

India can become the first country to provide hi-tech care to the aam aadmi via a digital platform

A Sharing-Caring Economy



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Uber, Airbnb and other e-commerce companies are aggregators of service and product demands of consumers. They don't sell services or products, but only offer existing ones at a lesser price and with a better consumer experience.

But how can one justify the valuation of Uber, a taxi-hailing app, at \$69 billion, being more than that of carmakers like Ford, General Motor and Honda? It is such weird valuations that have forced these e-companies to get into legal tangles. Uber, for instance, has 173 law suits against it.

I was recently stopped by a member of the hotel staff in Prague, Czech Republic, from using an Uber. He asked me to download an AAA taxi app instead, which promptly provided me with a taxi. Like many cities across the world, city authorities and the taxi drivers' association in Prague are trying to ban Uber. They have also created a less-expensive Uber clone, which serves the needs of customers, drivers and the local government.

In Vienna, my Uber app didn't have the address of the iconic Hotel Imperial. The local drivers' association call centre sent a taxi in three minutes. When the hotel manager

in Budapest told me that Uber is illegal in Hungary while Italy is trying to ban it for 'unfair competition', I realised that Uber has a problem.

The root cause of discontent is the pound of flesh — 20-25% — that Uber takes as its commission to justify its valuation. This money can only come from the passenger and/or the driver, leaving both unhappy. The local government is unhappy because Uber doesn't pay taxes. The driver is unhappy because passengers pay through credit cards and Uber eats into his earnings.

The only way Uber, Airbnb and other e-commerce companies can survive in the long run when investors' money dries up is by offering free services like Google and Facebook, make money through ads, and charge an amount so negligible that people won't care to pay. Unfortunately, the billion-dollar valuation spoils the party.

Clones

The company founders forgot the great levelling force of technology. Tools that developed Uber are available to everyone for free. All someone needs is imagination, knowledge and passion. That is how the AAA taxi app in Prague was developed.

A prominent politician from Karnataka had offered to build an Uber-like app to take on striking Uber drivers in Bengaluru. He need not waste time and money to build a new app. All he has to do is to contact the company that made the AAA taxi app and incorporate small modifications specific to Karnataka.

In fact, every city drivers' association can have their own AAA taxi app,



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Now one can really let them have cake

or even a better one. As the number of users increase, app costs will come down significantly as it does not cost anything to give the software to new users. This is the beauty of technology.

If I have a kg of rice and share half a kg with you, I lose my half kg. But if I buy the AAA taxi app for Karnataka and own the rights and decide to give it free of cost to the drivers of Andhra Pradesh, I can do so without losing what I have. I can give my copy to every Indian city and have enough left to give it to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the rest of the world for free.

Drivers across the world will love it because customers can now reach them wherever they are, and they get to decide on the fare and mode of payment. Uber may sulk. But if drivers decide to uninstall the Uber app, or the government makes it illegal, Uber can't do anything about it.

So what is in it for India with the emerging digital sharing economy? India can become the first country to dissociate healthcare and other essentials from affluence through a digital sharing economy. India can prove that the wealth of a nation has nothing to do with the quality of healthcare its ci-

tizens enjoy by offering hi-tech care to the common man on a digital platform.

Rules of the Game

In the near future, most healthcare delivery will happen online with mobile phones. Patients will see doctors only for serious illnesses. The rest will get managed online. This will make doctors more productive, allow them to earn more and will break the geographical barrier that exists between the village and city. However, this will only happen if IT platform providers don't get carried away with billion-dollar valuations and offer services for a tiny amount for each transaction.

Of course, they will make enough money to justify their efforts. If they don't follow the rules of the game, inexpensive clones will follow and governments will intervene the way they are with Uber and Airbnb. It's time young tech entrepreneurs know how to differentiate between need and greed. Success is never a zero-sum game. When customers, providers and the government win, entrepreneurs win.

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