.

Mobile applications are mainly offered for free. Consumers choose apps from Google or Apple stores and download and install them on mobile freely (Appel et al., 2020). Consequently, it is found that mobile app switching rates are high. The reasons are lower switching costs (Singh, 2022) and declining engagement over time (Park et al., 2018). This phenomenon adversely affects the retailer's profitability (Pauwels & Neslin, 2015) due to declining in-app demand (Lambrecht & Misra, 2017). Retailers offer customized promotions through mobile apps (Park et al., 2018) to bar customer switching.

Mobile promotion is broadly defined by Andrews et al. (2016) as "information that is delivered on a mobile device and offers an exchange of values, with the intent of driving a specific behavior in the short term" (Park et al., 2018, p. 455). It includes price discount coupons and free sample coupons. Discount coupons are price reductions on purchasing within the redeemable period, while free sample coupons are products distributed freely on redemption (Kumar & Pereira, 1995). Price discount coupons are temporary price reductions to increase sales, while free sample coupons are meant to initiate product trials (Ailawadi et al., 2001).

Research on mobile promotion is expanding (Danaher et al., 2015; Fong et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2014), but limited research has been conducted to examine the effects of mobile promotion, particularly on understanding the effect of in-app price promotion on consumers' post-usage behavior. This study examines the effect of mobile in-app price promotion on consumer advocacy.

According to Vivek et al. (2012), customer engagement is the intensity of consumer participation and connection with a firm's offering and activities. The engaged customers are motivated and manifest positive behavior toward the firm's offerings and activities (Quynh, 2019; Srivastava, 2019). However, this assertion is not empirically studied for in-app price promotion. This study also proposes examining the consumer's behavioral manifestation of engagement as a consequence of in-app price promotion benefits.

The online food delivery market is rapidly growing alongside the changing lifestyle, consumption patterns, and food-eating habits of Indians (Kapoor & Vij, 2018; Kaur et al., 2022; Nandi & Singh, 2021). In the early days, online food ordering was specific to a few brands and items like pizza, burgers, etc.; however, it paved the way for

other food retailers. Now, the entire food industry seems immersed in online delivery services (Ahn, 2022). The booming online food delivery market necessitates technological assistance for convenience and efficiency. To meet the growing demand for online food orders "food delivery app" was introduced that transformed ordering ready-to-eat foods (Kaur et al., 2021; Tanwar et al., 2021). Despite the increasing popularity of food delivery applications, the research on this growing segment is sparse (Kaur et al., 2022).

This study aims to empirically test consumer engagement with food delivery apps, analyzing post-usage behavior in terms of advocacy and understanding how in-app price promotion influences the consumer's usage behavior of food delivery applications. Thus, this research answers the following questions : (a) What is the outcome of consumer engagement with food delivery apps ? (b) Do engaged food delivery app consumers perceive in-app price promotion positively? (c) Do in-app price promotions strengthen the food delivery app usage and advocacy by engaged consumers? To answer these questions research framework was developed to estimate — first, the association between consumer engagement and consumer advocacy; second, consumer engagement and availing of in-app price discounts; and third, availing in-app price discounts and advocacy. The PLS-SEM was used to test the relationship because numerous research articles in the field of social science disciplines have applied PLS-SEM; also, it is now widely accepted in statistical analysis since it overrides the need for normality and is suitable in case of small sample size (Hair et al., 2019; Richter et al., 2016). Further, mediation analysis assessed the role of in-app price promotion in strengthening the association between consumer engagement and advocacy (Sharma & Singh, 2021).

The findings of this research provide several strategic directions to mobile application providers. For example, mobile app managers understand how engaged consumers behave regarding word-of-mouth in the context of mobile applications. Positive word-of-mouth is often considered a manifestation of loyalty and continuous usage (Alguacil et al., 2018). Moreover, mobile app managers can understand the role of in-app price promotion in users' word-of-mouth post-purchase behavior.

This article is structured as follows: the next section explains the theoretical background and presents the research framework and hypotheses. Then, the method section includes details about the food delivery mobile applications and explains the sampling plan and the measurement scales used in the study. The subsequent section presents data analysis and findings, followed by a section on discussion and implications for the theory and practice. Finally, the limitations and the scope for future research are presented, with the conclusion.

Theoretical Background

Customer Engagement

The concept of customer engagement is still evolving. Various research articles have contributed to its conceptualization, a few defined it as an aspect of consumer behavior, and others refer to it as a long-term relationship (Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek et al., 2012). According to these perspectives, customer engagement is defined as a long-term intimate relationship between the seller and customers (Van Doorn et al., 2010), while Brodie et al. (2011) defined customer engagement as a psychological phenomenon developed in the customer through continuous interaction and co-creation (Brakus et al., 2009). According to Van Doorn et al. (2010), the consequence of engagement behavior goes beyond just transactions and purchases due to consumers' motivation to stay with the firm or brand. In the extant literature, customer engagement is rooted in relationship marketing theory (Chahal & Rani, 2017; Vivek et al., 2012). Therefore, it may be said that customer engagement is an emotional bond between the firm and its customers (Gambetti et al., 2012; Hollebeek et al., 2016).

Engaged customers are crucial as they contribute to new product development and play an important role in co-creating experiences and value (Brakus et al., 2009; Hoyer et al., 2010). Such consumers also enhance the

firm's value by blogging, web postings, advocacy, etc. (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Customer engagement positively impacts the organization's profit, referrals, and repurchase intention (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2010).

Price Promotions

Price promotions are short-term financial benefits offered to customers, such as discounts, loyalty rewards, coupons, and sweepstakes (Deshpande, 2016; Gwinner et al., 1998; Taylor & Neslin, 2005). "Incentive Theory of Motivation," propounded by Skinner (1953), posits that external incentives like monetary rewards, gifts, titles, etc., reinforce positive behavior among consumers and potential consumers (Armstrong & Brown, 2006). According to Luk and Yip (2008), such price promotions are also believed to be monetary or economic benefits to consumers. Price promotion is considered individualized, which offers immediate financial benefits to customers, augmenting purchase intentions (Chandon et al., 2000; Kozinets, 1999; Lee & Tsai, 2014).

Price promotions are an essential marketing tool initially used by retailers (brick & mortar) to attract sales and positively impact their profit (Grewal et al., 2011). Like their offline counterparts, online retailers also use various price-oriented promotions to retain customers and attract new ones. Previous research proved that price promotions and discounts offered on online platforms or mobile apps are the primary reasons for customer engagement (Girija & Sharma, 2018; Kang et al., 2014). Online retailers offer a wide range of price promotions besides just price discounts. Loyalty programs, e-coupons, and referral rewards are popular monetary promotions via mobile applications.

Customer Advocacy

Consumer advocacy is an important criterion for assessing consumer involvement and attachment to the firm. Consumers practice advocacy, which refers to a tendency to introduce new referrals to a brand (Chelminski & Coulter, 2011). When seen from a firm's point of view, customer advocacy may be understood as a reflection of its customer-centric approach (Lawer & Knox, 2006). Thus, such practices serve the potential customers and help build a firm's reputation, brand image, and profitability, and above all, give an edge over competitors in the market (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Recommending to or advocating potential customers may be understood as the intention of an existing customer to refer family members, friends, or acquaintances to the firm (Jin & Huang, 2014; Ryu & Feick, 2007; Wirtz et al., 2013). Customers spread word-of-mouth (e-WOM) regarding their opinion and experience of the product or service with their family members, friends, classmates, and acquaintances through the Internet (Venkatesh & Brown, 2001). Social networking sites have also provided an alternative platform for customers to further share their feedback with other group members and recommend it to new customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

When customers are engaged with the brands, they tend to say positive things about them, prefer the firm's other offerings, purchase more frequently, and recommend the brand to others (Parasuraman et al., 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1996). The firm's recommendation or advocacy expresses customer satisfaction with the brand (Chung & Darke, 2006). Such customer recommendation is advantageous for the firm in terms of low costs of attracting new customers (Shabbir et al., 2007). Previous studies established that consumers who intend to repurchase a product or service also advocate brand features and attributes with others (Lee et al., 2013, Oliveira & Fernandes, 2022).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Customer Engagement and Price Promotions

According to the extant literature, not all online shoppers are price sensitive. According to Degeratu et al. (2000), online shoppers purchase online due to a lack of time; therefore, such customers are argued to be less price sensitive. Chu et al. (2010) classified online purchasers as heavy, moderate, and light shoppers based on purchase frequency and suggested that online purchasers differ in price sensitivity. Andrews and Currim (2004) further found that e-shoppers focused more on brand screening and were less sensitive to price. Further, Chintagunta et al. (2012) reported that customers with spare time prefer online shopping; these shoppers focused more on purchasing their preferred items rather than seeking monetary promotions.

Despite the above evidence from the literature, it is argued that engaged customers are motivated and manifest positive behavior toward the firm's offerings and activities. So this assertion needs to be verified toward the retailer's in-app price promotion; hence, it is hypothesized that:

↳ **Ha1 :** Engaged customers significantly and positively associated with availing of in-app price promotions.

Customer Engagement and Advocacy

A few existing research have studied advocacy as a post-purchase behavior of engagement. Researchers used various terminology to refer to the outcome of customer engagement, like "intention to recommend" (Venkatesh & Brown, 2001), "advocacy" (Sashi, 2012), and "referral" (Gopinath et al., 2014). However, all these indicate the intention of existing customers to refer new customers to the firm's offers. Kumar et al. (2010) suggested that the extent of customer engagement can be assessed by retention and purchase behavior. Kandampully et al. (2015) confirmed that firms could create brand advocates by attracting, converting, engaging, and bonding with customers. Above all, Van Doorn et al. (2010) identified "advocacy" as a customer engagement behavior; this means increased customer engagement activities of the firm also lead to increased referrals or advocacy. Shimul and Phau (2022) opined that advocacy could be considered a consumer's post-purchase behavior. Hence, ongoing engagement activities of the firm would increase advocacy or referral behavior among their current customers (Hollebeek et al., 2016).

In the extant literature, evidence supports that consumers' intention to recommend a brand/service to other consumers results from their strong relationship with the brand/firm offering service (Finn, 2005). However, in their study, Chelminski and Coulter (2011) warned that a consumer's advocacy could be a double-edged sword. With a tendency to share positive information with others, negative word-of-mouth is possible due to unfavorable brand/service experience. Thus, taking the above argument into account, it can be hypothesized that:

↳ **Ha2 :** Customer engagement is significantly and positively associated with advocacy.

Price Promotion and Customer Advocacy

Price discounts (coupons) or rewards as a price promotion strategy have assumed prominence in acquiring new customers for firms (Jin & Huang, 2014; Ryu & Feick, 2007; Schmitt et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2013). Such rewards incentivize existing customers to advocate with potential customers about the firm's offerings. These potential customers may be part of their family, friends, and acquaintances. Referrals from existing customers are considered more credible and impactful than other marketing strategies; this reduces purchase-related risks among potential customers (Tuk et al., 2009).

Firms have extensively implemented price promotion schemes to encourage advocacy behavior among existing customers. Since these existing customers are already familiar with the firm's products and services, their feedback tends to be more authentic and trustworthy (Jin & Huang, 2014; Tuk et al., 2009; Wirtz et al., 2013). According to Oliver (1999), the intention to recommend can be considered one of the best ways to predict purchase intention and repeat purchase. Despite an extensive literature search for price promotions and advocacy relationships, no research evidence was found. However, similar studies focused on the impact of loyalty programs on customer advocacy behavior (Bolton et al., 2000) and consumers' referral behavior on the Internet and social media. Based on the above evidence and argument, it can be hypothesized that:

- **Ha3 :** Price promotions facilitate significant and positive consumer advocacy.

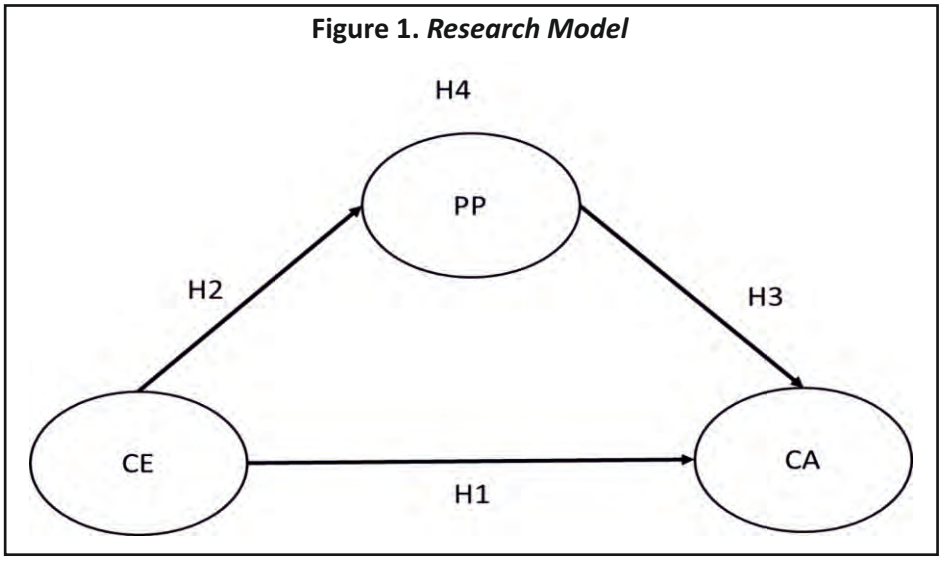
Price Promotion as a Mediator

An extensive review of the extant literature on price promotion activities revealed a scant study on the influence of price promotion on the relationship between customer engagement and advocacy in the mobile app context. The need to reward an existing customer is felt because price promotion entails economic benefits and promotes repeat purchases and commitment (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Also, price promotion provides various benefits, including developing long-term customer relationships due to mutual benefits (Wirtz & Chew 2002). Customer engagement is believed to be an outcome of a robust customer-brand relationship. Offering price promotions further strengthens the relationship manifested beyond purchases to increase loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Brodie et al., 2013). Moreover, monetary rewards also act as a basis for referrals that supports firms' customer acquisition strategies (Hollebeek et al., 2016; Schmitt et al., 2011).

Despite discounts and monetary rewards being effective means of acquiring and engaging potential customers (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Sashi, 2012), a few studies posit that price promotions are not always effective. Some consumers either do not participate or abandon such rewards because they perceive price discounts as compensation for buying inferior goods (Singh, 2022; Zoellner & Schaefers, 2015). In contrast to this, a few studies argue that most online purchasers are less price-sensitive, so price rewards are ineffective for them (Andrews & Currim, 2004; Bolton et al., 2000; Verhoef, 2003).

However, though the evidence of the relationship between customer engagement, consumer advocacy, and

Figure 1. ***Research Model***



price promotions in the mobile app context is fragile in the literature, we conjecture that engaged consumers are brand advocates; they give positive recommendations and referrals due to availing of price promotions offered by retailers/firms (Hollebeek, 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Hence, it may be hypothesized that :

↳ **Ha4 :** Price promotions significantly mediate the relationship between customer engagement and advocacy.

The research model of the study is depicted in Figure 1.

Methodology

Product/Service Category – Food Delivery Applications

The e-commerce industry proliferated in India, where online food delivery is one of the fastest-growing segments. Initially, it was anticipated to be a bubble burst that may not last long, despite the Indian online food delivery market showing promising growth. The Statista report also suggested that India's online food delivery market is expected to grow by more than 5 billion USD by 2023 (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Keelery, 2022).

The factors contributing to the growth of online food delivery markets are the following. First, the internet penetration and emergence of affordable technology (smartphones) assisted consumers and restaurant owners in stepping into online food ordering and delivery (Chandra & Cassandra, 2019). Second, website and app features contributed to consumers ordering online food anytime, anywhere (Kaur et al., 2022). Third, changes in society, such as the emergence of nuclear families in the cities, dual-earner couples, and busy schedules, necessitate online food ordering (Cho et al., 2019). Fourth, consumption patterns and eating habits change due to increased disposable income and easy payment methods (Kaur et al., 2021). Fifth, change in market dynamics due to the emergence of startups and innovative marketing strategies (IMARC, 2021).

Food delivery apps are of three types depending on their scope and reach. The first type of food delivery app is the one that delivers its food to the customers through its delivery executives. The second type is where app providers act as an agent who helps the customers place an order in a nearby restaurant and then deliver that order to the customers on behalf of the restaurants. These apps have their runner boys. The third type of food app helps customers to place an order. They provide a platform for customers and restaurants to meet, and once the food order is placed, the restaurant will deliver. Cloud kitchens have also come up with a very high potential to serve in India (Ferdianto et al., 2021; Keelery, 2022).

The major players in the Indian online food delivery market are Zomato, Swiggy, Foodpanda, and Ubereats (IMARC, 2021). Also, some other companies, like Domino's Pizza and KFC, have an app and connect with their customers directly. These food apps offer competitive features to their customers and allow them to compare cuisines and offer prices, check customer reviews, and then place their orders conveniently (IMARC, 2021).

Research Design

This study aimed to understand the relationship between consumer engagement and advocacy in food delivery applications. Further, the mediation of in-app price promotion benefit perceived between this relationship was analyzed. A descriptive (empirical) study was designed to frame the research model and hypotheses. Primary data were collected through the questionnaire from people using food delivery applications in Delhi NCR. The scale's construct validity and reliability were tested using Cronbach's alpha; further, hypotheses were tested using variance-based structural equation modeling using Smart PLS v2.

Table 1. ***Measurement Items***

Codes	Items	Source/s
CE 1	I am engaged with the app.	Vivek et al. (2012)
CE 2	I feel emotionally connected to it.	Vivek et al. (2012)
CE 3	I have a strong bond with it.	Vivek et al. (2012)
CE 4	When I use it, I lose track of time.	Vivek et al. (2012)
PP 1	Mobile shopping applications help me save money by giving me loyalty rewards.	Thakur (2018)
PP 2	I receive free coupons for the restaurant for being a member of the app.	Kang et al. (2014)
PP 3	I receive special deals and discounts for being a frequent user of the app.	Kang et al. (2014)
PP 4	I get rewards when I recommend someone.	Added new
PP 5	Mobile shopping applications give me better deals by offering price promotions.	Thakur (2018)
CA 1	I often recommend this app to close relatives and friends.	Added new
CA 2	I often recommend this app when somebody is asking me about related advice.	Zeithaml et al. (1996)
CA 3	I often tell positive things about this app when I am asked.	Zeithaml et al. (1996)

Measurement

The study's primary objective was to understand the relationship between customer engagement, customer advocacy, and price promotion's perceived benefit. It was also proposed to assess the role of price promotions as a mediator between customer engagement and customer advocacy relationships. For collecting data to achieve these objectives, a well-structured questionnaire was designed. Questions for each construct were taken after deeply reviewing the existing literature; some questions were modified to suit the context after discussion with industry experts and academicians. The questionnaire items are given in Table 1. The questions to check attention, such as "Kindly mark 'agree' as a response," were also included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire items were measured on a Likert 5-point scale, where "5" implies *strongly agree*, and "1" implies *strongly disagree.*

Participants/Respondents

We chose the respondents for this study by employing purposive or judgment sampling since it involves identifying and selecting well-informed respondents with the required knowledge and experience in online food

Table 2. ***Demographic Profile of the Respondents***

	Age	
Particulars	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
18–25 yrs	136	46.8
26–35 yrs	91	31.3
36–45 yrs	42	14.4
46–55 yrs	18	6.0
56 yrs & Above	5	1.6
	Occupation	
Employed in the public sector	11	3.8

Employed in the private sector	220	75.3
Self-employed	31	10.6
Student	30	10.3
Gender		
Male	135	46.3
Female	157	53.7
Monthly Income		
50,000 & above	91	31.0
40,000–50,000	33	11.3
30,000–40,000	116	39.8
20,000–30,000	27	9.3
Less than 20,000	25	8.6
Food Delivery Application Preferred		
Zomato	142	47.8
Swiggy	134	45.1
Food Panda	10	0.03
Others	7	0.02

ordering through apps (Singh, 2022). Since the study focused on the users who order food online using mobile apps, the Delhi - NCR region was purposefully chosen due to its renown for food joints and food lovers and the availability of popular food delivery apps like Zomato, Swiggy, Ubereats, and Foodpanda. Additionally, people across the country migrate to and reside in the Delhi - NCR region for either jobs or education. Hence, the possibility of getting a representative sample for the study was higher than in other regions. The questionnaire was shared online through google forms among mobile food delivery app users known through social media and a few contacts in public places (like the mall and metro) in the Delhi NCR region. The total number of respondents needed for the study was selected using G*Power software (Kang, 2021). However, the questionnaire was floated to more than 600 respondents, and only 327 responses were finally received. Thirty-five responses were excluded after the attention check, and 292 were found relevant for further analysis. The survey was done between July – December 2021, following strict COVID-19 guidelines, including social distancing.

The demographic profile of the respondents is mentioned in Table 2. From Table 2, it can be inferred that most respondents in this study were 18–25 years old. Since the study was conducted among the users of food delivery apps, it can be noted that the younger generation participated more in the study. Further, most respondents were private-sector employees and students because Delhi NCR is an educational hub with the maximum number of private companies' head offices. Another aspect noted from the data was that most respondents earned between 30,000–40,000 INR monthly.

Analysis of the Measurement Model

Cronbach's alpha was obtained using Smart-PLS software to check the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. As is evident from Table 3, the values of Cronbach's alpha are above 0.74–0.8. Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 is reliable (Taber, 2018). Table 3 presents Cronbach's alpha value (α) and factor loadings (λ) for each item of the construct. As evidence suggests, all the items have a value above 0.70 except one with a loading value of 0.643. It is recommended that the factor loadings should be equal to or above 0.7 to explain at least 50% of

Table 3. ***Construct Reliability and Validity***

Variables	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CE **(Consumer Engagement)**	0.741	0.771	0.825	0.542	
CE1	0.749				
CE2	0.643				
CE3	0.738				
CE4	0.805				
PP **(Price Promotion)**	0.807	0.812	0.865	0.563	
PP1	0.775				
PP2	0.732				
PP3	0.756				
PP4	0.767				
PP5	0.720				
CA **(Consumer Advocacy)**	0.754	0.781	0.858	0.67	
CA1	0.775				
CA2	0.875				
CA3	0.802				

Table 4. ***Discriminant Validity (Fornell – Larcker Criteria)***

	Customer Engagement	Price Promotion	Consumer Advocacy
Customer Engagement ***(CE)***	**0.736**		
Price Promotion ***(PP)***	0.616	**0.750**	
Consumer Advocacy ***(CA)***	0.482	0.731	**0.818**

measurement items' variance (Hair et al., 2019). According to Dijkstra and Henseler (2015), the rho (*_A*) value is considered to be the reliability test when using SMART-PLS, and therefore rho (*_A*) values are also given in Table 3. They are also highly reliable since all the values are above 0.7 (Sarstedt et al., 2017). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), composite reliability should be greater than 0.6, and average variance extracted (AVE) to be greater than 0.5 to indicate the construct reliability and validity; however, Hair et al. (1997) suggested that the composite reliability should be more than 0.7 to indicate good reliability of the construct. The values of composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) of this study fulfill both Fornell and Larcker's (1981) and Hair et al. (1997) criteria of value between 0.8–0.9 for composite reliability and 0.5–0.7 for average variance extracted. Table 4 indicates the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Analysis of the Structural Model

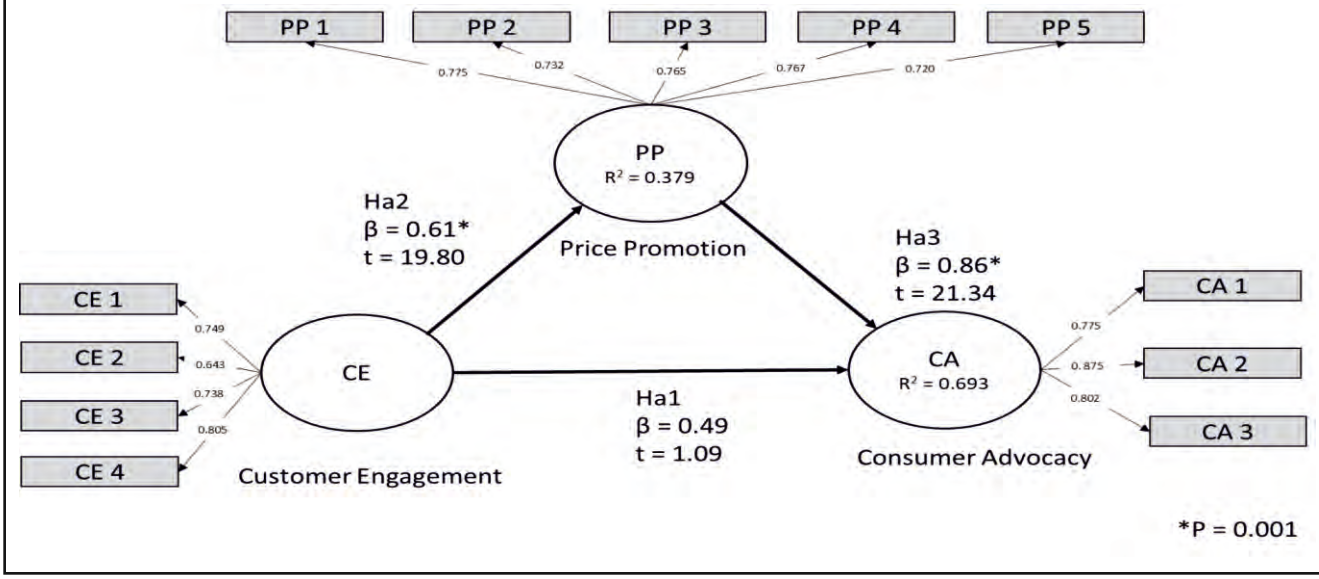
All the hypotheses framed in this article were tested on Smart PLS-SEM using the bootstrapping technique. Before this, the multicollinearity and common method bias (CMB) issue was addressed by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) and the latent common factor model method (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The VIF

Table 5. ***Structural Relationships and Hypothesis Testing***

Path	Beta Values (β)	*t*-statistics	*p*-values	VIF	Hypotheses Testing (Ha)
CE–CA (Ha1)	0.49	1.090	0.276	1.61	Rejected
CE–PP (Ha2)	0.61	19.806	0	1.03	Failed to Reject
PP–CA (Ha3)	0.86	21.348	0	1.87	Failed to Reject

Note. *$p<0.05$.

Figure 2. ***Structural Model Output (PLS-SEM)***



values range from 1–1.87 and are within the tolerable 1–5 limit (Table 5). Hence, it can be inferred that the multicollinearity issue does not exist. Also, the common variance was found to be less than 0.50. Thus, the data is free from common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The results of the path coefficient obtained through PLS-PM are mentioned in Table 5 for Ha1; Ha2; and Ha3 and Table 6 for mediation analysis Ha4, respectively. The values in Table 5 and Figure 2 establish that customer engagement and price promotions are significantly related, thus accepting Ha2 ($\beta = 0.61$, p-value < 0.05). Also, price promotions and customer advocacy share a positive relationship, thus accepting Ha3 ($\beta = 0.86$, p-value < 0.05). Interestingly, the relationship between customer engagement and customer advocacy is rejected (Ha1); thus, this study finds this relationship insignificant ($\beta = 0.49, p = 0.276$).

Mediation Effect

This study also intended to test the mediation effect of price promotions on customer engagement and advocacy

Table 6. ***Mediation Analysis***

Relationship	Mediator	Specific Indirect Effect	Mediation Effect
CE–CA (Ha4)	Price Promotion (In-App)	0.01*	Full Mediation

Note. *$p<0.05$.

(Ha4); the values to test mediation were derived through Smart PLS using the bootstrapping method. The values are given in Table 6. Estimated values for mediation (see Table 6) suggest that price promotion fully mediates the relationship between customer engagement and customer advocacy ($p < 0.05$). Any construct is said to have a full mediation effect on the other when the direct relationship (path co-efficient) between them is insignificant. In contrast, their indirect effect is significant (Nitzl & Hirsch, 2016).

Implications

Theoretical Contribution

This study explores the relationship between customer engagement, customer advocacy, and price promotions in the food delivery app context. Also, the mediating influence of price promotion on customer engagement and advocacy is explored. First, the outcome of this study reveals a significant positive relationship between customer engagement and price promotion, that is, engaged consumers avail of price promotion schemes. This finding is a meaningful contribution to the literature on customer engagement and pricing promotion because the attitude of the engaged consumer toward monetary factors or price promotions in the mobile application context has never been studied.

Second, the findings also reveal that price promotion positively impacts customer advocacy. Price promotions, like referral rewards, loyalty, and discounts, influence customers to recommend the brand and services to new customers. This finding is consistent with the study of Jin and Huang (2014), who supported that existing customers recommend to new customers when offered rewards. However, other literature to support our findings on the influence of price promotions on advocacy is meager. Therefore, this study's outcome may also be considered as another important contribution to the existing literature on customer advocacy.

Third, existing studies on the association between customer engagement and word-of-mouth (customer advocacy) or intention to recommend are significant and positive (Sashi, 2012; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Surprisingly, the findings of this study refute the existence of a significant association between these constructs in the presence of in-app price promotion but hold a positive influence. The findings of this study do not support the significant relationship between customer engagement and advocacy. This study also analyzes the indirect relationship between customer engagement and advocacy through price promotion, which is found to be positive and significant, thereby establishing mediation. Thus, the findings demonstrate that customer engagement is insufficient for consumer advocacy (positive word-of-mouth), but different price promotion schemes persuade consumers. This finding confirms the postulates of social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) that people reciprocate positively upon receiving benefits from a relationship. This finding can also be an important addition to the existing literature. Chelminski and Coulter (2011) presented a pioneering work on customer advocacy. They opined that advocacy is a voluntary behavior exhibited by satisfied consumers to help other consumers to have a positive consumer experience. Also, in the literature, evidence is available that recommendation or advocacy behavior is associated in another way with price promotion; it states that customers recommend brands to others to earn referral rewards (Verma et al., 2019).

Customer engagement activities are designed to retain customers in this competitive world of online retailing (Hollebeek, 2011). With the emergence of smartphones and mobile applications for ordering online, retaining customers has become a major challenge for marketers. A competitor's app is just a click away on mobile phones; engagement activities allow firms to retain and acquire new customers. Also, it necessitates the incentivization of customers to be engaged.

Managerial Implications

In the food delivery application context, the finding of this study becomes relevant for the food delivery application managers to plan their course of action in this competitive and dynamic situation. This study established that economic benefits are important for customer engagement and further advocacy. Singh (2022) posited that customers react strongly to price variation even in an online retail environment. This phenomenon is particularly true for Indian consumers too. This study has proved that Indian consumers are price sensitive even in online food ordering (Rejikumar, 2013; Thamizhvanan & Xavier, 2013). Customers usually reciprocate the engagement activities of the firm and intend to continue brand and service usage and recommend when receiving monetary incentives like referral rewards and discount coupons.

Conventional marketing wisdom suggests that keeping an existing customer is more cost-effective than getting a new one. It is also suggested that positive word-of-mouth disseminated by an existing customer is more effective in acquiring a new customer. The same is true in the case of readymade food delivery. Recommending wholesomeness and promptness in food and service delivery by existing users can attract new consumers. Hence, brand managers should reward their existing customers for spreading positive word-of-mouth about service delivery and food wholesomeness to others, which might attract new customers for the retailers.

Conclusion

Marketers implement customer engagement activities to achieve customer retention, repeat purchases, and gain more customers. The findings of this study will help retailers understand that engagement will help retain existing customers. Moreover, customers should be persuaded by providing monetary benefits to promote advocacy. Incentivizing customers is important for advocating online services like food delivery apps, where word-of-mouth publicity of food quality and delivery service quality matters.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

The present study contributes to the evolving concept of customer engagement; however, despite methodological rigor, the study has some limitations. The responses from respondents of this study were obtained through a questionnaire, so the possibility of the absence of response bias cannot be ruled out. Despite this limitation, this study would be a foundation for future researchers to further it in other contexts, such as m-wallet and mobile banking applications. Also, it is suggested to adopt other antecedents of consumer engagement by future researchers, such as service quality, to explore its impact on consumer advocacy. The influence of engagement on loyalty toward the service and continuance intention of mobile applications can also be studied. It is also suggested to extend the study to more expansive geographical locations, that is, nationwide and across cultures. The analysis does not include the impact of demographic variables (age, gender, income). Future researchers are suggested to consider these variables to study the moderation effect.

Authors' Contribution

Devika Rani Sharma conceptualized the idea and prepared a questionnaire in consultation with Dr. Balgopal Singh, further collecting and analyzing data. Dr. Balgopal Singh extracted relevant research papers and wrote the manuscript draft in consultation with Dr. Devika Rani Sharma. Dr. Kamal Jaiswal verified the research design and checked the manuscript's structure, spelling, grammar, and language suitability.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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