

Analyzing the Criticality of Service Level in Cab Aggregating Industry on Customer Expectations, Satisfaction, and Retention

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Abstract

All well reputed organizations know that the key to success lies in their customers. Hence in today's world, the companies that do not provide value to their customers bring an opportunity for the competitors to jump in and steal these customers. Organization are increasingly focusing on building long-term relationship with customer, thereby increasing their probability for success by offering customers higher levels of satisfaction, increasing customer loyalty and ultimately retaining customer. Thus, the paper attempts to establish concrete relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer retention. The relationship is supported through testing of hypothesis through and one sample t-test for finding out the impact of service quality and to find out the gaps in service quality of cab aggregators in consumer minds. The paper suggests certain service recovery strategies to cab aggregators which will help them reduce the gaps and enhance customer loyalty.

Key words: Cab aggregators, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Customer Retention, Service Recovery, Service Gap Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Public transport in Delhi has not turned out to be quite reliable both in terms of safety and efficiency. Taxi transportation system in Delhi is characterized by a scarcity of reliable taxi services, well-behaved drivers and proper faring processes both for local residents and tourists. As the government did not address the taxi problem appropriately, private players identified the high potential market for the “radio cabs” and captured it quite efficiently. The demand for such cabs have been increasing at a high rate in metros and other big cities as the corporate executives, software professionals, tourists and the moneyed strata of Delhi look for faster and effective transport system, even though they have to pay a little higher. 70 lakh working people in Delhi and NCR lose nearly 42 crore man-hour every month while commuting from home to office and vice versa through public transport. Today, radio taxi service has solved this problem to a laudable extent by using internet and mobile

technology and is providing satisfying cab services to frequent travelers. The herculean task of calling a taxi to get to the airport has turned out to be just a click away in the radio cab's booking website or a call away by dialing the number. The radio cabs business has emerged as one of the fastest growing businesses in the Indian transportation sector.

The business is booming in a huge way in India with versatile private operators both national and international investing tremendous money in setting up the call centers, acquiring fleets of new cars, and incorporating latest technologies in their vehicles. It has proved to be the win-win situation for government, radio cab companies, chauffeurs and most importantly, passengers. Radio cabs have filled in a gap in Delhi's transport system. The cab aggregators in India have completely changed the way we book a cab. Technology has totally transformed the service delivery mechanisms for these radio cabs. According to Softbank, the

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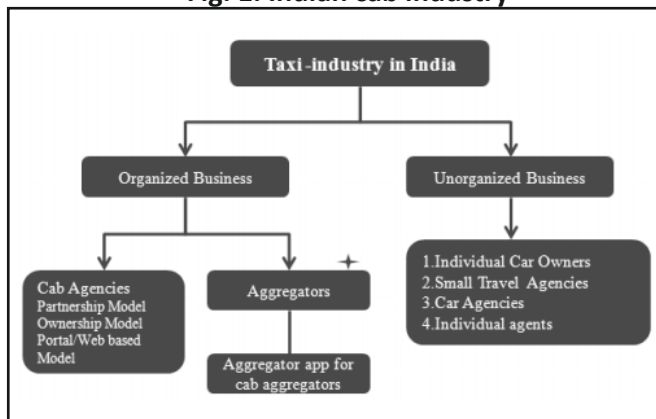
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organized taxi sector may be worth around \$7 billion by 2020. This segment has gained a lot of attention due to huge funding, highly competitive pricing, security issues and tussle with the government for license and permits.

Fig. 1. Indian cab industry

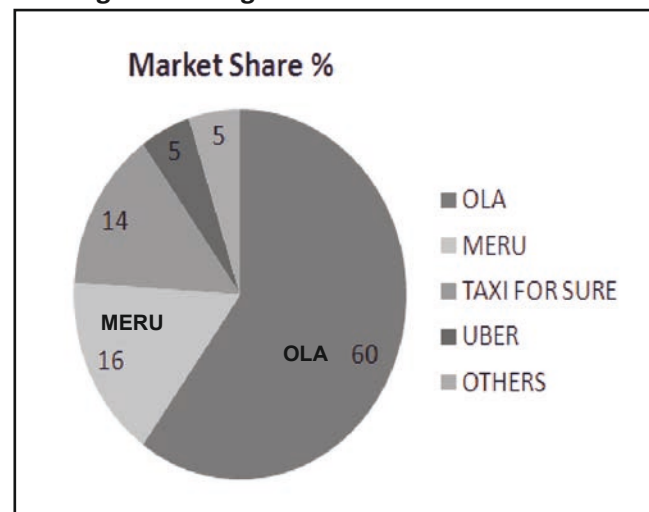


Organized industry primarily comes with a label / brand which brings in a sense of security and satisfaction to customers. The branded service providers have a set up office, trained supporting staff, call center for bookings, professionally trained drivers, and grievance cell to reach out to when needed. Largely, the current market can be segregated into four categories:

- 1) Cab agencies** are the established agencies with own vehicles or either coordinating with individual car owners, operating in metros or tier 1 cities where there is a higher demand. But due to lack of investments, such cab agencies operate on smaller scale.
- 2) Partnership model** – such companies work with multiple car/travel agencies to bridge the demand and supply gap. The partners don't own the vehicles, but the focus lies on generating leads for these car agencies registered with them and deploying/outsourcing research capabilities for analyzing the market and consumer conditions. These companies attract greater customer base through various schemes/ideas/proposals.
- 3) Ownership model** – Agencies under this model own all the vehicles, they either lend the cars to the drivers or employ drivers after analyzing the profit returns under both cases. One advantage of this model is that the management has total control and independence to execute its strategy according to plans. Also, with the increase in demand for services, the number of cabs can be increased in the fleet. Meru cabs are the best example for this model.
- 4) Cab aggregators** – Fundamentally these companies

call themselves technology companies, as they don't own any cars/taxis. Their expertise is in utilizing the technology that acts as an interface between the customers and the drivers. A mobile application is developed using maps to identify the request from customers then the nearest available cab is signaled to accept the request facilitating the transaction.

Fig. 2. The Organized Taxi Market in India



Data Source: SoftBank

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty can be defined as consumers' eagerness to continue their relations with a particular organization [1]. McIlroy and Barnett [2] explained customer loyalty as the level of commitment a consumer has with a firm which can be measured with the repurchase buying of a particular product or brand and also referring it to their friends and family. Attitudinal loyalty can be explained as consumer's sentiments attached to a particular brand and how he has climbed the loyalty ladder from being a suspect to an advocate of the brand. On the other hand, behavioral loyalty is a consumer's readiness to continue relations with a company through repurchase [3].

Many business organizations at large work around customer loyalty as their focal point [4]. A good management action can influence increase in sales of a company which is ensured by customer loyalty [5]. The organizations that focus on customer respect as a key ingredient of their business orientation definitely attracts loyal customers [6]. In today's competitive environment,

brands are struggling to keep pace with their counterparts and customer loyalty can be seen as the main focus which helps them grow [7]. In the emerging business environment, understanding customer psyche is very important so as to build competitive policies which help firms in succeeding by differentiating their product or service from their rivals which in turn helps them gain customer loyalty. It can also be said that a firm continues to grow and develop on the basis of their loyal customers [8].

B. Customer Satisfaction

The contentment of a customer with a product or service is termed as customer satisfaction. It can also be described as a consumer's feeling of delight (or disappointment) after comparing the actual performance after using a product or service with the expectations that the consumer had with that product or service before using it [9].

Customer satisfaction can be defined as a cognitive or affective reaction to a post consumption experience of a product or service [10]. Schiffman and Kanuk [11] defined customer satisfaction as “the individual's perception of the performance of the products or services in relation to his or her expectations”.

There are two approaches to understand customer satisfaction; transaction-specific and cumulative [12]. Transaction specific customer satisfaction can be explained as post consumption evaluation of a product or service by a consumer which leads to overall satisfaction [15]. Cumulative customer satisfaction, as the name suggests, can be viewed as the evaluation of the overall process of pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase experience which is enriched by a consumer's past experiences as well over a time period [16], [17]. The amount of supply provided by a firm also determines the level of customer satisfaction [5].

Customer satisfaction is also used as an indicator of possible future revenue [18]. Maintaining the level of customer satisfaction is a continuous effort which a company puts in by providing reliable services [19].

C. Customer Retention

Gerpott, Rams and Schindler [5] defined customer retention as a continued business relationship between a customer and an organization. Effect of product or service quality on customer retention is a crucial issue in relationship marketing [19]. It is observed that market

share and revenues of a company can be increased substantially by attracting and retaining customers [22]. A firm can be successful in retaining its customers by having essential knowledge about who to serve as customers. Post sales services are also seen as crucial drivers for customer retention [20]. Customer loyalty programs along with other compensations (for example, monetary compensation) are a step towards customer retention [13].

D. Service quality

Simply stated, service quality is a function of pre-purchase customer expectations, perceived process quality and perceived output quality [14]. Basically, service quality in i-banking can be viewed from two perspectives:

- ❖ customer perspective
- ❖ bank perspective

These five dimensions as suggested by Parasuraman for measuring service quality are:

1. Reliability: the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
2. Assurance: the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.
3. Tangibles: the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.
4. Empathy: the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers.
5. Responsiveness: the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.

The meaning of service quality may differ in wordings but it mainly involves determining whether or not perceived service experience exceeds or fails to meet expectations of customers [21].

E. Service gaps

It is assumed that when customers have a higher expectation of relationship continuity, service recovery expectations lower down and increase satisfaction. Service recovery is the process of putting things right (i.e. restoration of customer satisfaction). A necessary condition for service recovery is identifying when failures occur. Complaints make the service provider aware of a service failure. Service recovery management relates to the organizational efforts to manage and learn from customer complaints.

Gap 1: Gap between consumer expectation and management perception: This gap arises when the

TABLE I
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERCEIVED AND EXPECTED CAB SERVICES

DIMENSIONS	QUESTIONS	PERCEIVED	EXPECTED	MEAN
T1	Cab service has modern equipments	3.73	3.36	
T2	Cab service physical facilities are visually appealing	3.51	3.79	P=3.605
T3	Cab service reception desk employees are neat in appearance	3.60	3.27	E=3.57
T4	Materials associated with the service are visually appealing for cab services	3.58	3.89	
R1	When cab service promises to do something by a certain time, it does so	3.89	3.79	
R2	When you have problem, cabs service shows a sincere interest in solving it	3.61	3.42	P=3.778
R3	Online cab service performs the service right first time	3.89	3.79	E=3.716
R4	Online cab service provides its services at the time it promises to do so	3.80	3.69	
R5	Online cab service insists on error-free records	3.70	3.89	
RE1	Employees providing cab services tell you exactly when the service will be performed	3.85	3.27	
Re2	Employees of cab services provide you prompt service	3.92	3.39	P=3.82
RE3	Employees of cab services are always willing to help you.	3.85	3.42	E=3.33
RE4	Employees of cab services are never too busy to respond to your request.	3.66	3.27	
A1	The behavior of employees providing cab services instills confidence in you	3.73	3.79	
A2	You feel safe while taking a ride with these cab services	3.95	3.69	P=3.855
A3	Employees of cab services are consistently courteous with you	3.92	3.27	E=3.535
A4	Employees of cab services have the knowledge to answer your question	3.82	3.39	
E1	Cab service provider gives you individual attention	3.83	3.27	
E2	Cab service has operating hours convenient to all its customers	3.91	3.79	P=3.75
E3	Cab service has employees who give you personal attention	3.58	3.79	E=3.502
E4	Cab service has your best interest at heart	3.69	3.27	
E5	The employees providing cab service understand your specific needs	3.74	3.39	

Note: P and E are the mean values of perceived scores expected scores respectively of T1 to T4, R1 to R5, RE1 to RE4, A1 to A4, and E1 to E5.

TABLE II
WEIGHTED AVERAGE SCORE

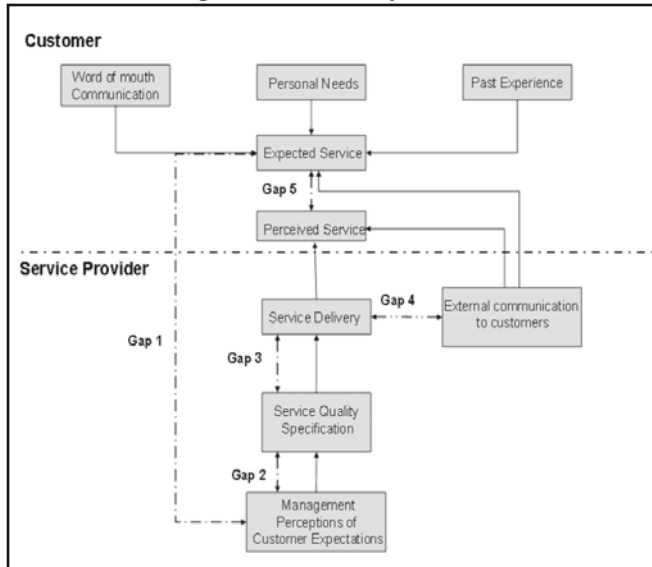
Dimensions	Difference of average	Weights	Weighted product	Weighted average	Ranks
Tangibility	0.035	20	0.7	0.14	5
Responsiveness	0.062	25	1.55	0.31	4
Reliability	0.483	15	7.245	1.449	2
Assurance	0.32	30	9.6	1.92	1
Tangible	0.248	10	2.48	0.496	3

TABLE III
ONE SAMPLE T-TEST

Test Value = 0						
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
DIFFT	.095	68	.925	.01087	-.2182	.2399
DIFFRES	.658	68	.513	.06667	-.1356	.2689
DIFFR	3.584	68	.001	.47464	.2104	.7389
DIFFA	2.786	68	.007	.31522	.0894	.5410
DIFFE	1.721	68	.090	.23478	-.0375	.5071

Note: DIFFT, DIFFRES, DIFFR, DIFFA, & DIFFE stand for the dimensions mentioned in first column in table II.

Fig. 3. Service Gap Model



management or service provider fails to accurately perceive what the customers want or need.

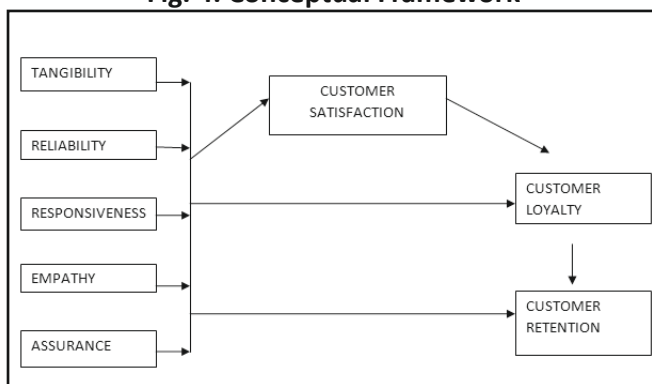
Gap 2: Gap between management perception and service quality specification: this is when the management or service provider might correctly perceive what the customer wants, but may not set a performance standard.

Gap 3: Gap between service quality specification and service delivery may arise because of service personnel. This could arise due to poor training, incapability or unwillingness to meet the set service standards.

Gap 4: Gap between service delivery and external communication: consumer expectations are highly influenced by statements made by company representatives and advertisements. The gap arises when these assumed expectations are not fulfilled at the time of service delivery.

Gap 5: Gap between expected service and experienced service: this gap arises when the consumer misinterprets service quality.

Fig. 4. Conceptual Framework



III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Conceptual Framework

The framework shown in fig. 1. establishes the relationship between the components of service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and customer retention. The services provided by the cab aggregators can be evaluated against the five dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL Model). A customer availing cab services will be satisfied when the service level provided to him are as per his expectations which will induce repurchases which further gives rise to customer retention. Customer satisfaction will have a positive impact on customer loyalty and new customer acquisition (satisfied customers move up the loyalty ladder to become brand advocates.)

The relationships established through the hypothesis testing will serve as framework for cab service providers in reducing their service gaps.

B. Research Objective

- ❖ To find the degree of impact/critical importance of each service quality dimension i.e. tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy on service delivery
- ❖ To establish the relationship between customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and retention.

C. Research Tools and Method

One of the primary concerns of this paper is to identify the important parameters affecting the service quality of radio taxi services. To determine the dimensions of radio taxi services and their relationships with the overall service quality, a questionnaire survey was conducted to collect the primary data. The structured questionnaire is based on a five- point likert scale; with anchor points from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The study was descriptive in nature. Through simple random sampling, 70 respondents were taken for the study. The responses were taken for two sets of questionnaire, one for expected service quality and the other for perceived service quality. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions which helped to explore the expectation of respondents and perception about the service quality of radio taxi services. Further for the study, one-pair t-test had been applied to check the credibility of the results from the SERVQUAL model. For the purpose of testing

SPSS was used for better accuracy in calculations.

IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table I shows the mean values of perceived and expected dimensions and their mean values. Table II shows the weighted score for all the dimensions.

We can conclude from table II that the gap between expected and perceived level of each dimensions of service quality is positive in case of radio taxi services. The above results indicate that cab service provider need to work more on **assurance** factors including knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence to customers. The positive gap between expected and perceived **reliability** is second highest; consumers don't have much reliability on cab services. Cab services may focus less on tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy (as positive gaps are lesser for these). We may say that for assurance and reliability factors, the service quality of radio taxi services have not been able to match customer expectations. Thus, these could possibly damage customer relationships in long term. The research suggests that customers may become loyal because they are provided services at the time of need, have highly responsive drivers and customer service executives, highly user friendly App interface, and provide solutions leading to repurchase and customer loyalty. This leads to customers choosing these services more often because of the three factors: **responsiveness, tangibility, and empathy.**

A. Data analysis through hypothesis testing

The following hypotheses were considered:

H₀: There is no significant impact of service quality on customer retention

H₁: Service quality has a positive significant impact on customer retention.

This hypothesis has the following sub-hypotheses:

H_{1a}: Tangibility has a significant impact on customer retention.

H_{1b}: Responsiveness has a significant impact on customer retention.

H_{1c}: Reliability has a significant impact on customer retention.

H_{1d}: Assurance has a significant impact on customer retention.

H_{1e}: Empathy has a significant impact on customer retention.

The 1-sample t-test is used to estimate the mean of a

population and compare it to a target or reference value when you do not know the standard deviation of the population. Using this test, we can determine whether the mean of a group differs from a specified value.

The test calculates the difference between the sample mean and the hypothesized mean relative to the variability of the sample. Usually, the larger the difference and the smaller the variability in the sample, the greater the chance that the population means differs significantly from the hypothesized mean.

First, average means of different dimensions of service quality were calculated for both set of responses (perceived and expected). Next, the mean differences between the averages of perceived and expected values was calculated and combined, thereby, converting data into single population and applying paired t-test on it.

There is significant level of difference in the mean value of tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy as the *p*-value is greater than 0.05 whereas, reliability and assurance have relatively lower value than 0.05. Therefore, we accept the alternate hypothesis for reliability and assurance which means these have significant impact on service quality, whereas, the null hypothesis is accepted for tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy. Hence, it is established that these service quality dimensions have no significant impact on customer satisfaction.

V. CONCLUSION

The new business model of cab aggregators has now provided the much needed peace of mind and affordable luxury to the middle class consumer segments who could not afford to own a car but wanted to travel hassle free. Also, the increase of smart phone purchase in India and the higher usage of mobile internet has made the task easier for these aggregators. It turns out to be one of the triggers that made these cab aggregators think differently and come out with a customer solution to get closer to customers. Eventually, mobile applications were developed and designed to enable users and travellers to book a cab with just a finger touch and within minutes, the cabs will reach one's doorstep. The major reason for the rapid development of the cab industry is the growth of the IT/ITES industry. The employees of these IT service companies work with call centers and log-in and log-out at odd times to support the client business round the clock. The cabs begin with facilitating employees commuting between home and office and providing

safety and security while travelling. As the employee income levels increased and got used to this comfortable travel, young employees started using cabs mostly for their personal travel. The way radio cab business is running today, it is highly impressive. It is acting as an intermediary between the customer and the taxi drivers. Both customers and drivers pay the company for the services respectively and that is how companies earn their profit. Change in the people's mindset has been the greatest factor in the growth of radio cab market. But there are certain other aspects which are acting as the obstacles in widening the radio cab market such as high fares.

To overcome this problem, first of all, radio taxi services need to understand what their customers really expect and how much they have been able to match upto their expectations. If not, then this might create gaps in the service quality of radio taxi services. At the same time, companies should try to improve tangibility and responsiveness towards their customers because according to our research, these two dimensions had unfavorable results. In the shorter run, these factors may affect the company but in the longer run these affect customer retention.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE SERVICE GAPS

Gap 1: Learn what customers expect

Get a better understanding of customer expectations through research, complaint analysis, customer panels, etc.

- a. Increase direct interactions between managers and customers to improve understanding.
- b. Improve upward communication from contact personnel to management and reduce the number of levels between the two.
- c. Turn information and insights into action.

Gap 2: Ensure that service performance meets standards

- a. Clarify employee roles and teach employees about customer expectations, perceptions, and problems.
- b. Train employees interpersonal skills, especially for dealing with customers under stressful conditions.
- c. Measure employees performance and tie compensation and recognition to delivery of quality service.
- d. Develop reward systems that are meaningful, timely,

simple, accurate, and do not fail.

- e. Ensure that employees working on internal support jobs provide good service to customer contact personnel.

Gap 3: Establish the right service quality standards

- 1) Ensure ongoing commitment to quality as defined from the customer's point of view and get middle management to set, communicate, and reinforce customer-oriented service standards for their work units.
- 2) Train managers in the skills needed to lead employees to deliver quality service.
- 3) Become receptive to new ways of doing business that overcome barriers to delivering quality services.

VII. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Cab aggregation industry is still at a nascent stage as only five percent is being capitalized and dominated by the organized players out of the estimated \$9 billion Indian cab market. It is forecasted that the demand for cab services will increase by 30 percent every month and this justifies the huge potential yet to be tapped in this service segment. The rise of the cab aggregation industry not only provides an affordable travel medium but has also become a source of livelihood for many drivers in the country. This space has attracted many young entrepreneurs to invest in research and innovation. Cab aggregators like Ola and Uber became an instant hit among masses and are able to capture the market share with the help of technology and their innovative business models. However, there is fierce competition in this segment owing to lack of entry/exit barriers for new players and amongst companies which have reached a saturation point and are now trying all possible strategies to revive their position. Technology is also being exploited to discover new ways to facilitate customers, innovating aggregation mobile apps for cab service providers, with which a user can search from all available aggregators. Ola taxi and Scoot are examples for such unified aggregator apps. The growth of technology can be appropriately used to engage customers, build loyalty programs, and make service delivery faster and accurate.

The results suggest that the cab aggregators have done a fair job in maintaining their quality levels by handling customer complaints and redressing them in all possible ways. The drivers are courteous enough, all the details related to travel are available, and user friendly digital interface as a one stop shop for all the traveling needs of

customers is available. But the aggregators need to further push themselves to raise their service quality levels due to the fact that good service quality leads to customer satisfaction and retention. Addressing loyalty in this space is a challenge for cab aggregators and this might help exceeding customers' expectations. Delighted customers would reinforce and sustain the relationship between service providers and customers and will also reduce/control investment in service recoveries.

For instance, the ride booking process of Ola or Uber fundamentally is the same but with the little differences or advantages that they claim as value additions for users. Ola has a pre-booking option, whereas, Uber accepts customer bookings based on the availability of cabs around. The usual payment options available are credit card, cash, discount coupons, and even mobile wallets. It is always recommended to have non-cash options to save time, for safety, clarity, and also to avoid issues like change tendering. These are the basic service offerings which serve as a threshold for any new entrant or the service providers up for an overhaul. Another crucial aspect is feedback – Uber and Ola both take this very seriously. As soon as a ride is complete, the customer is requested to provide feedback via app. In a way this has been made mandatory. If feedback is not given immediately, when the app is opened for the next booking, the screen remains blocked unless the feedback is given. Uber considers all this feedback and for a specific driver if the feedback is less than a certain value, let us assume 4.7, then the driver is asked to leave the network. Ola treats this a little differently. If the feedback is not good or any complaints are received, then Ola cancels the incentives of the driver accumulated for that week. This way both the companies are trying to maintain the standards to serve and benefit customers. Having understood the potential in the market, many players, small and big are entering the business. Out of these Ola and Uber have become significantly popular and the rest of them are trying their best to survive. The major challenge these players are facing the initial customer acquisition, to achieve this they are playing the game through price reduction, free rides initially, discounts and referral bonus. Along with that, there are many other areas to be dealt with such as network and data connection issues, demand and supply of cab affecting its availability, App crashes and increasing operating costs plus retaining and training employees so

as to avoid any service failure on the employees' part. Though the cab aggregating industry has a huge scope of expansion, but still the service providers, especially the existing ones have a long way to go, as they need to understand the criticality of relationship between service levels and customer satisfaction and loyalty. Loyal and retained customers have lower expectations for service recoveries, thus may help the service providers on saving their costs/ investments in areas of service recovery.

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