



The Role of Okada as a Means of Public Transport in Zaria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of okada as a means of public transport in Zaria. Data sets were collected from 200 okada operators and 200 passengers randomly selected across ten purposively selected routes within the metropolis. The data sets were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The results show that majority of the operators are youths aged between 21-40 years, most of whom are secondary school leavers earning well above the yet-to-be-enjoyed minimum wage of #18,000 for Federal and State Civil Servants in Nigeria. The study also reveals the dominance of females over males in the patronage of okada. Most of the passengers are young school goers who view okada as unsafe, yet patronize it because of its flexibility. It was concluded that the decline in transport infrastructure and the near-absence of taxi and bus service, coupled with congestion and poorly maintained roads has made the okada a ubiquitous feature of Nigerian cities. It was also suggested that safety education for okada operators will go a long way in reducing the carnage in our cities.

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INTRODUCTION

Motorcycles are one of the most affordable forms of motorized transport in many parts of the world and for most of the world's population; they are also the most common type of motor vehicle (Nakata, 2008; McCracken, 2008 and Barrionuevo, 2008). There are around 200 million motorcycles in use worldwide (Adachi, 2006), or about 33 motor cycles per 1000 people. Most of the motorcycles (58%) are in developing countries.

In numerous cultures, motorcycles are the primary means of motorized transport. In Taiwan for example, the number of automobiles per ten thousand population is around 2,500 and the number of motorcycles is about 5,000 (Chung Li, 2006). In places such as Vietnam, motorized traffic consists of mostly motorbikes due to a lack of public transport and low income levels that put automobiles out of reach for many. The four largest motorcycle markets in the

world are all in Asia: China, Indian, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Nakata, 2008).

The motorcycle is also popular in Brazil's frontier towns (Barrionuevo, 2008).

Recent years have seen an increase in the population of motorcycles elsewhere in the USA, registrations increased by 51% between 2000 and 2005. This is mainly attributed to increasing fuel prices and urban congestion (IIHS, 2007, PRNewswire, 2008).

Commercial motorcyclists are known by various names in different parts of the country which include, express, achaba, going and okada among others. The name Okada was borrowed from Okada air, a now defunct local airline in Nigeria which was not popular for its comfort, but remained the most used local airline in the country (Okia, 2015; Ajaja, 2017; Okonofua, 2020). The name was used as a nick name for the motorcycle transporters, because they could maneuver the heavy traffic of Lagos



and take you to your destination in time, just as okada Airline did. Okada began to gain popularity in the late 80s when, because of economic difficulties in the last years of the first decade of the Nigerian economic crunch, some jobless youths began to use this age old transport system for commercial purposes, to transport some stranded but willing passengers through the narrow or bad roads to the far inaccessible parts of the cities or villages. It is one of the chief modes of transport in Nigeria and, by far, the most common form of informal transport system in the country (Akut, 2011). It is easily affordable for the common man and very flexible. Above all Okada is readily available; one can hardly wait too long for an Okada to come around, even in the remotest villages they appear at given intervals. There is no road too narrow or a place too remote for okada. It became for the common man a welcome alternative to the sometimes short but often long walk to-and-fro home after a day's job. For these reasons okada became quickly beloved and did not take long to convince its critics and soon the fears or resentment of the early inception were dissolved into calculable risks that accompany all transportation.

Okada started in Zaria in the early 1980s as a means of connecting the military depot in the town to Sabon- Gari market, it then spread rapidly to other parts of the town such as Tudun – wada, Zaria city, Wusasa, Samaru etc. the operation at inception was carried out by soldiers and retrenched civil servants.

The popularity and widespread acceptance of okada has rapidly risen in recent years. It has become a regular means of transportation for a wide spectrum of the society. Unfortunately, the rise of high risk behavior and

accidents on Nigeria roads: as a result, they have come under heavy flak culminating in legislations restricting or prohibiting their operations in some Nigerian cities. This study is aimed at assessing the role of the Okada as a means of public transport in Zaria. The study has equally set the following objectives:

1. To identify the category of people engaged in okada business
2. To determine the income generated by the okada operators
3. To examine the socio-economic structure of passengers as well as frequency of patronage
4. To identify the problems being faced by the okada operators as well as their perception of safety measures.

METHODOLOGY

The population studied comprised of 200 okada operators and 200 passengers spread across Zaria metropolis. Ten major routes were purposively selected based on traffic and 20 operators and 20 passengers were randomly selected from each route for questionnaire administration. The selected routes are:

- i. Sabon-Gari/PZ
- ii. Sabon-Gari/Ungwar Godo
- iii. Agoro/Gaskiya
- iv. Aviation/Bassawa
- v. A.B.U. Campus service
- vi. Kofar Doka/Zaria city
- vii. Danmagaji/Wusasa
- viii. Agoro/Kongo
- ix. PZ/Tudun Wada
- x. Sabon-Gari/Chikaji

The descriptive statistical tools employed in analyzing data include Frequency and percentage tables.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Category of people engaged in okada operation.

Table 1: Age structure of Okada operators.

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
15 – 20	20	10
21 – 30	70	35
31 – 40	76	38
41 and above	34	17
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

From table 1, majority (76%) of the respondents fall within the 31 – 40 years age bracket. This constitutes the most productive age of any population,

and they are engaged in commercial motorcycling either as full time or part – time operators. Very few teenagers (10%) and middle aged men are involved (19%)

Table 2: Educational Qualification of Operators

<i>Certificate</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Primary	30	15
Secondary	124	62
Tertiary	24	12
Others	22	11
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

Senior secondary school certificate holders dominate the okada business according to the table above (62%). Most of these young school leavers either could not mobilize enough funds to further their education or were unable to secure the required educational qualification for further studies and have to resort to okada business for

sustenance. Apart from this set of operators, there are primary school leavers, tertiary institutions' graduates (12%) amongst whom are University, Polytechnic and College of Education graduates, Quranic School and non-formal school leavers make up the last group of operators (11%).

Table 3: Nature of Operation

<i>Nature of Operation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Full time	136	68
Part time	64	32
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

Table 3 shows that an overwhelming number of operators (68%) are into the business on full time basis, some of them for about 16 hours per day x7x 365. This is not surprising since

majority of them are young, energetic and adventurous. The remainder (32%) is either civil servants or retired civil servants who are into the business to augment their salary or pension.



Table 4: Type of Motorcycle

Type	Frequency	Percentage %
Honda	12	6
Cheng Cheng	40	20
Suzuki	22	11
Jingcheng	126	63
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

Jincheng unarguably is the most popular motorcycle among okada riders in Zaria (63%). Another Chinese product (Cheng cheng) is second in popularity (20%) while the Japanese duo of Suzuki

and Honda follow in that order with 11% and 6% respectively. This may not be unconnected with the advance fuel economy of the Chinese product.

Table 5: Ownership of the motorcycle

Ownership	Frequency	Percentage %
Self	134	67
Hired	66	33
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

According to the table, 67% of the operators own the motor bikes they operate while the remainder 33% hire the

bikes and are obliged to remit between N700- N1, 200 daily, depending on the newness/soundness of the bike.

Table 6: Riding experience

No of years	Frequency	Percentage %
1 year	32	16
2 – 3 years	82	41
4 -5 years	60	30
5 years and above	26	13
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

It could be seen from the above table that majority (41%) of the okada riders in Zaria are relatively new in the business since they started about 3-5

years ago, thereby lacking in experience since it goes with years of service. However, there is a sizeable number (30%) with over 5 years of experience

Table 7: Operators' Daily income

Amount	Frequency	Percentage %
N1,000	38	19
N1,500	100	50
N2,000	32	16
N2,500	20	10
N3,000 and above	10	5
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018



More than half of the okada operators (50%) earn about N1, 500 (one thousand five hundred naira) daily, translating into N10, 500 (ten thousand five hundred naira weekly amounting to N42, 000 (forty two thousand naira) monthly. This is well above the yet – to – be implemented N18, 000 minimum wage

for both Federal and State Civil Servants in Nigeria. In fact, even the least earner of N1, 000 daily still earns higher than the least paid civil servant. Interestingly, some okada, riders earn up to N3, 000 daily during such festive periods as Sallah or Christmas and during periods of fuel scarcity or civil unrest.

Table 8: Problems faced by Okada operators

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Bad roads	96	48
Police harassment	22	11
Fuel scarcity	48	24
Bad water	34	17
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

Some of the problems identified by okada operators include bad roads, which of course is the main problem (48%) followed by fuel scarcity, bad weather and police harassment in that order. Bad roads are a common feature of

Nigerian cities while fuel scarcity is a recurrent decimal in the Nigerian economy. The harmattan and rainy seasons poses very serious problems for okada operators.

Table 9: Passengers' sex and age

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>	<i>Age (yrs)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Male	72	36	15 – 20	60	30
Female	128	64	21 – 30	100	50
Total	200	100	31 – 40	24	12
			41 and above	16	8
Total				200	100

Source: field survey 2018

Table 9 reveals that most of the passengers (64%) are females while 36% are males. It also shows that more than

half of the patronage is done by youths aged 21 – 30. This is the post-Secondary School age as shown in table 10

Table 10: Passengers' educational attainment

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Primary/Nursery	28	14
Secondary	24	12
Tertiary	124	62
Others	24	12
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018



Majority of the passengers (62%) have either attended or are currently attending any of the Post-Secondary institutions in Zaria - Ahmadu Bello University, Federal College of Education, Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic or other diploma or degree awarding institutions.

There are also primary and secondary school students. Others is made up of those with masters or doctorate degrees and this category of passengers patronize okada to their places of work (see table 10).

Table 11: Places Passengers go on okada

<i>Option</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Work	40	20
Market	60	30
School	80	40
Business	20	10
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

The high concentration of schools in Zaria is being reflected in this study as majority of the passengers (40%) alluded to the fact that they ride okada

daily to school while others ride it to work, market or attend to other businesses.

Table 12: Passengers' opinion about okada safety

<i>Option</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Unsafe	84	42
Safe	44	22
Very safe	72	36
Total	200	100

Source: field survey 2018

While passengers' opinion about okada safety as a means of transportation varies, majority of them (42%) stated that it is unsafe, while 22% and 36% feel it is safe and very safe respectively. Despite its poor safety rating, most passengers still prefer it because of its flexibility and ability to evade traffic congestion thereby taking the passenger to his/her destination in good time.

CONCLUSION

While population has continued to increase and urban migration increases, means of transport has continued to decline. This decline in transport infrastructure and the near-absence of taxi and bus service, coupled with congestion and poorly maintained roads has made the okada a ubiquitous

feature of Nigerian cities. The okada is able to navigate and travel roads where no car has gone before- thus making it more popular in recent years. The rise of okada has been linked to an increase in the crime rates in cities throughout Nigeria, particularly in the city centers and urban slums. These criminal activities range from snatching of personal effects (e.g. mobile phones, purses, bags) to abduction, grand larceny and (political) killings, as a result, they have come under heavy flak culminating in legislations restricting or prohibiting their operations in some Nigerian cities.

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