DELIVERY PLATFORM MARKETING: COMPETITIVE EDGE OR HIDDEN COST?

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Abstract:
This paper explores the evolution of digital marketing within delivery platforms, emphasizing the strategic, behavioral, and technological transformations that define this emerging business model. Using Tazz by eMAG as a case study, the research analyses how delivery applications have evolved from simple logistical intermediaries into complex digital ecosystems that shape consumption patterns, customer relationships, and brand identity in the HoReCa and retail sectors. The findings reveal that success in delivery platform marketing lies in personalization, cultural relevance, influencer collaborations, and gamified loyalty mechanisms, all contributing to stronger customer engagement and long-term retention. At the same time, the study highlights the dual nature of these platforms x as both a competitive advantage and a financial challenge, depending on how businesses integrate them into coherent marketing strategies.

Key words: *digital marketing; delivery platforms; consumer behaviour; brand strategy; Tazz by eMAG*

JEL classification: M5

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, promotion through delivery platforms has become an almost mandatory practice for most restaurants that wish to remain competitive in an increasingly digitalized urban environment. Beyond the evident benefits of increased visibility and fast access to consumers, these platforms also entail a set of significant costs that must be understood and strategically managed. This section aims to analyse the structure of the costs involved, the differences between various types of expenses, and the way in which they influence the profitability of a business.

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The first and probably the most important cost for the majority of partner restaurants is the commission charged by the platform for each delivered order. On average, this commission ranges between 25% and 35% of the order's value, depending on the city, product category, contractual negotiation, and order volume. For example, Glovo charges a 30% commission in Romania for restaurants that use its delivery fleet. However, if a restaurant opts to deliver using its own fleet, the commission can decrease to 18–22%, but it loses the visibility associated with Glovo Express campaigns, such as the "Free Delivery on Orders Over 100 Lei" promotion. In such cases, a restaurant receives only about 70 lei from a 100 lei order, before deducting costs for ingredients, packaging, and VAT.

In parallel, Tazz offers a more flexible commission model but applies additional fees for Premium services. Through the "Recommended for You" function within the app, restaurants that benefit from this priority listing can see their commissions rise to 35%, while standard partners are charged starting from 25%.

Beyond standard commissions, delivery platforms also provide paid promotional services for their partners. These include top-list placement, visual banners, sponsored discount campaigns, and push notifications to users. A good example can be seen in Glovo's "Top Recommendations" or "Glovo Exclusive" sections, which require an additional negotiated budget, typically ranging from 500 to 1,500 lei per month, depending on season or category. For high-volume partners, Glovo offers mixed packages. Bolt Food, for its part, allows partners to run co-sponsored discount campaigns, where the platform covers part of the customer discount. However, such campaigns require contributions from both sides and tend to be effective only in the short term, potentially reducing profitability in the absence of a conversion and retention strategy.

When collaborating with delivery platforms, it is also essential to consider indirect logistical costs linked to compliance with platform requirements. For instance, standardized single-use packaging, additional staff time for packing and order management, order errors that may lead to compensations or penalties, and even losses of raw materials from cancelled or returned orders. For a restaurant offering complete menus (main course, side dish, salad, sauce, and dessert), the standardized packaging cost per order can exceed 5–7 lei. Over 1,000 orders per month, these costs can reach 5,000–7,000 lei, directly and significantly impacting profit margins.

Another additional cost that may arise from collaboration with delivery platforms involves temporary discounts and promotional campaigns, which may be suggested or even required. Some platforms periodically organize promotional events, such as Weekend Discounts or "1+1 Free" offers. Although participation is technically optional, restaurants that opt out tend to lose visibility within the platform's interface.

From a strategic standpoint, opportunity costs must also be taken into account, specifically, the potential value lost by focusing exclusively on third-party platforms. Many restaurants no longer invest in developing their own websites, personalized mobile apps, or email marketing campaigns because customer traffic is redirected to these platforms. This practice leads to a loss of control over the customer base and creates a superficial relationship with consumers. In the long term, this limits customer loyalty. Although such costs are difficult to quantify, their predictability is essential in correctly evaluating a restaurant's promotional strategy.

Table 1. Profitability Simulation for a 100-Lei Order

Profitability Simulation for an Order of 100 Lei	
Category	Percentage of Total Order Value
Platform Commission (30%)	30.0%
Cost of Raw Materials	35.0%
Packaging Cost	6.0%
Staff/Labour Cost	10.0%
Net Profit	19.0%

Source: literature

In summary, the chart clearly shows that 80% of the order's total value is consumed by fixed and variable expenses, highlighting the need for a carefully designed strategy in order to maintain profitability.

Thus, promotion through delivery platforms involves a complex combination of direct and indirect costs, which, without rigorous control and a well-defined strategy, can easily turn a marketing opportunity into a financial burden. Even so, for many restaurants, these platforms remain an essential sales channel, especially in densely populated urban areas and among digital-native consumers.

Therefore, the key lies in maintaining a balanced approach: using delivery platforms as instruments of visibility and customer acquisition, while simultaneously integrating them into a business's own strategies for loyalty, branding, and direct sales, so that the costs incurred can be justified and ultimately transformed into a competitive advantage.

The accelerated digitalization of recent years, coupled with significant changes in consumer behaviour and the effects of the pandemic, has led to a spectacular growth of delivery platforms such as Glovo, Tazz, and Bolt Food. These platforms have become essential sales channels for restaurants, cafés, and other players in the food industry. However, collaboration with these services has frequently brought to light a strategic dilemma for brands: whether their presence on delivery platforms serves as an effective marketing tool or merely represents an additional cost in the profitability equation.

For many local brands, especially those in the early stages of development or in expansion, collaboration with delivery platforms is perceived as a marketing and visibility opportunity, due to the considerable exposure these platforms offer. They allow brands to reach a broad audience quickly, with minimal investment in their own digital infrastructure. Another important aspect is the access to extensive databases of active users who are already accustomed to ordering delivery wherever they are. Moreover, the functionalities provided by these platforms create additional opportunities to attract consumers through promotional listings, customer reviews, push notifications, and discount campaigns.

There are also categories of restaurants, particularly those without an attractive physical location or situated in areas with low pedestrian traffic, for which these platforms represent the only effective form of marketing at minimal cost. As a result, the investment in platform commissions is often perceived as equivalent to a traditional advertising campaign, but with immediate and measurable results.

In contrast, well-established and visible brands have begun to face challenges related to profitability and control over their image. The commissions charged by delivery platforms, ranging between 25% and 35% of the order value, are considered significant and difficult to sustain in the long term. In the HoReCa sector, where profit margins are among the lowest, such collaborations can impact profitability in the absence of a clear differentiation strategy.

An analysis of the trends emerging alongside technological and digital evolution reveals another issue: the loss of human interaction. Major brands increasingly report a loss of control over their direct relationship with customers, as delivery platforms act as intermediaries, owning the customer data and managing direct communication. Consequently, customer loyalty becomes more difficult to achieve, and the brand is reduced to the role of a mere supplier within an ecosystem dominated by algorithms and discount-based positioning.

In this context, what was initially perceived as a marketing solution has, for some companies, evolved into a costly operational dependency. This tension is further amplified by the platforms' tendency to promote frequent discounts and promotional campaigns aimed at stimulating orders, actions that, while effective in the short term, place additional financial pressure on partner businesses.

Depending on the size, reputation, and maturity of the brand, perceptions of delivery platforms vary considerably. Small and medium-sized brands tend to see these platforms as a necessary springboard for growth, a kind of *"cost of market entry"*, while established brands may perceive such collaborations as a potential threat to their autonomy.

For instance, a restaurant with a strong physical presence in major cities may consider investing in its own delivery application, loyalty system, or digital marketing infrastructure to be a more sustainable and profitable alternative than paying commissions to a third-party platform. In contrast, dark kitchen businesses, which operate exclusively through delivery, are entirely dependent on these platforms and have built their entire business model around them. For such companies, marketing through delivery platforms is not only advantageous but essential to their survival.

Nevertheless, given the current socio-economic context and the dynamics of the food service market, brands have become increasingly cautious and focused on the expenses associated with maintaining and developing their operations. From a marketing perspective, companies tend to adopt a balanced strategy: they use delivery platforms to attract new customers while simultaneously investing in their own channels to reduce dependence. This approach requires building and consolidating a brand's own digital presence.

In this regard, some brands have begun to include loyalty messages or promotional codes in their delivered orders, encouraging customers to place future orders directly through the restaurant's own website or in-store.

Thus, collaboration with delivery platforms is perceived by brands as both an effective marketing opportunity and an additional cost that can threaten profitability and autonomy. Realistically, both perspectives are valid, depending on each brand's specific context, its size, level of digital maturity, strategic objectives, and capacity to develop independent sales channels.

In the long term, delivery platforms are not inherently profitable; therefore, business success depends on a company's ability to diversify its sales channels and to use them as tactical tools. Marketing on delivery platforms becomes a competitive advantage only when it is integrated into a coherent strategy that emphasizes customer value, data control, and loyalty-building.

The Tazz Application – Evolution, Functionalities, and Marketing Strategy

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the Tazz application was originally known as EuCeMananc, founded in Timișoara in 2014. It was one of the first Romanian food delivery platforms during a period when digital consumption habits were still emerging. The year 2019 marked a turning point for this local start-up, which had slightly expanded to nearby cities: the application was acquired by eMAG, Romania's largest online retailer, and relaunched under the new brand Tazz by eMAG. This acquisition brought significant benefits in terms of investment in technology, marketing, and service expansion.

Starting from 2020, Tazz experienced rapid growth amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which strongly accelerated the adoption of delivery services. Today, Tazz is present in over 35 cities and provides access to more than 8,000 partners, including restaurants, shops, pharmacies, and florists, becoming a comprehensive urban commerce ecosystem serving millions of active users.

From a functional perspective, Tazz differentiates itself through a suite of features that allow it to successfully compete with international aggregators, such as:

- ✓ Multi-category delivery – users can order not only food but also supermarket items, pharmaceuticals, gifts, flowers, or even IT and electronic products with same-day delivery.
- ✓ Tazz Now service – an ultra-fast delivery system that uses in-house stock or selected partner inventories.

- ✓ Genius subscription – providing users with free deliveries, personalized discounts, and priority access to promotions.
- ✓ Personalized in-app content display – using AI algorithms, the application recommends products and restaurants based on order history and local time.
- ✓ Integration with eMAG and eMAG Marketplace – enabling logistical and commercial synergies between platforms.
- ✓ Group ordering functionality – ideal for corporate clients or shared group orders.

From a marketing perspective, Tazz's strategy is sophisticated and built on adaptability, technology, and a deep understanding of its target audience. Rooted in the specific realities of the Romanian market, Tazz has managed to develop a coherent and relevant brand presence that drives organic growth and customer loyalty.

Consequently, Tazz's marketing strategy is articulated around four main pillars:

a) Personalization and targeting – leveraging user data and predictive algorithms to create tailored offers.

b) Collaborations with influencers – using relatable voices to reinforce brand authenticity and social reach.

c) Gamification and localization – integrating playful and culturally relevant elements that enhance user engagement.

d) Cultural and socialized communication – aligning brand messages with contemporary cultural narratives and community trends.

When it comes to personalization and targeting, one of Tazz's strongest assets is its ability to deliver tailored content and customized offers based on each user's individual behaviour. This is achieved through the use of machine learning algorithms and behavioural analytics, which focus on analysing order history, tracking peak ordering times, monitoring high-volume delivery locations, and recommending restaurants or products based on variables such as weather, time of day, or local holidays.

A good example of this personalization mechanism can be observed when a user regularly orders pizza on Tuesday evenings. On that specific day, the application sends push notifications with special offers from restaurants that deliver pizza. Conversely, on Friday evenings after 6 PM, the app prioritizes fast food, desserts, and beverage offers, anticipating end-of-week consumption habits. As a result, during Q3 of 2023, Tazz data showed that personalized notifications had a 35% higher open rate than generic ones. Moreover, orders placed following personalized recommendations recorded an 18% higher average basket value.

Tazz has also become a success story in influencer marketing, particularly on Instagram and TikTok, where collaborations are strategically targeted toward an urban, digital-native audience aged 18 to 35, who respond positively to authentic and informal content. For instance, the campaign *"I Ordered Only Desserts for 48 Hours"*, produced in collaboration with vlogger Selly, generated over 1.2 million views across YouTube and Instagram and resulted in a 27% increase in dessert orders during the campaign weekend.

Another notable and well-received campaign was the collaboration with Delia and Adrian Despot, titled *"Your Place Is in the Kitchen Whenever You Want It to Be"*, which also launched a song bearing the same name. The campaign addressed a socially relevant topic, gender equity in sharing household responsibilities, and, through the voices of Delia and Adrian Despot, transformed this sensitive issue into a modern manifesto about freedom of choice. Consequently, it was more than advertising; it was a clear brand statement in favor of a balanced lifestyle and progressive thinking. The impact on consumers was significant: it strengthened the perception of Tazz as a socially engaged brand, increased loyalty among young, urban, educated users, and generated online discussions that amplified the campaign's message far beyond its initial scope.

Figure 1. Tazz Campaign – "Your Place Is in the Kitchen Whenever You Want It to Be"

Surse: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TJq0tD1Wwk

Another renowned campaign that also earned awards for the Tazz brand is "Tazz Delivers (Almost) Anything" (Effie Awards Romania, 2023), a project supported by artists from the music industry. This initiative combined music and delivery into a creative concept that highlighted the versatility of the Tazz platform, while collaborations with contemporary artists generated a strong cultural impact, turning the campaign into part of urban pop culture and increasing the brand's relevance among Generation Z and Millennials.

The impact on consumers was notable: it strengthened the perception that Tazz delivers not only food, but also experiences, stimulated curiosity and social media engagement, and contributed to the brand's differentiation from competitors through a cool, relaxed, and culturally connected identity.

Tazz has succeeded in building a marketing strategy centred on cultural relevance, authenticity, and bold social messaging, going beyond merely communicating functionalities. The brand has positioned itself as an integral part of the daily lives of young, connected, and socially aware consumers. In the perception of users, this brand manifesto has strengthened emotional attachment, improved conversion rates for campaigns with social impact, and reinforced the association between Tazz, freedom of choice, and a modern lifestyle. As a result, customer loyalty has grown on the basis of a coherent and culturally resonant brand identity.

To maintain a high level of user retention, Tazz has implemented a series of gamification mechanisms inspired by video games and motivational psychology, such as:

Loyalty points for each order, which can later be redeemed for discounts.

Badge systems for recurring orders, special days (e.g., Black Friday), or monthly challenges ("Order from 5 different restaurants in 7 days").

The Genius subscription, offering free deliveries and exclusive discounts to its members, who have been shown to place, on average, 52% more orders per month than regular users. In February 2024, the introduction of the "Foodie Pro" badge led to a 19% increase in repeat orders, with these users averaging 10 orders per month.

The brand identity Tazz has developed reflects the realities of Romanian cultural life, offering authentic, accessible, and relevant communication for its audience. Consequently, its localized communication strategy represents a key pillar in its differentiation from competitors, contributing to higher levels of loyalty and emotional closeness with app users.

One of the most distinctive elements of Tazz's communication is its use of regional expressions and colloquial language, which creates a sense of familiarity and comfort, bringing the brand closer to consumers. Examples include:
a) "Food like grandma used to make, only this time it's delivered to your door" – evoking nostalgia for traditional Romanian cuisine.
b) "In Cluj, even cabbage works" – a humorous reference to local culinary preferences.
c) "Hungry? Stop pretending, grab a soup" – an informal, playful expression with a comedic tone.

From a psycho-emotional perspective, this approach establishes a bond with users who perceive the app as friendly, accessible, and emotionally relevant, effectively appealing to the user's emotions rather than just their rational choices.

At the linguistic level, Tazz's marketing strategy also relies on Romanian self-irony and dry humour. The brand's campaigns and messages subtly reflect everyday social nuances. Examples include taglines or short videos such as "Santa Claus Delivery" or "Stop lying to your colleagues about being on a diet. We saw you ordered three burgers." These generate amusement and engagement, reinforcing positive associations with the brand.

Thus, Tazz's communication strategy is deeply anchored in Romanian cultural identity. By using regional expressions, intelligent humour, and local media trends, the brand builds an authentic and relatable presence. This approach not only attracts but also retains consumers, making Tazz a memorable and culturally resonant brand.

The comprehensive analysis of digital marketing within delivery platforms, with a particular focus on the Tazz case study, reveals a series of essential conclusions regarding the evolution of this sector, the dynamics of consumer behaviour, and the efficiency of digital promotional strategies in an ever-changing business environment.

Starting from the theoretical foundations of digital marketing and the business models specific to delivery platforms, this research highlights how such applications have evolved from being mere distribution channels into interactive ecosystems that profoundly influence consumption patterns and the relationship between consumers and brands within the HoReCa and retail sectors.

First and foremost, it is evident that digital marketing on delivery platforms has evolved from simple discount-driven and traffic-oriented promotion to a much more complex strategy focused on personalization, loyalty, and cultural experience. Platforms like Tazz, through advanced functionalities such as personalized recommendations, real-time order tracking, customer reviews, and the *Genius* subscription, offer users greater control over the ordering process, enhancing both convenience and trust. This intelligent digitalization transforms the application into an ecosystem that satisfies consumers' utilitarian needs (speed, efficiency, accessibility) as well as their hedonistic aspirations, related to culinary exploration and personal indulgence.

The Tazz case study demonstrates that the platform not only responds to a growing demand for fast delivery but also manages to shape consumption habits, particularly among young consumers aged 20 to 35, for whom frequent orders through the platform have become an integral part of daily routine. This transition from occasional to regular consumption highlights a key insight: modern consumers are no longer driven solely by price or delivery speed, but also by quality of experience, relevance of offers, and emotional connection with the brand. Tazz successfully leverages multiple variables, from product type and restaurant proximity to promotions and emotional triggers, to deliver a predictive and personalized experience that stimulates both planned purchases and spontaneous impulses.

Strategically, the transformation of marketing within delivery platforms marks a shift from simple discount campaigns toward a storytelling-driven approach, based on influencer marketing and intensive use of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Collaborations with influencers, thematic campaigns, and gamification mechanisms contribute to building a culturally relevant and locally anchored brand, fostering a strong emotional connection with the target audience. Data-driven strategies enable Tazz to personalize notifications and optimize customer retention, resulting in a significant increase in conversion rates, as evidenced by the fact that 67% of new users place a second order within a short timeframe.

The SWOT analysis of merchant presence on Tazz highlights major competitive advantages derived from exposure on a platform with extended digital visibility, ensuring quick access to a broad and diverse audience. However, this exposure also entails significant costs, creating a continuous dilemma for local businesses, whether marketing through these platforms truly represents a sustainable competitive advantage or rather an additional cost that limits profit margins and brand autonomy. The answer largely depends on the business's ability to intelligently integrate these digital channels into its own marketing strategy, leveraging technology and consumer feedback to optimize offerings.

Another important finding from this research is the strategic role of delivery platforms within the HoReCa and retail ecosystem. Beyond their logistical function, these platforms act as strategic partners for restaurants, cafés, and shops, offering complementary services such as digital marketing campaigns, SEO optimization, social media promotion, and loyalty programs. This collaboration opens new development opportunities but also raises challenges related to control over customer relationships and the protection of brand identity.

Looking to the future, the challenges and opportunities for delivery platforms like Tazz are inherently tied to their capacity to adapt to the rapid changes in the market and evolving consumer demands. Emerging trends point toward a growing orientation toward sustainability, healthy options, eco-friendly delivery, and the integration of innovative functionalities such as augmented reality and social shopping. This evolution will require a continuous reassessment of marketing strategies and the strengthening of customer relationships through increasingly personalized and lifestyle-oriented experiences.

In conclusion, the Tazz case study illustrates a complex, flexible, and consumer-oriented digital business model that effectively combines technology, behavioural analysis, and emotional marketing. This synergy enables Tazz to create not merely a delivery platform, but a digital ecosystem that decisively shapes consumption habits, industry standards, and user expectations. Tazz thus stands as an eloquent example of success in the digitalization of the culinary experience, demonstrating that food is not only a necessity but also an expression of modern lifestyle, and the platform acts as a bridge between these two dimensions.

Ultimately, this study underlines that success in digital marketing for delivery platforms lies not only in the ability to generate traffic and sales but also in the capacity to create lasting relationships and memorable experiences, continually adapted to cultural, economic, and technological change. In an increasingly competitive digital environment, the platforms capable of efficiently integrating these elements will be those that dominate the market and shape the future of online commerce.

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