

GRABCAR: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TAXI OPERATORS

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Abstract: Taxis, being a significant element of mobility, play a sufficiently great role in public transportation. However, the issues towards taxi services have gradually increased due to the poor services given to passengers by taxi operators, leading to the demand for other ride service alternatives. With the development of technology, GrabCar was developed and launched as an online taxi booking through smartphone application which can easily connect passengers and drivers. The main purpose of this study is to find out the perception of taxi operators towards GrabCar service and vice versa so that there will be a clear point of view to identify opportunities and challenges for taxi operators. Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted with 5 taxi and 5 GrabCar operators in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus. Interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis. The findings showed that there were more challenges than opportunities for the taxi operators. This study could help the government to improve taxi services in general and GrabCar services in sharing economy.

Keywords: Taxis, GrabCar, e-hailing, opportunities, challenges.

Introduction

Public transportation system incorporates a variety of choices such as buses, LRT, monorails, trains, and taxis. These public transportations which are available for general public may require fixed fare charges and run according to scheduled times. One of the public transportations frequently used by customers is taxis that provide services throughout the cities in this country. Taxis are a conventional mode of transportation where a passenger can access by hailing at a taxi stand (Nistal & Regidor, 2016). Every day, thousands of people commuting around the cities generally rely on taxis because they are the only options for passengers which are convenient to use without schedule restrictions. Most of the passengers have been disappointed with the taxi service as it has not

met their expectations. Issues such as overcharging, refusing to go by the meter, refusing to take passengers, and lacking knowledge of directions have resulted in the disappointment of passengers with the taxi services (Spencer et al., 2014 cited in Ackaradejruangsri, 2015). Rudeness, reckless driving, refusing passengers, and lack of reliability from taxi drivers constituted the majority of the complaints (Cybermax, 2013 cited in Ackaradejruangsri, 2015). Indeed, getting a taxi that is reliable and safe may be an utmost challenge. In recent years, taxis have been moving towards the digital. It started when Apple launched their App Store for the iPhone in 2006; few could have predicted the impact apps would have on different industries and occupations. Indeed, the hiring of private cars and taxis would

seem to be a world away from Apple product (Glöss *et al.*, 2016).

In most urban cities, getting a taxi that is reliable and safe can be a major challenge (Ackaradejruangsri, 2015). Hence, in 2011, MyTeksi was introduced in Kuala Lumpur, which was later branded as GrabTaxi. GrabTaxi, also known as GrabCar, was established in Malaysia by Harvard Business School graduates Anthony Tan and Tan Hooi Ling (Paronda *et al.*, 2016). According to Tan, “we started GrabTaxi because the taxi system in Malaysia was a mess. At first, 30 taxi drivers got the opportunities to try out the apps and on June 2012, the company launched the on-demand e-hailing application in Kuala Lumpur” (Mei & Dula, 2016). In 2014, GrabCar was officially launched in Malaysia as the number of GrabCar usage gradually increased due to the safety, time efficiency, and convenience to passengers and drivers. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to find out the perception of taxi operators towards GrabCar service and vice versa so there will be a clear point of view to identify opportunities and challenges for taxi operators.

E-Hailing

E-hailing services (Didi in China and Uber in the US) can connect passengers and taxi drivers directly using communication technology since taxi drivers know the passengers’ locations and destinations beforehand (Fang & Huang, 2018). According to Onyango (2016), such an application should support identification of location(s) by both driver and passenger, searching for available taxis in a given area, allowing a passenger to book a taxi and the driver to accept such requests, and enabling the passenger to pay for the service using the E-hail app.

In addition, consumers prefer this e-hailing service such as Grab since they find it affordable and easily accessible using the internet. Furthermore, with strong internet connection,

this e-hailing service is easily booked when consumers have the e-hailing app installed. They can easily book for a ride anywhere and anytime according to their convenience. Apart from that, by using the e-hailing app, consumers can track their driver’s location and estimated arrival time. It also allows customers to monitor the identity of the driver.

Sharing Economy

Stephany (2015) denotes the “Sharing Economy” with “the value in underutilized assets and making them accessible online to a community, leading to a reduced need for ownership of those assets.” The sharing economy uses immobilized assets and turns them into services (Lieberman *et al.*, 2015 cited in Nistal & Regidor 2016). According to Hawapi *et. al.*, (2017) this new economic model is no longer focusing on product ownership but rather emphasizing on the product usage. Sharing economy is often associated with peer-to-peer model where information technology becomes the platform for people to offer and share underutilized resources which are financial, social and environmental.

Sharing economy is also defined as carpooling, literally sharing a ride with another passenger. Sharing economy companies such as Airbnb do not own the performing assets that generate revenue, apartments and rooms. Meanwhile Grab taxi only provides taxi services but not the vehicles (Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014).

Research Objectives

The study was carried out to achieve the following objectives:

- I. to understand the practices of taxi and GrabCar operators in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus,
- II. to identify how getting the ride, during the ride, payment and ratings lead to opportunities

and challenges for taxi and GrabCar operators in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus, and

III. to determine opportunities and challenges for taxi and GrabCar operators in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus.

Research Framework

The present study adapted the framework from Glöss *et al.*, (2016) to identify opportunities and challenges for taxi operators. Figure 1 shows the research framework for the present stud

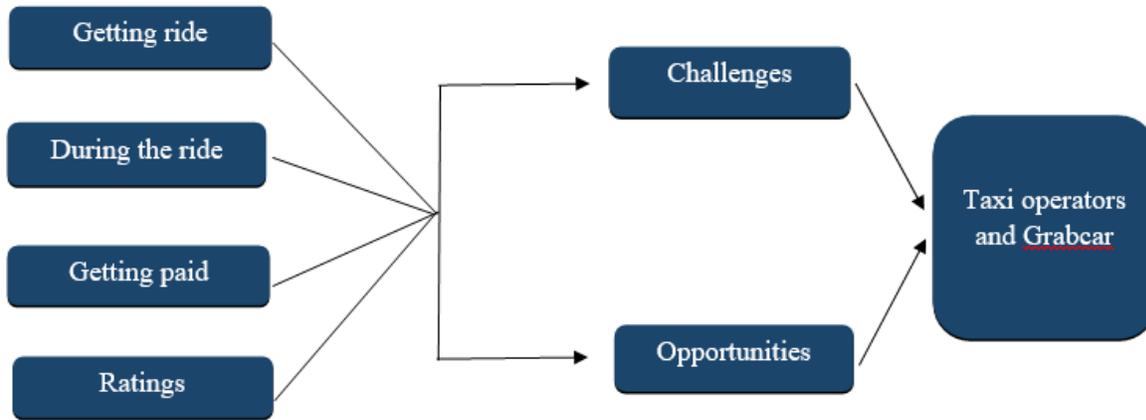


Figure 1: Research Framework

Based on the research framework, opportunities and challenges were identified through getting ride, during the ride, getting paid and ratings. The differences of these themes are explored by comparing traditional taxi operators and e-hailing operators.

Getting Ride

Most of the taxi operators are only paid if they get rides, so their first demand of the job is to find passengers for ride (Glöss *et al.*, 2016). Taxi operators have to be on a standby at the taxi stand waiting for the passengers at different locations. Sometimes, taxi operators have to head back empty-handed as they do not get any rides on the way back. The working routine of e-hailing services is similar in some regards to that of the traditional taxi operator. While they do not have to pick up the taxi, they still have to acquire customers, navigate to their destination and get paid (Glöss *et al.*, 2016). A consumer has a smartphone app that allows him to indicate he needs a pickup, and e-hailing operators on the

other side of the platform respond to the request (Wallsten, 2015). Unlike traditional taxi operators, e-hailing operators can simply go online through their apps and accept any request that comes especially if it is close-by. They do not have to wait at a specific place like taxi operators. A ride-hailing app is a smartphone-based e-platform capable of geographically locating both taxi drivers and passengers, and then efficiently matching drivers with passengers (Xu *et al.*, 2018). Some of the critical information that would be helpful to customers include the operator's name, vehicle registration number, telephone number and an advance estimated cost (Ackradejruangsri, 2015 cited in Onyango, 2016).

During the Ride

Once a passenger is inside the taxi, the taxi operator needs to navigate to the destination requested by the passengers. Most traditional taxi operators rely on their expert knowledge in navigation. It is because of their hard-earned

knowledge of city obtained entirely based on their own experiences (Glöss *et al.*, 2016). Meanwhile, e-hailing operators have not gone through any formal training in term of routes and maps. Thus, they rely heavily on the use of GPS system (Glöss *et al.*, 2016).

Getting Paid

Traditional taxi operators only accept cash as the method of payment while e-hailing operators accept both payment through the app and sometimes in cash (Glöss *et al.*, 2016). The ability to link passenger's credit card to the App allows for secure and convenient settling of payments (Onyango, 2016). Besides, the ride-share company takes a percentage of the fare, and the rest goes to the driver (Wallsten, 2015).

Ratings

There is no rating for traditional taxi operators by the passenger. If passengers want to give comments on their good or bad experience at the end of a trip, they are required to do the process through SPAD manually. However, e-hailing passengers utilize the app to rate the operators between 1 and 5. E-hailing operators receiving reliably low scores are suspended from the services. Poor rating can lead to separation of engagement terms with the App providers. This encourages professional behaviour and respect from both passengers and operators, and foster greater communication between the customers and operators (Onyango, 2016). The rating towards the operator is essential because it represents the quality of the operator at the end of each trip. Rating of e-hailing operator's performance by passengers and consistently low rating can weed out unprofessional operators. Similarly, e-hailing operators can also rate the passengers, so rude and aggressive passengers can be eliminated as consistent low rating and unsafe behaviour towards operators can lead to their account deactivation from the app (Dhawan & Yadav, n.d).

Methods

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, a series of face-to-face standardized open-ended interviews were conducted among 5 taxi and 5 GrabCar operators in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus. The main reason for focusing particularly on these areas was taxi and GrabCar operators mostly operated in these locations. All interviewees or participants were asked the same basic questions which had been determined in advance. The main advantage of this interview is increasing comparability of responses while the drawback is that there is little flexibility to change direction of the interview (Patton, 2002). This technique also assists researchers to capture the depth, complexity and roundness of responses regarding subjects of interest (Hasan, 2011). Non probability sampling in the form of snowball sampling was used for this study. Interviews were only conducted among 5 taxi and 5 GrabCar operators and ranged from 20 to 60 minutes in length. Although the number of participants were generally far smaller, it was sufficient to achieve data saturation. Data saturation is whereby no new information is forthcoming and no new insights appear feasible (Schindler, 2019). Prior to the interviews, the questionnaire was reviewed by the supervisor and consent forms were distributed to protect participants' confidential and anonymous data.

Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire design is a systematic process in which the researcher contemplates various questions format, considers a number of factors characterizing the survey at hand, ultimately words the various questions carefully, and organizes the questionnaire's layout (Burns & Bush, 2006). The systematic questionnaire design for the present study involved questionnaire development, reviewing process by the supervisor, pre-test and finally approval to use for interview. The main questionnaire was divided into 5 parts as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Questions for Interview

Part	Description	Items
1	Your Background	Age, gender, race, experience, type of taxi/grab, shifts, daily driving exposure
2	Getting Ride	Getting passengers, trips a day, comments/feedback
3	During the Ride	Route knowledge, passenger’s comfort, comments/ feedback
4	Payment	Fare, payment methods, comments/ feedback
5	Ratings	Action to increase passengers satisfactions, initiatives to improvise the taxi service, driver rating, suggestion

Content Analysis

Content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks quality content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner (Bryman, 2004 cited in Hasan, 2011). The content and structure of concepts created by content analysis should be presented in a clear and understandable way (Elo et. al., 2014). The present study used content analysis whereby the audio recorded interview conversation was transcribed, coded and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The findings were organized into 5 parts: profile of taxi and GrabCar operators, how taxi/GrabCar operators get their passengers, operators’ experience during the ride, getting payment from passengers, and ratings process.

Part One: Profile of Participants

Part one of the interview was about taxi/GrabCar operators’ profile or background. Table 2 and 3 show the participants’ age, gender, race, working shifts, and experience, daily exposure, and type of taxi or Grab.

Table 2: Profiles of the Taxi Operator Participants

Items	Participants				
	TX1	TX2	TX3	TX4	TX5
1. Age	64	70	72	55	62
2. Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
3. Race	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay	Malay
4. Shifts	Full- time				
5. Experience	21 years	35 years	40 years	12 years	17 years
6. Daily exposure	Days to nights				
7. Type of taxi	Budget taxi	Budget taxi	Budget taxi	Budget taxi	Budget taxi

Table 3: Profiles of the GrabCar Participants

Items	Participants				
	GC1	GC2	GC3	GC4	GC5
1. Age	45	43	23	23	39
2. Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
3. Race	Malay	Chinese	Malay	Chinese	Malay
4. Shifts	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time
5. Experience	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year
6. Daily exposure	3-4 hours	5 hours	3-4 hours	3-4 hours	4-5 hours
7. Type of GrabCar	4-Seater	4-Seater	4-Seater	4/ 6-Seater	4/ 6-Seater

It can be seen from the profile of taxi and GrabCar operators that they were mostly male drivers. The taxi operator's ages were between 55 and 72 and they were nearing their retirement. Meanwhile, GrabCar operators' ages were between 23 and 45. The majority of participants' race was Malay and only two were Chinese. Apart from that, the taxi operators were working full-time shifts with their daily exposure between days to nights. On the other hand, the GrabCar operators were working as part-timers whereby their average daily exposure was between 3-5 hours per day. There was a huge difference in working experience in taxi services between taxi and GrabCar operators. Most of the taxi operators had been in the service between 12 and 40 years while GrabCar operators had had a year experience. Taxi operators opted to drive budget taxis and GrabCar operators preferred to drive 4-seater or 6-seater GrabCar.

Part Two: Getting Rides

Findings showed that the taxi operators received their passengers from taxi stands near central bus stations or airports while GrabCar operators received requests from passengers via Grab application. Since the introduction of e-hailing in the form of GrabCar, most of taxi operators had been facing problems getting passengers as compared to GrabCar operators who had enjoyed the high demand for their e-hailing services. This was revealed in the statements made by operators with regards to receive their passengers:

“Some of us even didn't get one single passenger for a day due to GrabCar...some of us only managed to get RM10-RM20 per day. Terminate GrabCar operation because they did not have any insurance, driver identification card, and no involvement with PUSPAKOM and SPAD.” (TX1)

“It can be said that taxis are not operated due to competition from GrabCar, buses and illegal car operators” (TX2)

“... It depends on how many trips a day. Sometimes it can be around 10-15 or 10-20 trips per day.” (GC2)

“Short trips up till 20; however, for long trips it is not as much as short distance services. Furthermore, Grab gives bonus if operators achieve certain target trips. It is much easier to achieve target by short trips” (GC1)

Findings also showed that although GrabCar achieved many trips, some of these operators faced difficulty in terms of internet coverage, passenger usage of GrabCar application, limited pickup space, too many GrabCar, and inaccurate location. This was mentioned by some of the operators.

“There are too many operators within one area that influence the number of trips....Sometimes it is difficult to get accurate location as compared to Uber application. Hence, the passenger has to contact the operator in order to describe the actual location for pickup.” (GC4)

“It is difficult to get a long-distance trip due to GrabCar zoning system, such as Kuala Besut is for Kota Bharu GrabCar operators, and not many people from suburban areas use GrabCar application.” (GC1)

Part Three: During the Ride

Route knowledge is very important for taxi and GrabCar operators. Findings showed that all taxi operators were experts in route knowledge as compared to GrabCar operators who depended more on Waze or Google Maps. Below are statements made by participants in relation to route knowledge:

“...based on my experience. I have been working for a long time. It is not difficult to understand Kuala Terengganu route as compared to Kuala Lumpur. I really don't use Google Maps.” (TX2)

“I don't use Google Maps because of my experience as taxi operator in Terengganu.” (TX5)

“Google Maps and Waze are good enough because they're accurate and kept up-to-date. Normally the accuracy in showing the correct routes is very important when I am unsure about certain location.” (GC5)

Taxi and GrabCar operators were also particular with regards to providing passenger comfort during the ride. Findings showed that taxi operators focused more on operators' attitude and their driving styles while GrabCar operators focused more on the condition of their cars. Issues also arose in terms of passenger attitude and behavior towards taxi and GrabCar services. This was mentioned by some of the operators.

“Safe driving style, good attitude, and educated driver are important. I would decline passengers who demand speedy journey because I don't want to get speed-trapped.” (TX2)

“I always make sure that I drive carefully. It is also important to practice polite communication

in order to make sure that our passengers feel comfortable during the ride.” (TX5)

“The other day, I drove for a long-distance journey. My passengers were sleeping; hence, I turned down the radio volume and made sure the air conditioning was at the right temperature.... Sometimes, passengers attempt to save money by getting 5 people into a GrabCar that is only 4-seater. This is not acceptable and can be caught by the police for overcapacity.” (GC2)

Part Four: Payment

Taxi operators always follow the fare charges stated by the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD). For example, the fare charges are based on distances for taxis at bus stations and are based on distances as well as zones for airport taxis. Meanwhile, GrabCar operators were unsure about how the fare charges are estimated because they are calculated automatically with fixed base fares. This was described by taxi and GrabCar participants:

“SPAD's fare estimation for a journey to Kota Bharu is around RM200, and if I charge a passenger with this fare, surely he will not take taxi. I have to consider reducing this charge.... I can accept SPAD's fare estimation for long journey, but, for short journey it is too low.” (TX1)

“The fare estimation is acceptable, and I can't increase the fare. However, I will reduce it if the passenger is disabled.” (TX2)

“We base on zoning system. For example, a trip from the airport to the city center will cost RM30, and for a trip to Gong Badak, we will charge RM20.” (TX3)

“Yes, fare will be charged according to SPAD. At the airport counter, we display the fare according to zones and we can't charge more than that. If we charge more, passengers can complain to SPAD.” (TX4)

“I’m not sure how GrabCar determines the fare; however, there is base fare of RM3. Maybe fare is based on distance. I’m not sure.” (GC5)

Findings also showed that taxi operators’ opinions about the usage of electronic apps for fare charges were they were unnecessary and not suitable, while GrabCar operators felt that they were generally good and convenient. In sum, taxi operators were still using the manual method of payment where passengers paid the fare by cash, while GrabCar was using alternative methods such as debit card, credit card or cash which was convenient for passenger. This was mentioned by some of the operators.

“We don’t accept credit or debit cards. We only accept cash. If the foreign passengers don’t have the Ringgit currency, we will drive them to a money changer or the hotel will make the payment.” (TX3)

“Credit or debit cards. The payment method is much simpler for Uber rather than GrabCar”. (GC2)

Part Five: Ratings

Findings also showed that taxi operators would make sure that they would maintain a positive attitude to increase customer satisfaction and would take initiatives to attend courses. On the other hand, GrabCar operators would ensure that their cars were in good condition and Grab management should take part in providing initiatives for improvement. This was described by operators:

“For taxi operators, we will have training courses. During the courses, we will be monitored on how we are getting passengers, treating them etc...” (TX3).

“Usually, I will recite the ‘doa’ before starting the journey, making sure that my car smells fresh and playing soothing music...I think Grab management should take action for any room of improvement.” (GC5)

Apart from that, there are no rating systems available for taxi operators while most of the GrabCar drivers find it inefficient to use Grab rating system due to its limited function. This was revealed in the statements made by operators with regards to the rating system:

“...because taxi operators are not under one company, we’re individual operators. We don’t have any rating system. However, we do take action if there are any complaints. That’s all. If no complaint, then everything will be okay. We are not being paid monthly salary. It’s different if it is monthly salary. Hence, we need ratings and monitoring to evaluate taxi services.” (TX4)

“For Grab rating system, it is quite difficult. There are more passenger benefits rather than driver benefits. For operators, there is no rating for passengers. If we have these ratings, then we will have the option of whether to accept or reject the incoming request.” (GC2)

Findings also showed that taxis operators’ opinions towards GrabCar were not positive, such as bad service, inappropriate dressing and being unfair towards taxis operators. In addition, most taxi operators had no intention of switching to GrabCar and would remain with the taxi association. They also suggested to abolish GrabCar and implement the same rules and regulations for GrabCar operators. GrabCar operators’ opinion towards taxis were generally positive, such as should upgrade like Grab, sometimes too calculative, expensive fares and unavailable when passengers wanted a ride. Apart from that, GrabCar drivers had no intention of switching to taxis and would prefer a permanent job. This was mentioned by some of the operators.

“I would like to give one suggestion. Eliminate GrabCar in order to increase taxi operation or change GrabCar to be like traditional taxi operation. We as taxi operators must go through PUSPAKOM for car assessment once every six months. If GrabCar does not have do the same process, it’s totally unfair. Hence, in order to be

fair, GrabCar needs to go through the same process as traditional taxi operators. Then, I can accept if GrabCar offers lower price than us.” (TX5)

“Traditional taxis sometime are not available and difficult to reach. I think I will still choose to be a GrabCar operator due to the technological benefit and I can still work as part timer” (GC4)

Conclusion

This paper outlines of some opportunities and challenges of taxi operators and GrabCar operators. The results of the interviews showed that there were more challenges for traditional taxi operators in terms of high competition with GrabCar, limited payment methods, and huge disparity in fare charges, which eventually led to high reduction in number potential passengers. These findings are supported by researchers of Der (n.d) that private-hire car drivers are disrupting the taxi industry, robots are replacing hundreds of blue-collared workers, and even start-up companies with minimal experience compared to incumbent firms can triumph when armed with advanced technology. On the other hand, technological advancement of e-hailing assists GrabCar to be part of sharing economy in taxi industry. However, challenges did arise in the form of too many GrabCar operators within certain areas, negative perception from traditional taxi operators, and lack of backup for GrabCar operators as compared to traditional taxi operators who have their own association.

Similarities in the taxi industry between the present situation and the past (Snead, 2015 as cited in Rahel, 2016) were noted where there were not many innovations that were introduced for betterment in the taxi system. Currently, the major challenge faced by the taxi industry is the technological innovation of ride-sharing applications. Ride sharing companies, namely Grab, Uber and Lyft, operate by using a smartphone app to match consumers requesting rides with taxi operators that will take them there

(Rahel, 2016). Besides, technology advancement gives great opportunities to develop e-hailing service and be competitive like GrabCar, yet some of the traditional taxi operators cannot adapt to the technology advancement as they are not computer-literate and feel the way it used to be is the easiest system to get their potential passengers. Apart from that, the traditional taxi operators think that due to lower fare, passengers prefer to get rides with GrabCar, not mainly because of the technology advancement.

It is hoped that the present study can help the government to assess the impact of e-hailing from the perspective of both traditional taxi and GrabCar operators. Furthermore, taxi operators should consider adopting e-hailing because this technology advancement gives great opportunities for the taxi industry and is widely used by passengers in the current digital world. Potential future research should focus more on understanding the complex relationships among markets, operators, technology and ethics (Glöss *et al.*, 2016).

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