

The Influence of Motorcycles/*Boda Boda* on Community Development in Rural Kenya: a study of the Challenges Facing Motor Cycle Operators in Meru South Sub-County

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Abstract

This research aimed at evaluating the impact and the challenges of the boda boda operations on the rural society in Kenya with a focus on Meru South Sub-County. The study covered 100 boda boda operators/riders and 7 key informants. The research applied probabilistic sampling methods namely: simple random and cluster sampling to determine the sample size. The study established that only 49% of the boda boda operators possessed driving licences. The research established various challenges that affected boda boda operations as well as the risks that were attributed to emergence of boda boda in the rural areas. The challenges and risks that faced the boda boda operators included harassment by the police, poor health conditions, accidents and breakdown of the motorcycles, uncooperative or difficult customers, sexual abuse and high levels of school dropouts. The study makes recommendations of how motorcycles can become more effective in opening up the rural areas in order to enhance community development in rural Kenya.

Keywords: Boda Boda/motorcycle, rural areas, boda boda risks, Structural Functionalism, Social Exchange, Accidents, Customers, Community development.

Introduction

Globally increase in the number of motorcycles has raised per capita income in many developing countries (World Bank, 2006). In countries like Malawi motorcycles are used to transport patients to hospitals in areas that are not reachable by vehicular means of transport. Of late boda boda business has taken root in Kenya in a very notable and significant manner. This is because motorcycles have become the affordable means of transport and also by their nature of being able to navigate where cars cannot be able. Boda boda can get to the villages where the road network is not conducive for cars (Kumar, 2011). It is out of their availability and convenience that they are used in some places to take children to school as well as patients to hospitals and dispensaries. On the other hand boda bodas are also dangerous especially where riders do not have the required qualifications and experience on the roads as it is the case with the public service vehicles. Motorcycle business has come as rescue to the Kenyan youths most of whom are not employed and youths between 50-200 Kenyan Shillings to get trained in riding motorcycle (Nyachio, 2015, Nyachio, 2002). This is a factor that can be attributed to the rise in the number of accidents and fatalities involving use of motorcycles. Motorcycles have increased the number of accidents according to National Transport and Safety Authority 2016 accident report. In comparison, the year 2014 recorded 320 compared to 399 in 2016 while pillion passengers were 159 in 2015 unlike 160 in the year 2016 (KNBS, 2016). Motorcycles pose interesting challenges in developing countries that are not faced by the rest of world (Perco, 2008). The increase in the usage of motorcycle has been attributed to the recent increase in petroleum prices as well as their maneuverability on the streets (Perco, 2008). Motorcycles are accessible and cheap based on the reason that people get loans advance from the banks or even shylocks. Rural people are able to buy them and without training they get into business to ensure that they are able to repay back the loans. In some instances, those with title deeds use land as collateral while others sell their ancestral land to buy boda boda.

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Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research were:

- i.To find out the challenges faced by boda boda operators.
- ii.To establish the risks posed by the boda boda operations/activities in the rural areas

Literature Review and Theoretical Conceptions

Rapid growth and use of motorcycle has taken place in different countries globally. This has been attributed to increase of global motorization of low and medium income in these countries as well as disorganized transport system especially in least and developing countries (Kumar and Barret, 2008). Raising levels of unemployment faced by these countries have pushed youth towards this ready form of employment. Youths in these countries focus on the motorcycle taxi business as ready form of employment (Peden et al, 2004).

Rural development in sub Saharan Africa suffers the set back of poor development as a result poor accessibility of the rural areas due to poor roads. The study indicated that for the rural areas to grow there must be commensurate interlinking of these areas with the urban areas. The survey that was carried out in Nangara village of Uganda showed that people are sensitive to the pricing and hence many rural people will prefer motorcycles due to lower fares as compared to car taxis (Gian, 2014).

In Kenya boda boda business has significantly yielded remarkable positive results to people who are involved in the business the youth groups who make savings and practice discipline on the savings that they make. Youth unemployment is a global challenge and Kenya is not an exception. It is estimated that 64% of unemployed persons globally are youth. According to 2010 economic survey there was an increase of 32.8 % in transition from the previous year of 2009 in terms of the registered vehicles. This is attributed to the increase in the number of the auto cycles which were registered in Kenya which accounted to 56.3%. According to (Nyachio, 2002) majority of the Kenyan youth in the boda boda have no other form of employment.

In terms of training, many of the riders do not have formal training. Big percentages of the riders acquire riding skills through fellow riders at a fee of between 50 and 200 shillings. A study that was conducted in Kisumu found that only 39% of the riders had formal training from the driving schools. Similarly, boda boda business is seen as means of employment that is readily available and as such, many young people, especially boys, view boda boda business as a bridge to a better future after completing primary or secondary school (Nyachio, 2015)

Table 1.Motor Cycle Accident Reports, 2014– 2015 in Kenya

| Victim type | 2015 | 2014 | %variance |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Pedestrians | 1344 | 1340 | 0.299 |
| Drivers | 339 | 268 | 26.49 |
| Passengers | 668 | 642 | 4.05 |
| Motorcycle fatalities | 637 | 553 | 15.19 |
| Pedal cyclists | 69 | 104 | -33.7 |
| Total | 3057 | 2907 | 5.2 |

Source: KNBS Economic Report, 2016

Table 1 show that the number of motorcycle fatalities in Kenya increased from 553 in the year 2014 to 637 in the year 2015. This is attributed to the increase in the number of motorcycles on the Kenyan roads registered between the year 2014 and 2015. As the number of the motorcycles on the roads increased the violation of the traffic rules increased. The report indicates that there was a variance increase in the number of fatalities to the tune of 15.19%. A study that was conducted in Muranga revealed that 65.4% of the riders did not understand traffic rules. In addition, the study found out that their recall of the traffic rules was very low (Macharia, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The study was guided by two sociological theories namely: Structural-functionalism and Social Exchange Theories.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism views society as a complex whole comprising of parts that complement one another to enhance solidarity and cohesion of the entire system. It therefore sees society as providing to the social system of interconnected parts that work together to achieve state of the equilibrium and balance of the whole (Parsons, 1951). This therefore implies that for instance, family has various roles that end up contributing to the wellbeing of the rest of the society. In the case of the motorcycle riders majority of them whom are male are the husbands and fathers within their social set up in the family and thus, they have the role of providing for their families. This means that the boda boda operators will always strive to ensure that they are capable to generate enough income to cater for their family needs. Society is regarded as functional if the rest of its parts are complementing one another but at the same time it will be seen to be dysfunctional if any of its part is working in disregard of the other parts (Parsons, 1951). For instance, when the boda boda riders disregard traffic rules they will be seen as dysfunctional from that perspective simply because they will not be working in cohesion with other parts of the society or rather they do not ensure stability of the society.

Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory explains the human relationship as a beneficial relationship that develops as a result of internalized cost benefit analysis by each individual in the engagement (Homans, 1961). It is argued that behavior is an internal process which is self-directed, and thus, not influenced by the environment. Thus, boda boda riders and their clients evaluate the cost-benefits of their engagement for the business to thrive. The benefits that accrue as a result of the boda boda engagement will attract more clients but on the other side if the costs outweigh the benefits then boda boda engagement will diminish. Risks associated with boda boda business such as accidents, rise in school dropout cases, engagement in criminal activities by the riders is likely to affect its operations negatively. Aspects such as reliability, efficiency, and speed among others will attract more people to prefer this mode of transport against others.

Research Methodology

Site Description

Meru South Sub County is one of the three Sub Counties of Tharaka Nithi County. Other Sub Counties are Tharaka North and Tharaka South and Maara. Meru South consists of five divisions namely; Magumoni, Igambangombe, Chuka, Mwonge and Mariani Division. The Sub County has a Population of 128,107 people according to KNBS, 2009 census and it houses the largest town in the County which is Chuka town as its administrative headquarters. Majority of the population segment in this Sub-County are small scale farmers who mostly use boda bodas to access their farms and also to take their farm produce to the markets.

Sample Size and Research Instruments

The sample size consisted of 100 boda boda riders who were picked using cluster sampling and random sampling techniques. In addition 7 key informants were interviewed. The boda bada riders were the key respondents and they were interviewed using an interview schedule. The key informants were interviewed using a key informant guide.

Sampling Design

Chuka Division was purposefully selected because it is the economic hub and the fact that it is the agricultural nerve centre of the entire Meru South Sub-County. This is so because there are many boda boda operators who ply many routes to transport farmers, business people and workers to various parts of the sub-county. The sample size was selected from the various wards within Chuka division. The division has fifteen wards. To get the required sample size the researcher used cluster sampling and simple random sampling techniques.

Table.2. Selected Riders in their Proportionality

| Cluster | Population | Proportionate Sample |
|----------------|------------|----------------------|
| Kiereni | 32 | 12 |
| Ndagani/Jatomy | 45 | 17 |
| Weru | 80 | 30 |
| Kiangondu | 50 | 19 |
| Kathathani | 30 | 11 |
| Chera go down | 30 | 11 |
| Total | 267 | 100 |

Methods of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed appropriately. The primary data was collected by use of questionnaires to interview motorcyclists, and an interview schedule/guide was used to interview the key informants. The questionnaire had both open ended and close ended questions.

Findings of the Study

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows: 71% were in the age of 21-35 years and all of them were male. In terms of marital status, the study found that 65% of the respondents were married while 34% of the respondents were single. The study findings established that 58% of the respondents were people with primary school education, 38% of the respondents were people with secondary school education while only 4 percent of the riders possessed post-secondary school qualifications

Challenges Faced by Boda Boda Operators

This study sought to investigate the challenges that were faced by boda boda operators in their day to day operations. Various questions were posed to the respondents for the purposes of trying to understand challenges experienced by the riders. The study posed the question on whether riders possessed valid driver's licence. The study found that only 25% possessed valid motorcycle licence endorsed as class F and G respectively. This finding concurs with a study by Kumar (2011) who observed that 50% of motorcycle riders in Lagos did not own driving licence while in Douala the possession of driving licence was only 18%. Similarly this research established that 24% have driving licence but which were not valid because they were not endorsed for the respective motorcycle class. The study established that local leadership collaborate with the County Governments and the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NGCDF) with the view of assisting youths in these groups to obtain driving licence. One of the respondents informed us that: *"We were trained at Kibugua ground for one day and filled forms to get licence. Even though we found the training not to be adequate enough to equip us with the required basic knowledge we had no other option since someone was organizing issuance of licence for free"*

Table 3. Riders Possession of Valid Driving Licence.

N=100

| Possession of driving licence | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Valid driving licence | 24 | 24.0 |
| Other endorsement | 25 | 25.0 |
| No licence at all | 51 | 51.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Source: Fieldwork

Police Harassment of the Boda Boda Cyclists

The study found that boda boda operators encountered police harassment where the law enforcers demanded bribe ranging from Kshs.50 to 5000. Whenever the operators passed through police roadblocks/check points they are required to part with Kshs.50. This allowed them to operate on the road for that specific day and as a result they had to carry extra passengers to get extra money to cater for the offered bribe. But during traffic police operations if one was arrested he parted with as much as Kshs.5, 000.

One of the Respondents informed the researchers that: *"I had parked my boda boda outside Kimwa Hotel, when I came back I found traffic police officers had towed it to the police station. I was required to part with Kshs5, 000 bribe for them to release it. To us it is normal but one has to look for other means of surviving. I am forced to carry more passengers than required to assist me to pay bribes when am caught by police and also to remain with my share"*

Poor Health Conditions.

Many roads were found to be dusty and this dust made riders and their pillion passengers to suffer from dust related diseases such as running nose and coughing. Cases reported to Chuka County Referral hospital as reported by one of the key informant included pneumonia, chest pain cold and severe headaches among the riders who went to that hospital. He further stated as follows:

"Majority of the cases in regard to chest pain and pneumonia relate to boda boda riding. Many of the patients who visit us in this hospital are boda boda riders. They experience running nose and coughing as a result of dusty roads they operate from."

Accidents and Breakdown of Motorcycles

In addition, the riders informed the researcher that they experienced frequent motorcycle breakdown as a result of poor road network. In other instances, when it rained the number of accidents increased due to slippery roads. They also claimed that their businesses were affected by muddy roads during rainy season. This impacted negatively on their day to day earnings. One of the respondents informed this study that: *"Our motorcycles often breakdown due to bad roads. Feeder roads are rarely maintained making us to spend more on our motorcycles maintenance. With good roads this can be a very good business since expenses will be minimized"*

Another respondent added that: *"When it rains many customers avoid our services. This is because they fear to be involved in accidents due to slippery roads in this area. This affects our economic wellbeing"*.

Uncooperative Customers

The study sought to understand various difficulties that the riders experienced from their customers. It was established that various categories of the customers posed various difficulties to the riders. Some of the female customers did not want to pay by cash but instead they were ready to offer sex. This mostly applied to young women and girls. Sometimes husbands accused riders of being wife snatchers as one respondent put it that: *"I carried someone's wife from town to her home, unsuspecting, the husband had been informed that she was in a lodging with another man, thus, he thought that I was the one. I was saved by my swift turn and speeding away from the machete brandishing husband. Am lucky to be alive"*.

It was also reported that some female customers who refused to wear helmet for the reason that it would destroy their hair style. They instead demanded to be given a leso to cover their hair in disregard of their safety. One of the respondents stated that: *"When you give out a helmet to a female customer they complain that we want to destroy their hair style. I had an instance where a female customer refused to wear a helmet but unfortunately we were involved in a slight accident and she sustained slight head injuries"*. *"Mostly ladies here respect their hair style and cleanliness of their hair in the place of safety. A lady customer will ask for a leso in place of helmet and a reflector to secure their hair style and also to prevent it from becoming dirty"*

On the other hand, some drunk male clients were reported to be troublesome especially at night. Sometimes they fell out on the way inflicting some injuries on their bodies. Some male clients turned to be violent especially when they reached their homes at night and they refused to pay. One of the respondents cited that: *"I carried a passenger who I was taking home only to realize that he had fallen out of the boda boda in the middle of the road. I realized this when I got to his home and found the passenger seat was empty. On my way back I met him walking home where he told me that he fell asleep on the way and fell down from the boda boda. Lucky enough he was not seriously injured since I was not speeding"*

Some customers challenged riders to a duel so that they could avoid to pay for the ride. Other male customers turned out to be robbers where they stole bikes from the riders. In some instances they killed the riders who resisted to be robbed or who appeared to have identified those thieves for the purposes of concealing evidence.

The study thus, sought to understand how the riders coped or dealt with the challenges that they face in their day to day operations. The study found that there were some riders who chose to just let it go for the sake of future business with their clients while others sought assistance from their self-help groups so that they could adopt resolution to deal with such issues when they occur.

Risks Posed by Boda boda in the Rural Areas

The study sought to understand from the respondents whether there were social risks attributed to the emergence of boda boda in their respective areas. All the respondents interviewed cited that there were risks that are associated with the introduction of the boda boda in rural areas. One of the aspects of the risks that was cited by all riders was increases in the cases of robbery and theft in those areas. One of the respondents stated that: *“I have been a victim where my customer turned to be a robber who requested to alight in the middle of the road only to point a gun at me”*.

A key respondent cited a few cases where boda boda had been involved in theft. It was established in one sub-location of Gitareni three boda boda were stolen by “customers” who turned to be robbers. A respondent who recalled such an incident said: *“The motorcycle was allegedly stolen from Mvea in Kirinyaga County and brought to my location. More than three hundred riders were chasing the criminals and it had to take intervention of the Police by firing in the air to disperse the irate mob that wanted to torch the suspect’s house”*.

Many incidences had been reported where riders were suspects in allegations ranging from transporting stolen goods to riders themselves engaging in the actual robbery. This was attributed to the fact that they were capable of navigating easily and more so some boda boda had no registration number plates on their motorcycles. Even those boda boda that had registration, it was not easy to read their registration numbers at a distance. This made it easy for them to actualize criminal activities.

Involvement of the Riders Accidents

The introduction of the boda boda had brought increased cases of road accidents. The study established that 25% of the respondents had been involved in at least one accident. Out of those accident cases only 2% were reported to the police. Riders preferred sorting the cases outside police stations for the fear of victimization since many did not have driving licences. One of the key informant recalled that there had been increase in number of accidents within her area of jurisdiction where one of the bicycle riders was hit by a boda boda in a place called Kathutwa in August 2016. He died while being treated at Chuka County Referral Hospital. She further informed the researcher that: *“There is another man who was hit by a boda boda and developed a back bone fracture forcing community to raise one million, five hundred thousand shillings (Kshs.1, 500,000) for hospital expenses”*. *In the year 2017 a chief from Magumoni Division was crushed by a lorry while riding a boda boda. “I was also involved in an accident on a boda boda”*.

The research established that there had been increase in rates of motorcycle accidents which in most cases they were fatal in comparison to motor vehicle accidents. This is because motorcycles have no body/housing to protect the occupants and therefore the passenger or the rider are prone to injury in case of falling or even being hit by a vehicle. Interference by politicians was also cited as a contributing factor in the number of accidents. They organized for the riders to be issued with driving licences in disregard of the traffic laws. This took place especially during the campaign periods. This research established that some politicians invited traffic examiners for one day to train the riders and they were issued with driving licences the same day.

Table 4: Accident Victims Attended to at Chuka County Referral Hospital

| Year | Accident Victims attended to at Chuka Referral Hospital |
|--------------|---|
| 2012 | 6 |
| 2013 | 67 |
| 2014 | 103 |
| 2015 | 142 |
| 2016 | 202 |
| 2017 | 93 |
| Total | 613 |

Source: Chuka County Referral Hospital

Influence of Boda Boda on School Dropout.

This study established that there was an increase in the number of school dropout cases involving boys and girls. Boda boda business is commonly seen as a business venture by young boys who form the role model to boys in school. The boys who were in school viewed the riders as successful and as role models. They also view boda boda business as lucrative where one leased a motorcycle from the owner at Kshs. 300.

One of the key informants cited out that: *“I have a case where one of my pupils in class seven dropped out of school to go and get married to another boy who had earlier dropped out of school to be employed as a rider. They are now a married couple with the boy being the family provider”*

The key informant added that: *“There are cases where I know of girls who have been impregnated by the riders forcing them to drop out of school. It becomes a burden to the family and especially to the parents of the girls who have to provide everything to the new family member who has been born”*. The study established that girls were enticed by the riders with the money and free rides and in return they paid in kind. This greatly contributed to early pregnancies leading to school dropouts as well as early marriages among the school girls.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concludes that boda boda influx in Kenya has come at a time of its great need in many rural parts of the country. It is imperative to note that boda boda have played a very significant role in connecting rural areas with the rest of the towns in aiding circulation of goods and services to and from these areas. Agricultural activities are thriving in many of the rural areas of the country and thus, significantly impacting positively on the lives of the rural dwellers. Employment opportunities have also been created for youths some of whom did not transit to secondary school due to various reasons. However, failure to come up with proper policies in this sector has led to emergence of lawlessness among the boda boda operators who have established themselves as a sub-cultural group with its own rules. The challenge remains how to bring order to this sector in order to mitigate the social ills brought about by the boda boda operations and attain maximum benefits to the society especially the youth.

This paper suggests the following in order to improve operations of boda boda and enhance community development in rural areas in Kenya:

1. County Governments in Kenya should devise strategies of sensitizing and encouraging motorcycle riders on the importance of belonging to a SACCO in order to make savings for their economic empowerment;
2. The government through National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) should come up with the training curriculum which is user friendly especially to riders with low education background. This will help reduce number of accidents associated with boda boda operations;
3. The ministry of health through NHIF should sensitize motorcycle riders on the importance of enrolling in the medical scheme with the view of addressing boda boda rider's health;
4. The government should come up with the clear guidelines on the operating hours aimed at curbing crimes associated with the boda boda operations.

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