

## DEEP-DIVE



## Internet

### Demystifying recent developments in online food delivery

- Aggregators progressively becoming indispensable to restaurants
- Aggregators' share of restaurants turnover as high as c.30%
- High commission remains a key point of friction

#### ZOMATO IN: Recommendation and Price Target

Current Reco.	BUY
Previous Reco.	BUY
Current Price Target (12M)	105
Upside/(Downside)	41.7%
Previous Price Target	105
Change	0.0%

#### [Zomato - ONDC: Missing the forest for the trees](#)

#### [Zomato - 4QFY23 Result Update](#)

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Our primary checks across 135+ restaurants spread across 10 cities suggest food delivery aggregators Zomato (Buy, TP INR 105) and Swiggy (unlisted) together account for 30%+ turnover of restaurants that are listed on their platforms. Macro challenges apart, the aggregators are expanding choice, use cases and palate of the consumers, in addition to providing convenience and a seamless ordering experience. This is leading to addition of more differentiated supply that includes cloud kitchens, exotic cuisines, gourmet meals, and value meals, amongst others, which in turn is driving more demand for out-of-home cooked food. This network effect of demand and supply is helping the organised food services industry grow faster than it otherwise would have. In the absence of any new material competition emerging and [ONDC remaining a non-starter in its current shape and form](#), we strongly believe aggregators can continue to grow 1.2x-1.5x of the underlying industry in the foreseeable future. We reiterate Zomato as our top pick in the listed Internet space.

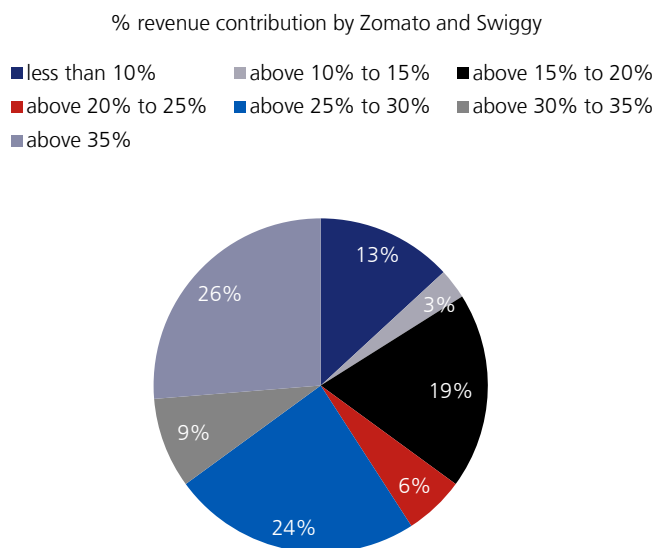
- **Both large incumbent aggregators are becoming indispensable:** Interactions with 135+ restaurant owners and managers suggest both incumbent aggregators are helping the organised food services industry pie to grow. Their presence is leading to meaningful changes in eating-out habits of consumers and higher ordering frequencies, especially among millennials and Gen Z. Similarly, aggregators are also facilitating an increase in supply by helping entrepreneurs build new restaurant brands (a few of which are only available online), widen their reach and improve customer retention and loyalty. Naturally, it is also helping create new opportunities for skilled and unskilled job seekers. With no meaningful competition in sight, we believe both incumbent aggregators are becoming indispensable to the ecosystem.
- **Restaurants now earn a meaningful share of turnover through the aggregators:** Restaurants that we spoke to receive c.20 orders everyday on average through both the aggregators combined. In turnover terms, aggregators contribute ~30%. This is despite the fact these restaurants have been active on the aggregator platforms for only ~3.5 years (average). Further, three-fourths of the restaurants that we surveyed mentioned the usage of direct ordering channels such as own app and website (through integration with Dotpe/Thrive), social media connects or direct tele calling to generate demand. Having said that, only a handful of restaurants within the sample claimed that they received a notable number of direct orders.
- **Main area of friction is high commissions, other disagreements appear resolvable:** While aggregators have enhanced industry turnover, the main friction point is high commission rates that restaurants claimed eats into their profit margins. The average commissions claimed by the restaurants stood at 27% of AOV (for the restaurant). We note that this number is likely inflated by 18% GST that aggregators are required to collect from restaurants on top of their own commissions. Adjusted for that, actual commissions could be 22-23%. Marking up online menu prices vs. dine-in menu prices to cover up aggregator commissions and discounts is an ubiquitous practice, with 85%+ of the total restaurants admitting to following it. Our interactions suggest that aggregators are taking efforts to amicably resolve other contentious issues such as data sharing.
- **Awareness around ONDC remains low:** In our survey, only a small proportion of restaurant owners had heard about ONDC despite the heightened focus on it of late. Even amongst those who were aware, many had little clue as to how they could get onboarded on the network. Some who were listed were clueless as to whether the orders that they had received through Magicpin (unlisted, which is the largest seller-side app for F&B category on ONDC) originated on ONDC's buyer-side partner platforms or through Magicpin's own erstwhile discovery platform.

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## Other important takeaways

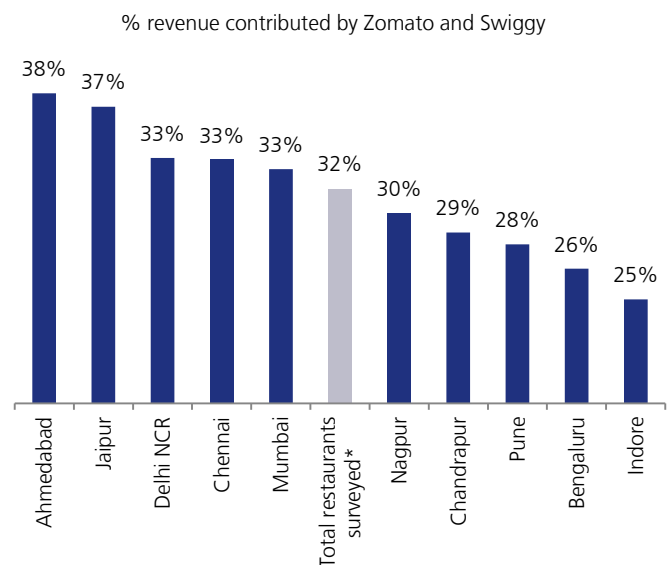
- Balance of power in favour of aggregators:** While, theoretically, the organised food services industry can survive without the presence of aggregators, practically that is unlikely to ever happen. Aggregators now contribute >30% on average to the turnover of restaurants who are listed on their platforms, whereas the contribution of individual outlets to the aggregators GMV/Revenue is relatively nominal. For that matter, even some of the branded, chain restaurants mentioned that they have limited bargaining power over aggregators on account of the latter’s sheer size, customer loyalty and diversified supplier base. The only few restaurants that are somewhat immune to this are those who have surplus walk-in demand or some natural advantage; for e.g., the outlet is located very close to a railway station or in a very high-density business hub. Aggregators’ advantage gets even more amplified when they are negotiating with standalone or new outlets. In fact, we also came across instances where even successful branded chains were not able to leverage their scale while opening a new outlet and ended up paying significantly higher commissions towards the new outlets compared to the more matured ones. The recourse for restaurants on disputed orders or ratings also appears limited. Restaurants, therefore, mitigate their relatively inferior position by being available on both Zomato and Swiggy.

**Exhibit 1. c.60% restaurants that participated in our survey (n=137) claimed that aggregators contribute >25% of their daily turnover**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

**Exhibit 2. Aggregators contributed >30% on average to the turnover of restaurants that participated in our survey (n=137)**

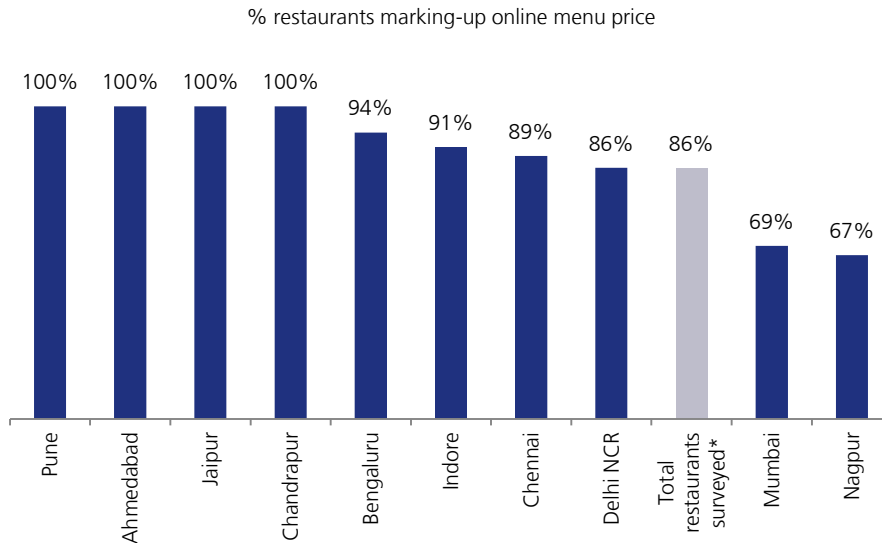


Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

- Restaurants that offer discounts often get better visibility:** Anecdotal evidence suggests consumers spend more when they are enticed with discounts/deals. And so, when aggregators began their businesses, it was quite natural that they spent heavily on discounts/cashbacks in order to scale up quickly. While restaurant-funded discounts were also prevalent, they were mostly discretionary in nature. Consequently, a substantial proportion of discounts earlier were platform-funded discounts, while restaurant-funded discounts used to be nominal. But since aggregator focus has moved from just growth to profitable growth, platform discounts are mainly limited to new or inactive customers. On the other hand, customers continue to see discounts as a matter of right - which means discounts/deals remains critical to improving customer engagement and, thereby, driving up order volume. Hence, aggregators quite often offer better visibility to restaurants that are willing to offer upfront discounts to their customers. This, in turn, leads to several restaurants offering heavy subsidies on the menu price albeit with a maximum discount threshold.

- Marking up online menu prices is now a common practice:** More than 85% of the restaurants that we interacted with said that they had marked up their online menu prices on the aggregator platforms vs. dine-in menu prices. These restaurants claimed mark-ups are necessary to recoup upfront customer discounts and/or to compensate for high aggregator commissions. We believe aggregators are unlikely to voluntarily stop such practices, unless there are regulatory changes or a severe backlash from customers, both of which do not seem to be happening at present. This is because forcing price parity with restaurants' offline menus will either increase the friction on commissions or force them to scale down discounts, both of which would be undesirable outcomes from the aggregators' perspective.

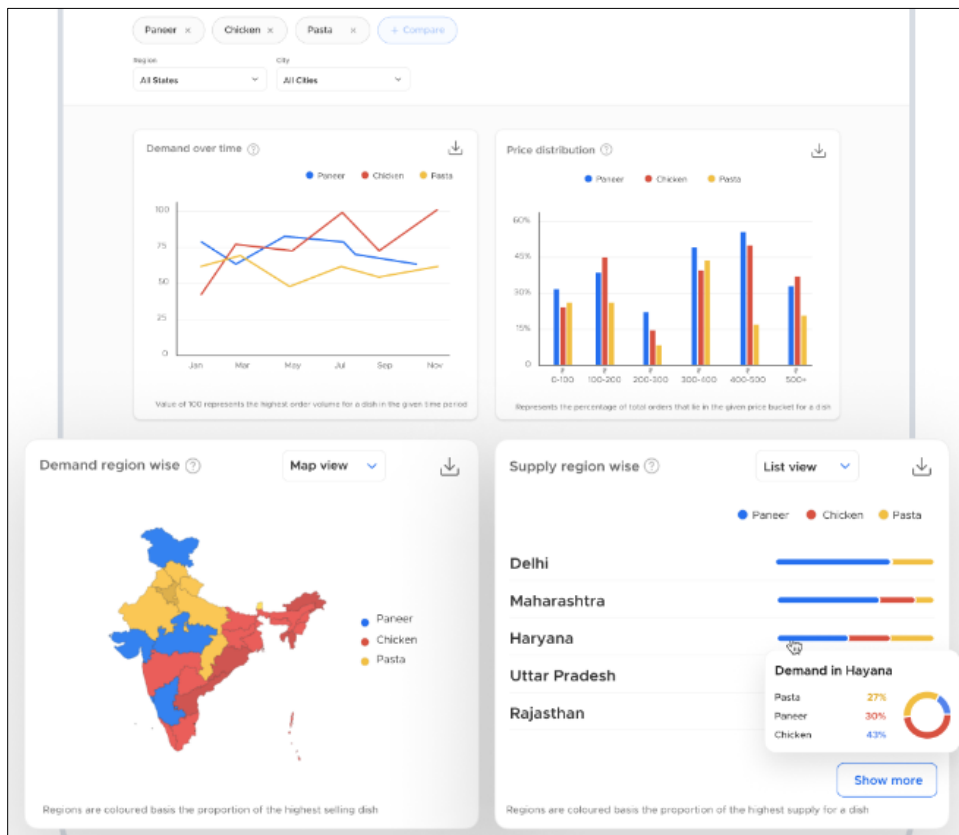
**Exhibit 3. More than 85% restaurants that participated in our survey (n=137) claimed that they are marking up their online menu prices**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

- Proxy data and analytical insights are shared free of cost:** While its true that the aggregators do not share readily identifiable customer details such as email id, phone number and address with the restaurants, they do end up sharing a lot of proxy data (through consumer masking). For instance, aggregators share virtual customer ids basis which restaurants can trace and analyse a customer's ordering behavior. Aggregators also share detailed business insights (such as top-rated and poor-rated food items, marketing success insights, financials insights, etc.) and analytical insights (such as how the competition is faring at the aggregate level or which item sells best at different periods of a day in a particular locality) that could help restaurants in making tactical/strategic choices. Most importantly, access to all these data points is free of cost. Further, assuming aggregators were to start sharing readily identifiable customer data, we believe they face the risk of a severe customer backlash as the latter would be cluttered with spam calls/emails/SMS/whatsapp from restaurants that they would have ordered from in the past. Our interactions also suggest that only a few restaurants, typically large branded, chain restaurants have the expertise or the willingness to invest to optimise all the data/insights shared by the aggregators. This effectively leads us to believe that the constant clamour on data sharing is mostly unnecessary, as it serves the business interests of only a few restaurants in the top echelon.

## Exhibit 4. Illustration of data insights shared by Zomato with their restaurant partners



Source: Company

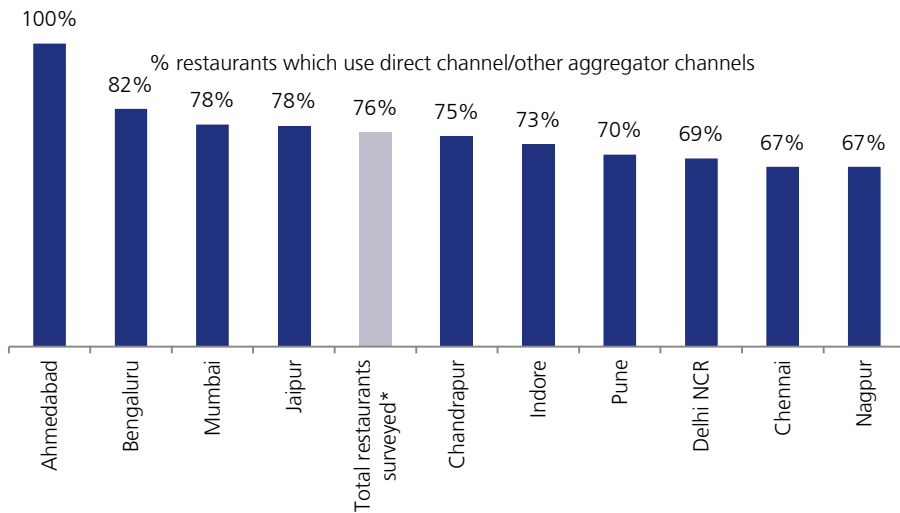
- Direct ordering is still relevant for a sizeable percentage of restaurants:** More than three-fourths of the total restaurants that we spoke to said that they accepted orders through direct channels such as own app and website (through integration with Dotpe/Thrive), social media connects or direct calling. Some restaurants also claimed that they incentivise direct orders through upfront discounts. Having said that, only a handful of restaurants claimed that they received a notable number of direct orders. Since direct orders are relatively less compared to aggregator-generated orders, most restaurants prefer to fulfill them on their own, while a few others take the services of point-to-point delivery platforms such as Dunzo/Rapido. That said, own delivery has its own set of operational challenges for restaurants. Further, some restaurants mentioned that they charged a certain delivery fee from customers in order to recover their delivery cost.
- Alternate online channels also available but awareness remains low:** While the general perception is that India today has only two food delivery platforms, during our research we came across a wide range of online food ordering platforms. Having said that, most of these platforms have very localised operations, limited to one or two cities (refer exhibit 5). The only exception to this phenomenon was Magicpin (unlisted) which has made decent inroads in terms of presence in a few Tier 1 cities. Nonetheless, the daily order volume for all these players put together is just a fraction of what the two large incumbents service on a daily basis.

**Exhibit 5. Examples of alternate food delivery platforms**

Platform	Operations in	Description
Magicipin	Mainly Tier 1/2 Cities	40k+ restaurants
Qmin	Mainly Tier 1/2 Cities	The Indian Hotels Company Ltd. Restaurants
Waayu	Mumbai	1.5k+ restaurants, Zero commissions but restaurants pay subscription fees
Qugometa	Bengaluru	Free delivery up to 3kms
Donebro	Bengaluru	
Saucetra	Bengaluru	
Pune Eat outs	Pune	Zero commissions, restaurant delivers on its own
Taste2plate	Kolkata	Intercity online food delivery
Potafo	Kozhikode	150+ restaurants

Source: Company, JM Financial

**Exhibit 6. Three-fourths of the restaurants that we surveyed (n=137) mentioned the usage of direct ordering channels or other relatively small aggregators**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

**Exhibit 7. Examples of alternate food delivery platforms**

Waayu,  
Mumbai

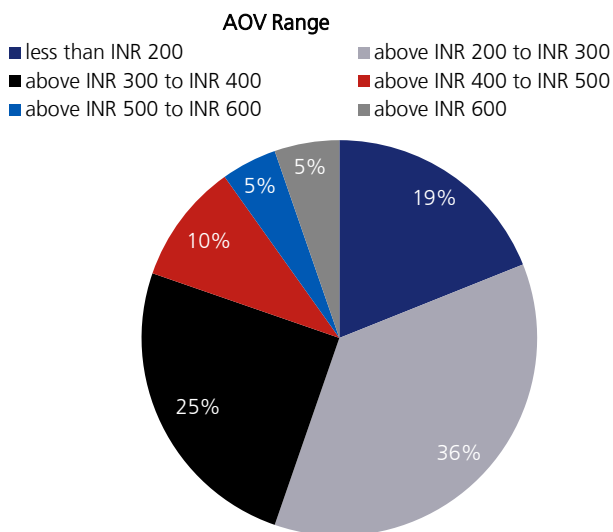
Qugometa,  
Bengaluru

Potafo,  
Kozhikode

Source: Company, JM Financial

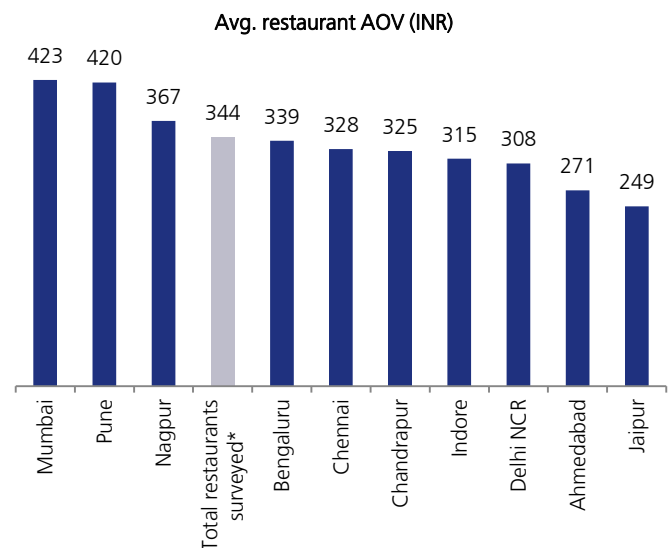
- At scale, benefits of engaging third-party delivery can outweigh own delivery:** Several restaurants noted that their core business was to curate, innovate and offer superior quality of food. Therefore, building and efficiently operating an in-house delivery fleet was not a viable option beyond a certain scale. This is because own delivery fleet requires incremental investments towards manpower and delivery vehicles. Plus, there are limitations on delivery radius (deliveries beyond 1-3 km are cumbersome), scale benefits are difficult to achieve and customer experience is generally inferior to third-party delivery aggregators. While utilising in-house manpower leads to significant savings on commissions and better access to customer data, several restaurants suggested that these benefits often do not override the investments.
- AOVs need to increase meaningfully for commission rates to come down:** We note that aggregator commission rates for restaurants that operate at very high AOVs (upwards of INR 1,000 per order) ranged from low to mid-teens, significantly below those claimed by restaurants that operate at low AOVs (around INR 400 or lower). We believe this is because at higher AOVs 1) restaurant level unit economics for aggregators work out far better even if rates are lower due to higher absolute commissions per order, and 2) direct ordering becomes a much more effective alternate channel both for the restaurant as well as the customer.

**Exhibit 8. 70%+ restaurants that participated in our survey (n=132) claimed their AOVs ranged from INR 200 to INR 500**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 132

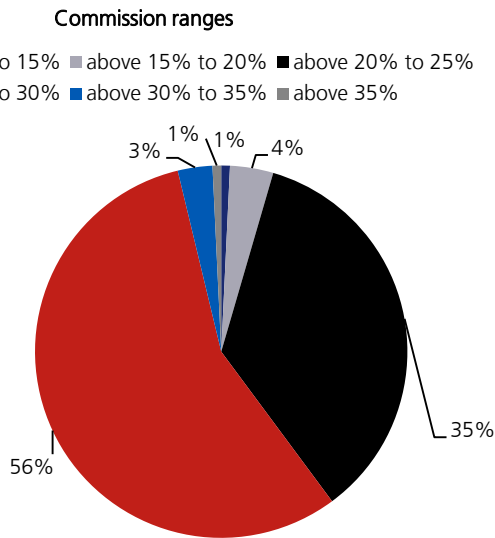
**Exhibit 9. City-wise AOVs (average) mentioned by restaurants that participated in our survey (n=132)**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 132

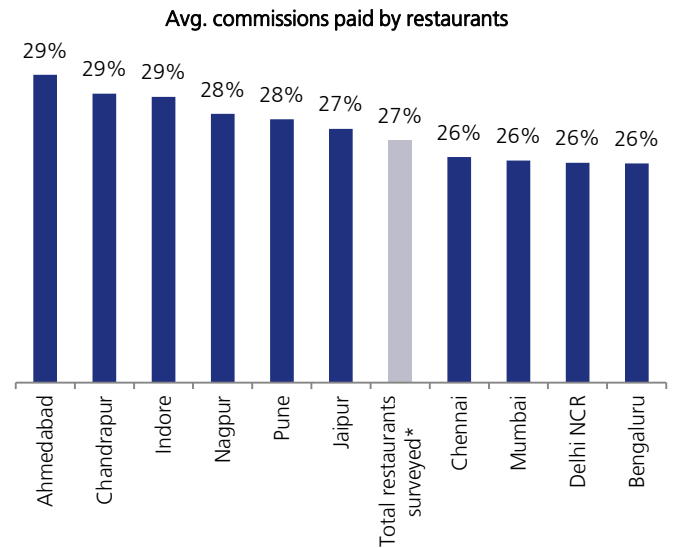
- Aggregators are likely experimenting flexible commissions:** The average commissions claimed by the restaurants stood at 27% of NSV. We note that this number is likely inflated by 18% GST that aggregators are required to collect from restaurants on top of their own commissions. Adjusted for that, actual commissions could be 22-23%. A few restaurants mentioned that the aggregators now allow them to choose from flexible commission plans basis their requirement and choice. For example, one aggregator offers a three-tiered commission plan – Basic, Basic+ and Premium. Commission rates are the lowest in the basic plan but restaurants do not have access to marketing support, cataloguing support, distant customers, amongst other value-added services. Having said that, we believe flexible commission plans are currently on an experimental basis. But given that some of the global peers have already pivoted to flexi-commission structures, we expect Indian aggregators to also adopt such tactics that could reduce the friction points with restaurants.

**Exhibit 10. 90%+ restaurants that participated in our survey claimed their commission rates ranged between 20% and 30% (n=133)**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 133

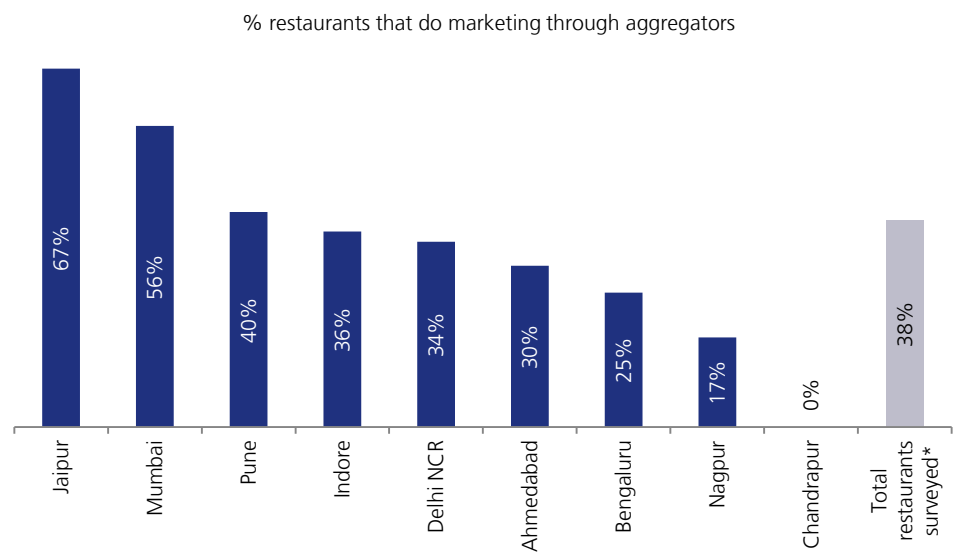
**Exhibit 11. City-wise commissions (average) mentioned by restaurants that participated in our survey (n=133)**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 133

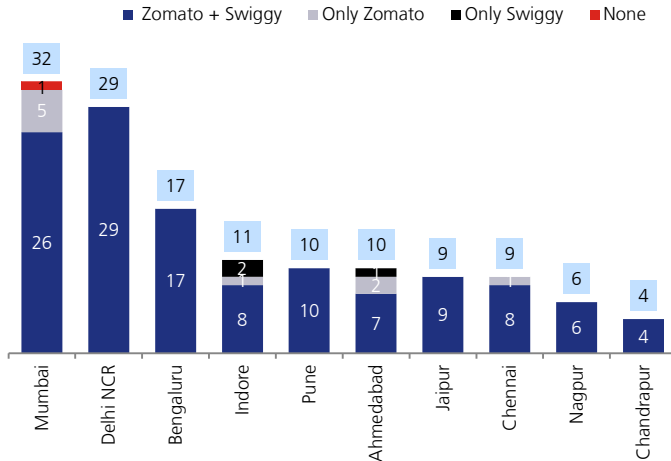
- High proportion of aggregator ad-income likely comes from new, chain and branded restaurants:** Close to two fifths of the total restaurants we spoke to said that they now indulge in branding and marketing activities on either of the aggregators or both (in a few cases). Recently set up restaurants typically end up spending more compared to the well-established ones. Similarly, chain and organised restaurants are more amenable to these spends (in fact many have set up dedicated teams) compared to the standalone restaurants. The latter generally prefer social media marketing (Facebook/Instagram/Whatsapp) or traditional offline methods.

**Exhibit 12. Close to two fifths of the total restaurants surveyed (n=120) claimed that they were using the aggregators for marketing purposes**



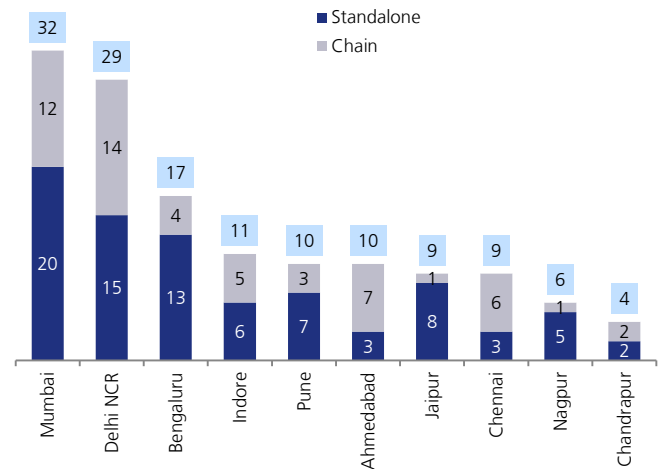
Source: JM Financial \* Sample size = 120

**Exhibit 13. Food aggregator platforms used by restaurants who participated in our survey (n=137)**



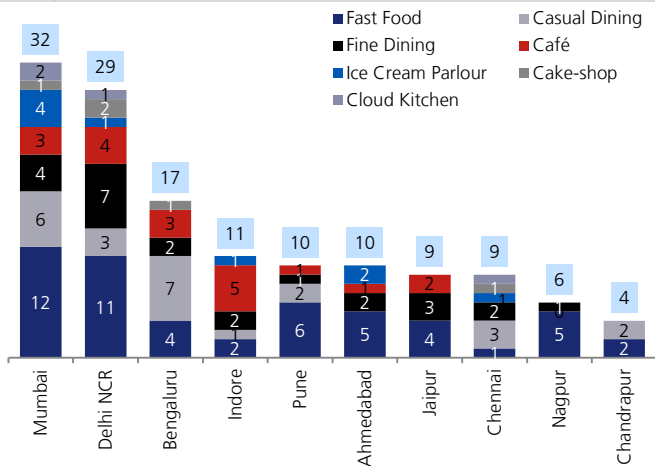
Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

**Exhibit 14. Type of restaurants who participated in our survey (n=137)**



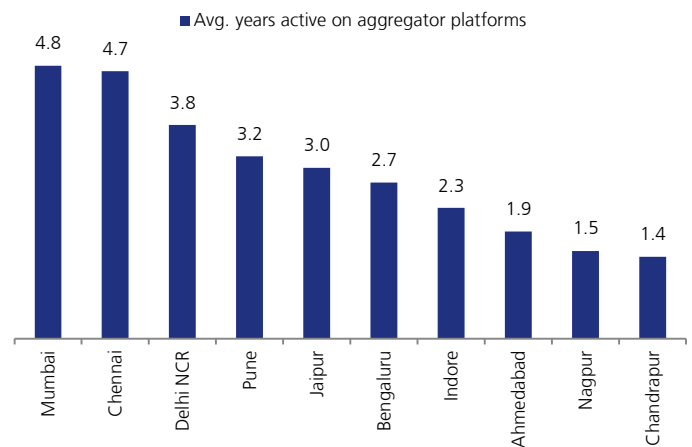
Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

**Exhibit 15. Type of restaurants who participated in our survey (n=137)**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

**Exhibit 16. Average time spent by restaurants that participated in our survey (n=137) on food delivery aggregator platforms**



Source: JM Financial. \* Sample size = 137

- Seamless and timely settlements helping build aggregator - restaurant trust:** A common feature across most our conversations was that the two large aggregators always settle the outstanding payments of restaurants as per pre-agreed arrangements, i.e., weekly/bi-weekly, etc., typically with no follow-ups required. This attribute is very highly appreciated by their restaurant partners.
- Hyperpure being used but large-scale adoption will likely take time:** A few restaurants in Tier 1 cities noted that they use Zomato’s Hyperpure services to source some of their food ingredient requirements. However, its usage was limited to a few SKUs and penetration in terms of a restaurant’s daily spends wallet share appeared low.
- Riders are now required to book slot-based gigs beforehand:** During the course of our primary checks we also spoke with 20 food delivery partners of Zomato and Swiggy across six cities. The most important takeaway was that delivery partners have to book their gig hours in advance with the aggregators (in slots of 2-4 hours). While there are no limitations on the number of slots that a delivery partner can book in a day, the number of partners that can pre-book a particular slot is capped. We believe this way the aggregators try to better match demand with supply, which helps them save on payment of excess availability fees during slack hours (it is a compensation that aggregators give to delivery partners for being available to deliver even if there is no gig available). Delivery



partners can see approximately hourly payouts that they can expect while booking a slot itself. Delivery partners are graded by the aggregators basis their past performance such as booked slots honoured, customer ratings, orders accepted vs. completed, amongst others. The performance is regularly monitored basis these parameters and partners are informed of steps they need to take to improve their grades as higher grades lead to better payouts.

- **Delivery partner compensation and benefits:** Qualification to join as a delivery partner with aggregators is generally not too stringent. Basic education and good communication skills are enough for anyone to get onboarded. In fact, in most cases, riders are onboarded and trained entirely through digital processes. Aggregators primarily pay delivery partners basis a) orders/trips completed b) kilometers travelled, and c) hours they were active. In addition, incentives are also paid on achieving certain milestones in a day/week. Average payouts and incentives are relatively high during dinner times, weekends, big festive days and adverse weather conditions. Our survey suggests per hour payouts range between INR 75 to INR 180, depending on the earlier described variables. Average pay-outs per order ranged between INR 40 to INR 70. Lastly, delivery partners are also covered by health and life insurance policies.
- **What delivery partners like?** 1) No dependency on any particular employer, 2) Flexible working hours as per one's availability/choice, 3) Timely payouts, 4) Monthly earnings can go as high as INR 40k per month (which at times could be higher than some other semi-skilled jobs) 5) Option to raise token or reach out to handling manager in case of certain unforeseen issues such as heavy rains, extreme traffic, restaurant- or customer-related issues.
- **What delivery partners do not like?** 1) Challenging working conditions due to extreme weather and high traffic (especially in Tier 1 cities), 2) Most incentives can only be achieved if they put in long working hours, 3) Absence of social security benefits, 4) Low bargaining power with the aggregators, and 5) Fear of penalties being imposed in case of customer complaints.
- **Reiterate Zomato as our top pick in the listed Internet space:** Due to its strong market leadership within the food aggregators (c.55% share vs. Swiggy) space and recent trends in profitability, Zomato remains our top pick in the space; we maintain 'BUY' with an unchanged TP of INR 105.

## APPENDIX I

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Hold	Price expected to move in the range of 10% downside to 10% upside from the current market price for stocks with market capitalisation in excess of INR 200 billion and REITs* and in the range of 10% downside to 15% upside from the current market price for all other stocks, over the next twelve months.
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\* REIT refers to Real Estate Investment Trusts.

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