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OKADA (MOTORCYCLE) TRANSPORT AS A VERITABLE MEANS OF URBAN TRANSPORTATION IN ILORIN, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The problem of urban transportation remains complex in Nigeria as a result of the low level of public transport services and the ever-increasing demand for transportation. This paper looks at the impacts, operating characteristics, and problems of Okada commercial transport in Ilorin metropolis. The findings showed that the mode has many advantages like; door to door services, quick to access, fuel efficiency benefits and ability to maneuverability. However, Okada commercial services have its susceptible disadvantages of high rate of accidents. However, most riders and passengers are still willing to use the mode. It is therefore advisable that government enforces the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and enforcement of its legislation

Keywords:-Accident, Okada, Personal Protective Equipment, Prerogative Alternative, Urban Transport.

Introduction

The impact of the rapid rate of urbanization on urban amenities in the Third World is disturbing. This is due to enormous pressure on basic infrastructures like; portable water, waste disposal, accommodation and transportation system. All these amenities have been over stretched in many respects, especially transportation system in cities of the world.

The importance of transport in any available environment cannot be underestimated. Man as a social and gregarious animal cannot live in isolation but in association, hence there is the need for interaction, which is enhanced by transport. Button and Hilling (1998) defined transport as a derived demand, which serves to bridge the distance between origin and destination. In order words, transport serves as a connector while distance is a major determinant of the intensity of relationship between various sets of phenomenon distributed in space. It is as a result of the important key roles play by transportation in our

society, that brings about various modes of public transport in cities, some of which are unique. The common modes include; taxicabs, private cars (Kabu-kabu), bus-services has just become an integral part of Nigeria public transport system especially in our cities in recent time (Iyiola and John, 2003).

The problem of urban transport is complex in some Nigeria urban centers as a result of the low level of public transport services as well as the ever-increasing demand by the general public for easy transportation system for their immediate use. Earlier works by Udo (1986); Layode (1998); Ogunsanya and Galadima (1993); John and Oni (2003); among others; were centred on the importance of motorcycle transportation system in the country. However, the main demand for Okada transport as an alternative to other modes has been increasing without much attention. This assertion has provided fertile ground for unconventional modes of transportation system in the urban centers of Nigeria. One of such unconventional mode is the use of 'Okada' motorcycles in our urban centres. This mode emerged recently in some Nigerian urban centers even though, the system had been popular in the rural settings in the 1980s but have continued to gain national acceptance in urban centers

This study is aimed at looking at the importance of 'Okada' commercial motorcycle as a means of transport in Ilorin metropolis. The objectives are to know the operating characteristics and problems.

Conceptualization of Okada Commercial Motorcycle Transport Mode

The conceptual information about transportation in any environment cannot be underestimated. Man as a social and gregarious animal cannot live in isolation but in association, hence there is the need for interaction, which is enhanced by transport. It is as a result of the important key roles play by transportation in our society that brings about various mode of public transport in cities of the world more especially in Nigeria.

Commercial motorcycles are now being used to supplement other vehicles like; bus services and taxicabs in Nigeria. It is one of the main means of transport in some cities in the country, by far, the most common form of informal transport system of our time. The popularity and widespread acceptance of this mode have rapidly risen.

Okadas have adapted easily to the prevailing economic climate in Nigerian when other modes are plagued with problems such as; hypercongestion,

society, that brings about various modes of public transport in cities, some of which are unique. The common modes include; taxicabs, private cars (Kabu-kabu), bus-services has just become an integral part of Nigeria public transport system especially in our cities in recent time (Iyiola and John, 2003).

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Okadas have adapted easily to the prevailing economic climate in Nigerian when other modes are plagued with problems such as; hypercongestion,

high cost of spare parts and the poor state of roads. Okadas have become a ubiquitous feature in Nigerian cities because of their low cost of purchase, easy accessibility to roads and lanes, as well as their fuel efficiency (Wikipedia, 2007).

The service renders by riding of Okada (motorcycle) in urban centres of Nigeria is unique. Because in major cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ilorin, among many others, where traffic congestions (delays) represent an ever present threat to businessmen, government workers, and students, Okadas come to weave through traffic, and literally rescue countless helpless customers from the organized chaos on Nigerian roads.

However, Okadas, like all motorcycles elsewhere, have a far higher rate of crippling and fatal accidents per unit distance than automobiles. In USA, a survey carried out in 2004 revealed that out of every 100,000 cars, 15.0% of the total ended up in fatal crashes. While the rate for motorcycles was 69.3 per 100,000 (US Transport, 2004). Similarly, in Nigeria, a 1998 study at the Obafemi Awolowo Teaching Hospital, Ile-Ife Nigeria, showed that injuries to limbs that occurred was 79.3% of total patients who reported at emergency department of that hospital in 1998. The report also showed that male to female ratio of accident victims were about 8: 1. More importantly, the study also revealed that the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), one of the safety measures was practically nonexistent among most Okada riders in the area (Oluwadiya, et al, 2004).

STUDY AREA

Ilorin, one of the traditional cities in Nigeria, is located on latitude 8°, 30'N and longitude 4° 35'E, is occupied by such ethnic groups such as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Fulani, Nupe and Baruba among others. The traditional city emerged as the Kwara state capital in 1967 and the growth pattern of the city is influenced by factors of site, situation and location (Ayeni, 1976; Ahmed, 1996). A major river Asaba or Asa divided the city into almost two halves, and has a great effects in the direction and pattern in which streets and roads formed connectivity for transport networks. The city also serves as one of the meeting points between the northern and the southern parts of Nigeria as a result of its

geographical proximity (Ahmed, 2005).

Ilorin city had a population of 208,546 in 1963, 343,000 in 1980 about 400,000 in 1990, and 1,548,412 in 1991(NPC, 1992). Most of the population are engaged in diverse occupation. Some are farmers, traders, and private enterprises, while others are civil servants, artisans among others.

The major thoroughfares of Ilorin are; Lagos road, Jebba road, Ajasse/Omupo road, and Kaima road. Literally, these roads divide Ilorin city into four bye-passes. Both old and new buildings-mostly along Offa and Jebba roads-face one another on either side, leaving old and semi-function railroad by side. While major streets, road arteries and lanes aligned east to west, south to north joining one another at a major junction (see fig.1). The general effect has been the growth of the closely settled traditional core, peripheral and transitional zone, all with number of developed and developing streets and lanes that give Ilorin Township an outspread spatial expansion (Ahmed, 1996).

Methodology

This paper covers of Ilorin metropolis; an area of about 468sq.km (Km²). Data used for the study was obtained through questionnaires, which were administered on registered and unregistered motorcycle operators, riders (passengers) and the general public. A total of 400 operators and 200 unregistered operators were interviewed at different locations in Ilorin. In all, a total of 600 Okada operators were questioned (see 1-6). The questionnaires were administered to the 'Okada' operators at eight major points along the major streets and roads in the township (see table 1, appendix). The reason for using different samples is to acquire enough response from both operators and order passengers of Okada in the study area. Therefore, a set of 200 questionnaires was distributed to the general public in order to solicit for additional information(see table 8). In general, 800 questionnaires were administered and analyzed in this work. A random sampling method was adopted for selection of both the location and respondents.

Table1: Okada (Motorcycles) Zones/Areas of operation and the number of Operators administered with questionnaires.

S/no.	Zone/Name	Location/Area	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Standard	University Of Ilorin Mini-Campus gates	30	7.5
2.	National	Freely found around Ilorin streets/roads (i.e. Geri Alimi roundabout area)	60	15.0
3.	Onikanga	Govt. Reservation Area/Govt. house	50	12.5
4.	Oko-Erin	Osere/Saw-mill by Taiwo road junction	30	7.5
5.	Emirate	Oja-Oba-Ilorin by Police 'B' Division	60	15.5
6.	Afenifere	Freely found around Okelele, Gambari, Pakata, and Oloje areas.	60	15.5
7.	Okada Riders	Freely located around Ilorin City (i.e. Ilorin Grammar Sch by Deeper Life road)	70	17.5
8.	Araokanmi (Success)	Freely Located around Ilorin city (i.e. Offa road junction).	40	10.0
Total			400	100.00

Source: Author's Fieldwork March 2007.

Discussions

The study was carried out on Saturdays and Mondays to obtain needed information from a good number of them who operate full-time basis and ply roads from morning till nighttime. Also, from those who ply roads after end of working hours from offices, on weekends or on public holidays (as part time riders). Mondays are best days where both public workers and private individuals would be easily found on many streets to attend to questionnaires accordingly.

Services Rendering by Okada Operators in Ilorin Metropolis

The use of Okada (motorcycles) for commercial transport services like taxicabs is strictly an all male affairs in Ilorin metropolis. All Okada operators that were interviewed were largely males and their ages are between 21 and 40 years. Table 2 shows age range of respondents between 31 and 36 years. This is an indication that older people are among the Okada operators and no females' operators in Ilorin metropolis when this research was conducted

Table 2: The breakdown of Age of Okada (Motorcycle) Operators in Ilorin Metropolis

	Age of Operators (Years)							
	18-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	< 50
Number. Of Respondents	32	44	90	127	51	28	17	11
Percentage (%)	8.0	11.00	22.5	31.75	12.75	7.00	4.25	2.75

Source: Field Survey, March 2007.

The use of Okada (motorcycle) for public transport services has had a phenomenal growth in the recent time, more especially in the last two years in Ilorin Metropolis. When the respondents (operators) in around Ilorin were asked how long they have been in the Okada business, most of them mentioned between six months to two years. The breakdown of the responses is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of Years in Operation of Okada Transport Services in Ilorin Metropolis

	Years of Operation						
	6 months	1	2	3	4	5	< 50
Number of Respondents	41	151	95	51	28	22	12
Percentage (%)	10.25	37.75	23.75	12.75	7.00	5.5	3.00

Source: Field Survey, March 2007.

The pattern of ownership of Okada (motorcycles) plying some streets of Ilorin metropolis on commercial basis looks so interesting. This pattern in common is divided into four. Most Okada (motorcycles) are owned by the riders. Others are loaned out for a financial monthly return, or belonging to someone else who receives daily returns from the operators. The last pattern is the ones government gives out to serve as aids to civil servants and some of them after closing from office, turn into Okada (motorcycles) riders on commercial transport service. They do this in order to enhance their monthly wages. Table 4 shows this ownership distribution of the pattern.

Table 4: Ownership Pattern of Okada (Motorcycle) used for Repayment Transport Services

	Own by Operators	Loaned to Operators by Persons	Loaned Thru Gov. Alleviation Programme	Belonging to someone else to Whom financial Returns are Paid On Daily Basis
Number of Respondents	72	158	110	60
Percentage (%)	18.00	39.5	27.5	15.00

Source: Field Survey, March 2007.

One other interesting observation in this study is that most Okada riders, who are not civil servants, have other sources of livelihood apart from riding commercial bikes, which they run. In other words, the proceeds they obtain from motorcycles business only supplement their earnings from their basic trades. Some of them are motor mechanics, bricklayers, night guards, carpenters, fresh university graduates or other unemployed among many others. Therefore, most categories of these riders are found doing the business of Okada (motorcycle) for commercial services as Full-timers, Part-Timers or just on the streets when they are in need of money. This category could be regarded as 'Free Riders'. The breakdown of their responses to the questionnaires administered to them is found in Table 5.

Table 5: Mode Okada (Motorcycle) Operation to the Riders.

	Full-Time Operation	Part-Time Operation	Hobby/ Leisure Pursuit
Number of Respondents	104	70	26
Percentage (%)	52.0	35.0	13.0

Source: Field Survey, March 2007.

It is also significant to note that the Okada business is an important source of employment to youths in Ilorin metropolis. Some areas in the city were selected and an additional 200 questionnaires (each) were administered to both operators and passengers (males and females). When they were asked if Okada

business should be cancelled from the city and restrained to Peri-urban or rural areas due to some reasons such as; incessant accidents, reckless riding and over speeding, noise pollution and other traffic problems. Their responses were diverse. Table 6 reflects the various opinions of respondents Okada operators and passengers in Ilorin metropolis.

Table 6: Okada operators that have involved in accident (s) and willing or not willing to engage in the business again.

Respondents	Number that Have had Accidents	Nature of Accident			
		Fatal	Not Fatal	Willing to Back at job	Not willing to back at job
Passengers	200	75 (37.5)	125 (62.5)	110 (55)	90 (45)
		80 (40)	120 (60)	140 (70)	60 (30)
Total	400	155 (77.5)	245 (122.5)	250 (125)	150 (75)

Source: Field Survey, March 2007. *Figures in Parentheses are in Percentages

From the survey of Okada (Motorcycle) operators in Ilorin metropolis, the normal charges for the trip fare of less than a kilometer is #20 and the price increases with distance. Any distance over two (2) Kilometers is described as 'Special Drop' and the fare is levied accordingly. But in an occasion when there is scarcity of fuel in the township, the price may be increased by 50% to 150% depending on the level of scarcity. Table 7 shows the number of passengers that operators of Okada carry daily and the estimated amount of money they realize daily.

Table 7: Estimated Number of Passengers carried by Okada (Operators) and Amount of money Realised per day in some zones of Operation.

	Zones	Number of Okada (Operators) in each Unit (Zone)	Estimated Number of Daily per Operator	Estimated Amount of Money realized per Operator daily
1.	Standard	30	90	#1200 - #2000
2.	National	60	100	#1700 - #2200
3.	Onikanga	50	150	#1400 - #2500
4.	Okoko-Erin	30	80	#1200 - #2200
5.	Emirate *(ROAD)	60	180	#1300 - #2000
6.	Afenifere	60	170	#1000 - #2000
7.	General Okada Riders	70	95	#1500 - #2000
8.	Araokanmi (Success)	40	120	#1400 - #2000
Total		400	985	-

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2007

The use of Okada (motorcycle) mode of transportation is becoming very popular in many cities of Nigeria. The reasons for this could not be far fetched. Okada has ability to move around quickly, during traffic hold-ups or at narrow streets or lanes. It also provides door-to-door services, as well as it saves times and efforts of the passengers who may be in need. Table 8 shows that most users of this mode of transport prefer it because it is quick to access and can penetrate all streets, roads and lanes within Ilorin environs where other vehicles would be unable to access.

Table 8 indicates some of the reasons why riders patronize Okada transport services in Ilorin metropolis.

No of Respondents	Reasons					
	Quicker Service	Ply all users routes	Door-to-door Services	Availability	Cheapness	Painstaking
	39	41	44	28	22	26
Percentage (%)	19.5	20.5	22	14	11	13

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2007

Problems Associated with Okada Commercial Transport

Generally, wherever Okada (motorcycle) is being used for commercial transportation services all over Nigeria, a number of problems always arise. In Ilorin, when the operators of Okada were asked to identify the problems confronting the effectiveness of their operation, majority of them reported that high cost of spare parts for maintenance of their bikes is the major bane. This was amazing because the survey was conducted, when a biting fuel shortage was affecting the country as a whole, and one expects the Okada operators to emphasize the lack of fuel as their most important problem among many others (see table 9).

Table 9. Problems Confronting Okada (Motorcycle) Operators in Ilorin Metropolis

Problem	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Fuel Scarcity	68	17.00
Poor Road Network	23	5.75
High Cost of Spare parts	116	29.00
Harassment by Law enforcement Agents	49	12.25
Harassment by other Road users (Cars, Taxis and Trucks etc.)	44	11.00
Harassment by Local Government Officials	40	10.00
Unfriendly Weather	29	7.25
Others.	31	7.75
Total	400	100.00

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2007.

As much can be attributed in favour of using Okada (motorcycle) to provide fare paying transportation services in Nigeria, the system however, is without blemish. Some of the operators just take to the roads/streets without adequate knowledge of obeying traffic rules or regulations that are guiding all vehicular operations. While some are very reckless others are careless for other road users in their operation in urban centers. They overtake other vehicles from both directions or they may carry additional passengers instead of a single one as allowed by law.

Apart from the above, many Okada operators evade the authority because of Learners' Permit and have less knowledge that guides the riding with proper training. This results into incessant accidents and a number of lives lost, or some if lucky, remain in hospital (private, government or native). In order to curb this excessiveness and recklessness of Okada riders in Ilorin metropolis, the Kwara State Government, through the State House of Assembly in year 2005, promulgated an Act that all that operates Okada along with the passengers must wear protective helmets in the state. But this new law was politicized and met resistance from both Okada operators and general public.

By and large, it is also heartening to note that public attitudes towards the use of Okada (motorcycles) for public transport business are beginning to change. About ten (10) years ago, to ride on bikes was looked down upon as

derogatory and as such meant for the poor persons only. Egbu (1994) confirmed this assertion when he said, that the significant role in urban public transport, which has been assumed by the motorcycle operators has apparently helped to change this attitude.

The employment opportunities which Okada operation provides have made the use of motorcycle riding an accepted form of urban transport. Even though Okada business was disengaged from Abuja city into the Peri-Urban in October 2006. This was without its socio-economic impacts on the general masses. In this connection however, in one of the Federal Government schemes-the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Kwara State Poverty Alleviation Programme, motorcycles were given to eligible applicants for transport services in both urban and rural areas.

Causes and Consequences of Okada Accidents in Nigerian Cities.

Given the common incidence and serious consequences of motorcycles accidents in the study area, there has been surprisingly little contribution to the study of their causes and effects most especially in Nigeria. However, the followings are the root causes of accidents in the cities of Nigeria where Okada commercial motorcycle services are in operation: -

- Riders do not pay attention to road signs and other motorists.
- Most rider are unlicensed and untrained, most of them make their commercial debut after a few hours of training sessions.
- Underage Okada riders are not a rarity on Nigeria roads.
- Drunk or drugged riders are not uncommon.
- Shared-riders involving two or more passengers, mostly among the uniformed Police officers are rampant.
- The poor state of most urban roads in Nigeria, which are typically riddled with potholes, also contributes to the problems highlighted.
- Graft and corruption among the road safety officials, and the Nigeria Police, both who are easily induced into condoning traffic misdemeanors when given bribes are also not uncommon.

It is no gainsay that, the emergence of 'Okada' motorcycle

transportation services in Ilorin metropolis serve as a source of employment to thousand of youths, retrenched workers and retired civil servants, to have something to fallback to and this also to sustain their livelihood. This mode of commercial transportation in the city is a succor to public easiness and relief to transport problems in the city. This aside, the 'Okada' services in Ilorin have assisted in no small measure in reducing cost of transportation from one part of the city to the other. More especially, where taxis-cabs or buses services could not reach or ply due to bad roads or unfriendly terrain. Certainly, the ability of this mode of transport (Okada) provides door-to-door services and plies both narrow and congested routes, this also gives a credence to the services render by this mode of transportation in Ilorin city.

However, apart from socio-economic increases resulting from the services render by this mode, Okada (motorcycle) transportation system has a lot of shortcomings. There are many unaccounted records of Okada (motor cycle) accidents victims that involved the riders and the passengers alike, as well as other unethical reveals about the behaviours of some operators of this mode of transport in Ilorin. But of all the consequences, both operators and passengers are willing to persevere.

Conclusion

As there is an increasing demand for urban transport development in the country, motorcycle operators, popularly known as 'Okada' have tremendously increased in their operation in recent times to meet the need of general masses. The operators in no doubt provide a very useful service that is likely to expand if identified problems that militate against its operations are tackled. Without this, the service provided by this means would be seen as facilitator to many woes of both the riders (operators) and passengers (the general public). It would be erroneous not to say that, the operation of Okada in Ilorin is totally free of problems, which include; reckless driving, disobeying traffic rules and regulations and, almost daily accidents. These are with disastrous consequences on both victims (operators and passengers). Government must make sure that laws promulgated on the use of protective helmet wearing stay and operate. This would be a good step to reduce the rate of fatal accidents incurred on riders of Okada in urban Ilorin metropolis. The operators of Okada must be educated through their associations on safety measures that are needed to protect themselves and their passengers. Such measures include; strict compliance to traffic rules and regulations on the roads, reduction in speed on

the roads, carrying only one passenger at a time among many others. These if put into use and allowed to remain would definitely stand out to increase the success that has been achieved and enhance the effectiveness and quality of their operations.

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