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Consumers in India will soon have access to what has already been billed as India’s first Super App, courtesy Tatas. India’s oldest industrial giant is all set to debut its multipurpose app towards the end of this year or by early January aims to transform the way netizens shop, make digital transactions, and perform various other tasks. However, will it be an easy going for the proposed super app, given that several domestic rivals, notably RIL-owned Jio, too are aiming to come up with their own versions of a super app? In an exclusive interview with N Janardhan Rao, Dy. Editor, *The Global ANALYST*, Anand Kumar Jaiswal, Professor of Marketing, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, shares his views on what are the opportunities and challenges for the upcoming super app. Read on.... ▶▶



Anand Kumar Jaiswal
Professor of Marketing, IIM-A

■ **What would be your first reaction to the news of the proposed ‘Super App’ project from Tatas?**

It indeed was a big surprise. Tatas launching a major e-commerce project is certainly big news, given that despite being one of India’s



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In fact, it may even be seen as an attempt by the Group to catch up with rivals and underline a strong presence in the emerging digital and internet space.

■ **Does it excite you?**

As a marketing academic and also as a consumer, I see this as a very welcoming and positive step. It means more competition and enhanced choices for consumers. So far we have only Reliance and Amazon in this space. So there is a risk of creation of monopoly in the market. Tata Group is known for a very high degree of customer centricity, ethics, trust and therefore whenever they would launch this Super App, it may bring in a lot more positive changes in the market as a whole.

■ **How do you define a Super App?**

Super App is a one-stop solution or an umbrella app where a user can do multiple tasks. For example, users can use the app for accessing social media, communicating with others, buying and selling, making payment, booking taxi or cinema tickets and many more other tasks.

■ **Coming back to the proposed Super App, there is a sense of skepticism in some quarters**

over the project’s success, given that Tatas are no match to the mighty Ambanis who despite being late to the retailing party are calling the shots, relegating the former to being an also-ran. Also, Tatas’ e-commerce venture tatacliq.com has failed to give any competition to e-tailing’s top guns like Walmart-owned Flipkart and Amazon. What’s your take?

Tata CLiQ was launched in 2016. It was a part of Tatas’ digital strategy. They were trying to increase their presence in new age businesses. Tata CLiQ mostly followed omni-channel (online as well as offline) model as part of which it was trying to integrate its online and offline retailing. Flipkart and Amazon are essentially online marketplaces with large number of sellers competing with each other to sell myriads of products—from salt to sarees, smartphones to sewing machines. There is a healthy competition and it has benefitted consumers.



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Given the scale advantage of both, it is not easy for others to compete with them. So Tata CliQ hasn’t really become a challenge to Amazon and Flipkart in India. This means Super App of Tata is not going to be a great hit automatically. It would require an effective strategy to not

only attract consumers, but also achieve scale.

In management, we talk about ‘network effect’, which means the value of service to a new consumer depends on the number of consumers already using that service. Like WhatsApp is a big force now because a new user can find or interact with all others using WhatsApp but not through other apps even if it is technologically superior. JioMart and Amazon have the advantage of early movers and it would not be easy for Tatas to compete with them. However, Tatas do have presence in a wide range of traditional businesses through which each day they touch millions of consumers regularly. For example, Tatas can easily leverage their presence in retail like Chroma electronic stores, Titan stores, Westside stores and supermarket chain Star Bazaar. So big challenge for them is how to le-



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After all, it is a question of controlling data of more than a billion customers in India. As you know in the last few years customer data availability has grown immensely with three major trends. First is about the growth of organized retail, through which customer data about grocery purchase or other household purchase is now captured on almost real-time basis, which was not possible in traditional retail. Second major trend is the growth of e-commerce.

We have seen e-commerce growing exponentially over the recent years. Even in a small town people are now regularly purchasing online, which means a lot more data is captured about consumers’ transactions. And finally, the growth of mobile e-commerce, which allows marketers unprecedented access to customer data.

A Super App can integrate all three formats and give seamless data about almost all kinds of transactions done by consumers. With such data a marketer can gain a big competitive advantage over others. It will result in good understanding of their customers, ability to predict their purchase behavior, and customize product offerings, marketing messages and actions, and so on.

■ **Why do you think Indian consumers would still need a Super App notwithstanding the fact that there are a number of apps available currently in the market?**

Consumers need a Super App as it can provide them with a one-stop solution for all their needs—be it grocery purchases, booking air/train/bus tickets, information search, entertainment, communication, and even education. It offers convenience, it’s time-saving and is effective too.

■ **Assuming that it moves beyond the proposal stage and sees the light of the day, what would be your expectations from the much-hyped Super App?**

A key expectation is that it must provide consumers a technologically superior product which enhances their overall experience and allows them to perform multiple tasks seamlessly without any barriers. The other is, the company must also handle customer data with full integrity and transparency. There is always a possibility of it being misused or utilized for purposes for which consumers haven’t agreed or given their consent.

The major challenge would be to balance the conflicting goals of pre-

dicting and providing customized offers and messages to consumers, on the one hand, and the need for safeguarding customer data privacy, on the other.

■ **How feasible is the idea of a Super App?**

It is surely a feasible idea. Tatas have resources needed for such a major project. However, the Super App development is not the only thing, eventually achieving success with customers is also important.



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■ **Do you foresee retaliation from rivals, especially RIL, if not the super e-tailer Amazon?**

Like in any competitive market it is expected that RIL will retaliate and respond to Tata’s Super App. RIL has a dominating position currently with its partnership with Facebook which acquired a 9.99% stake in Jio Platforms by investing ₹43,574 cr in April this year. The challenge for Tatas would be to create a unique space and differentiate itself from the offerings of Reliance and Amazon.

■ **Are you aware of any such Super App in vogue anywhere in the world?**

In China, we have several Super Apps. For example WeChat is very popular there. It was originally used for messaging, before it eventually added many other functionalities such as e-commerce, mobile payments, gaming, etc. ■

Disclaimer: The views are personal.

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