



## **Emergence and Effects of Commercial Motorbike Services in Rural Akuapem North Municipal Area**

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### **Abstract**

Rural areas in developing countries are often known by their inadequate transport systems, making it difficult for agricultural produce to be transported to market centres. Okada in rural areas transport people and their goods, from poorly served areas to market centres in cities and towns. Commercial motorcycle services offer a faster transport option to destinations than minibuses or regular taxis. The researcher randomly chose two (2) “okada” stations in the Adawso and Mangoase communities and randomly distributed fifteen (15) questionnaires each to the parks in the Akuapem North Municipal area. *Okada* business is a novel and a relevant form of employment for the youth. It enables the riders meet their basic needs. The service has received approval from community members too. The service has also been accepted due to the deficiency in existing modes of existing transport systems. The study suggests that the government should create decent job opportunities for the youth and the Municipal Assembly should also organise frequent public education for riders on the adherence to road safety regulations and safe riding principles so that the risks involved will be reduced.

**Keywords:** Rural transport, commercial motorcycle service, motorcycle taxi, Okada, Akuapem North.

### **1. Introduction**

Deterioration in organised public transport systems have led to rapid growth in non-conventional means of public transport, originally provided by minibuses and shared taxi/vans, and more recently by commercial motorcycles. Unlike cities in South and East Asia, ownership and use of motorised two-wheelers as a personalised vehicle is very small in sub-Saharan cities. However, over the past decade there has been a significant growth in the use of motorcycles as means of commercial public transport. While bringing about some transport advantages in the form of easy manoeuvring, the ability to travel on poor roads, and demand responsiveness, commercial motorcycle services’ growth has likewise led to an increase in road accidents, traffic management problems, pervasive noise and increases in local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions (Kumar, 2011).

The growth in the use of commercial motorcycles has also dismissed one of the usually held impressions that fare controls in the public bus market are often justified to support affordability for a vast majority of the poor; however, commercial motorcycles are more expensive than the lowest bus fares, but are increasingly being patronised by the poor due to

the inadequacy of bus services (Dinye, 2013). According to Kumar (2011), the source and development of okada in most African countries can be credited to the decline of bus services directly provided by the state or contracted for, and market deregulation leading to a rise in informal operators. In the abundance of local names to identify them the majority of commercial motorcycle service providers throughout Africa is clearly expressed; these expressions include okada (Ghana), okadaor alalok (Nigeria), kabu-kabu (Niger), boda-boda (Uganda and Kenya), zemidjan (Benin), oleyia (Togo), and bendskin (Cameroon).

Rural areas in developing countries are often known by their inadequate transport systems, making it difficult for agricultural produce to be transported to market centres thereby obstructing economic growths (UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 2001). Non-motorised transport seems to control transportation in these rural areas; and thus do not entail any expensive provision. It is no surprise walking is the major transport mode for most rural people. Poor accessibility in the rural areas of developing countries preserves the deprivation trap by denying communities' access to their most basic needs. This has led to the popularity of commercial motorcycle services in rural areas (Litman, 2010).

Okada in rural areas transport people and their goods, from poorly served areas to market centres in cities and towns (IRF, 2011). Commercial motorcycle services offer a faster transport option to destinations than minibuses or regular cabs, they are capable of cutting through traffic and providing direct door-to-door services (Chang, 2012). Chang upholds these two-wheelers are free of the multiple stops associated with minibuses and always take passengers to their exact destinations. Starkey (2011), also views commercial motorcycle services in Africa as a flourishing business. Apart from bridging the transport gap, motorcycle transport services have offered young men livelihoods while stimulating employment in the supply and maintenance services (IRF, 2011).

Motorcycles and tricycles have become the preferred means of transport for rural folks in Ghana because it is the easiest and cheapest means by which they do their businesses. In the five regions of the North; Bono Region, Ahafo Region and the Oti Region, the use of motorcycles and tricycles assume critical parts of their daily engagements greatly. For instance, farmers, teachers, nurses, social workers and many others depend on these means of transport to get to their places of work. Farmers use motorcycles or tricycles on daily basis to cart food stuffs to and from their farms. Health workers in these areas find them as the most effective and well organised means to access the neighbourhoods to provide healthcare services on time (Dinye, 2013).

It is central to note the unusual significance of transport in rural areas. Inadequate access to transport limits socio-economic development. According to Starkey et al. (2011), the provision of better access to transport services arouse economic activity and creates a virtuous circle that reduces poverty and improves the lives of the rural poor. They indicated that the factors affecting rural transport provision are different from those in urban areas. In the provision of rural transport services, there is the need to address the particular needs of the community concerned.

## **2. The Problem**

The low population of rural areas coupled with large distances between adjoining settlements and townships and the poor nature of roads make provision of public transportation not economically viable (Dinye, 2013). In a country such as Ghana where the provision of public transportation has mostly been left to the private sector, rural areas are faced with the

challenge in their daily movements. The challenge has led to increase in the use of motorcycle taxis for carrying people and goods. Most research on motorcycle taxis have concentrated on their effects in the urban areas with little regard to its impact in rural areas. In urban areas, their operations are reportedly becoming a nuisance due to recklessness, lack of lane discipline, unsafe manoeuvres and high incidence of crashes. The same cannot be said of rural areas because of the low volumes of traffic, absence of congestion, absence of alternative means of public transport.

Studies to understand the operations and characteristics of okada business have mostly been skewed towards their activities in urban areas to the exclusion of the peculiar situation prevailing in rural areas. Not much is known about the characteristics, causal factors to the rise in the use of motorcycle taxis in rural areas, the reasons for patronage and the services they provide. This study therefore seeks to contribute to bridge the knowledge gap related to the use of commercial motorcycle services/taxis in the provision of rural transportation services.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 The Study Area

The Akuapem North municipal area is situated in the south-eastern part of the Eastern region and is about 58km from Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The Municipal area has about 230 settlements with Akropong as its administrative capital. Agriculture is the leading employer of the working population living in the rural areas of the Municipal Assembly and the service sector also employs some of the population, especially those in the towns such as Akropong, Mampong, Mamfe, Tutu and the likes. The people are generally the Akuapems (ANMA, 2019).

Adawso is one of the major market centres in the municipal area, the market centre and its surrounding rural communities have nowadays developed interest in the *Okada* business services because it is deemed to be fast in conveying people to their destinations. The research area is limited to the confines of Akuapem North Municipality; specifically, motobike operators around the Adawso-Mangoase area (ANMA, 2019).

#### Map of the Akuapem North Municipal Area



Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2014

The researcher randomly chose two (2) “okada” stations in the Adawso and Mangoase communities and randomly distributed thirty (30) questionnaires each to the parks in the Akuapem North Municipal area. In order to gather in-depth information, the researcher interviewed fifteen (15) respondents each from the two selected “okada” parks. Also, four (4) focus group discussions were organised with the patrons (mostly market women) of the commercial motorcycle services.

Lists of the names of *okada* riders were obtained from the Okada Riders Association at Adawso and Mangoase. The names were put on pieces of paper, each name to a piece of paper. The names were then selected from the bowl using the lottery method of the simple random sampling technique; this exercise was conducted at each of the two (2) selected parks.

Four (4) focus group discussions (between 12-15 participants in each group) were organised with clients/patrons of *okada* services. Two semi-structured interview guides were designed and administered to the participants of this study. To get all data into compatible format, responses from participants were grouped taking into consideration the items that demanded those responses. In effect, there was manual and electronic analysis of data. Findings from participants were presented in descriptive form using frequencies, percentages and tables. The sequence of presentations was presented with the bio-data of the respondents and the research.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Okada Rider Participants’ Demographic Features

The ages of the *okada* participants interviewed were between 18 and 35 years and, above. The table 1 below shows the age distribution of the respondents. Majority of the 30 participants (73%) were within the age group of 18 and 24 years, 17% fell between the ages of 25-30 years. A 7% covered those in the age group of 31 to 35 years and only one (3%) of the participants indicated that he is above 35 years. In all, about 81% of the surveyed *okada* riders were below the age of 30 years which undoubtedly shows that provision of *okada* services is basically a form of employment for the youth in the Akuapem North area. The biostatistics of participants is presented in the table 1 below.

**Table 1: Okada Rider Participants’ Demographic Features**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	30	100
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	22	73
25-30	5	17
31-35	2	7
35+	1	3
<b>Education</b>		
Primary	4	13
Senior High School	7	23

Junior High school (JHS)/Middle School Leavers	14	47
School Drop Outs	3	10
Never been to School	2	7

All (100%) the *okada* rider participants in this study are male. This shows that it is a male dominated business. The research team observed that there were no female riders at the two (2) stations that were visited. Most (98%) of them have had some form of education ranging from primary school to senior high school. Though as little as 3% of the participants dropped out of school at various levels of education; this study considers this category of participants as having had some form of education.

#### 4.2 Entry into Commercial Motorcycle Business (*okada* service)

The study sought to know why the youth were so much involved in this trade regardless of challenges associated with it. The study found that unemployment was a key factor that accounted for the youth's involvement in the *okada* business. Other reasons identified included poverty, lack of capital to start business and peer influence. The following are quotes from the interviews:

*Poverty, unemployment and influence from two (2) of my friends pushed me into the okada business. After senior high school, my parents could not afford to help me further my studies. I have younger ones who also need to be taken care of but unfortunately, my parents could not really provide the family with the basic needs. I tried to find a job in the community and even in the neighbouring communities but I did not find any meaningful job that could enable me assist my parents in taking care of my younger ones. I have three (3) friends that were already doing the okada business, they encouraged me to join them and that is how I am here as an okada rider.*

Another participant revealed his motivating factors in the following words:

*I am involved in okada business because it offers better financial benefits as compared to other forms of businesses. I was hawking fanice products. During the fanice hawking days, life was very tough for me. A friend told me about what he was earning from being an okada rider and I got enticed. Luckily for me, I already know how to ride a motorcycle so it was easy to join. That is how I became an okada man.*

The motivating factors as expressed by the participants in this study is in line with the finding of Akinfemi (2009) who also identified unemployment as a major pull factor for entry into *okada* business. The result indicated that persons engaged in commercial motorcycling business were principally driven by economic reasons as most of the riders did not have the intention to engage in commercial motorcycling initially. Also, the study found that it was relatively easier to join the *okada* business because there are businessmen and women who give the bikes to the riders on hire purchase which they referred to as 'work and pay'. Levies by the Akuapem North Municipal Assembly was deemed manageable and the availability of motorbike spare parts at relatively affordable prices makes maintenance of the bikes less stressful. All these factors have made the subsector appealing to the youth and thus the resultant growth of *okada* business.

#### 4.3 Ownership

Results from the field, indicated that majority (62%) of *okada* taxi riders owned their motorcycle through hire purchase. The non-owners acquired their motorcycles through some

form of rental agreement or they got the bikes from family/friends. This implies that most of the riders are their own employers, therefore they have the final say on the income accumulated from the *okada* business. Similar outcome has been reported by Starkey (2011), who indicated that *okada* services are booming in Africa due to the profitable nature of the business.

#### **4.4 Rider qualification and license**

Majority of the *okada* riders had no form of formal training in motorcycling. They only learned how to operate the bikes through family and friends, and self-tuition. The participants revealed that they have not heard of motor rider training schools. Most (79%) said they would have attended the training schools if they existed. On the issue of possessing rider's licenses, virtually all the riders (100%) did not possess valid rider's licenses. However, the data shows that the riders have varied levels/years of experiences. About 71% of the participants have been in the business for more than two (2) years. Almost 20% have been doing this business for a little over four (4) years and the rest (9%) of the participants have been engaged in this business for over six (6) year. Some of the participants in the last category indicated that they were operating in the Northern parts of the country before moving to the Akuapem North areas.

#### **4.5 Services provided**

Services provided by the motorcycle taxis were basically the conveyance of passengers and goods. The latter, involves movement of produce/goods to and from the markets and farms. No regulations are currently in place to ensure the limit of goods to be carried on the motorcycles. Some of the goods transported on the motorcycles included foodstuff, construction materials, farming implements and many more. This finding is in consonance with the findings of IRF (2011) which revealed that motorcycle taxis in rural areas transport people and their goods from poorly served villages to functional areas in cities and towns (IRF, 2011).

#### **4.6 Motorcycle Taxi Users**

From the focus group discussions, various reasons were given by participants for their patronage of the *okada* services. These reasons included the ability of the motorcycle being faster and cheaper means of transport. The bikes are said to be faster because they do not make stops on the way to pick up or drop off passengers as compared to the minibuses 'trotro'. Waiting time was also give as a reason for patronising *okada*. One of the FGD participant had this to say:

*'once you get to the station they move because you are the only passenger needed'. Unlike the taxis, you have to wait until they have a full load before they move. The okada saves a lot of time'*.

The current study validates the findings of Darido (2010) who found the use of motorcycles to be very common in developing countries because they are relatively cheap; usually less regulated. Motorcycles also have lower travel costs, and reduce travel time.

#### **4.9 Legalising Okada Operations**

Most of the participants knew about the illegality of the *okada* services. Nevertheless, there were varied responses as to whether the operations should be made legal or not. The participants supported the legalisation and training to facilitate safety operations of the business in the country. The patrons of *okada* services also supported legalisation of *okada* operations in the country. The support for legalisation came typically from the affordable nature of the services and the ability to ply poor roads and provide door to door services.

With its increasing usefulness to the residents and the fast uptake in the rural setting among the youth.

#### **4.7 The benefits of commercial motorcycling**

Furthermore, the study revealed that there was reasonable level of income in commercial motorcycling operation. The income so generated from the industry made it a viable source of employment. The riders indicated that the business received high patronage because of its ability take people to places where taxis could not reach. The patronage of *okada* services in the study area disclosed that there was high amount of financial returns from the business. The current study is in line with the findings of Oladipo (2012) who found that, the operation of this group of transporters has eased the transport difficulties encountered by the people. Thus, we can say that the *okada* business has filled a big gap in the public transport system in Nigeria. With the operation of commercial motorcycles, people can now go to areas previously inaccessible by conventional means of transportation.

#### **8.10 Challenges of Okada Business Operations**

The operations of *okada* services involve numerous challenges. The riders and patrons revealed that one of the problems of *okada* services is frequent accidents which is chiefly caused by the impatient attitude of the riders. They over-speed on high ways and make very poor manoeuvring which make them to lose control. Patrons said some of the riders were too careless and impatient. High rates of *okada* related accidents are associated to deficiency in training and traffic education among the operators. Impatience, blatant disregard for traffic regulations and irresponsible riding by the operators which sometimes results in loss of lives of riders, passengers and even other road users are some of the challenges identified.

#### **Conclusion and the Wayforward**

*Okada* business is a novel and relevant form of employment for the youth. It enables the riders to meet their basic needs. The service has received approval from community members as they touted, the relevance of the service to them. The service has been accepted due to the deficiency in existing modes of transportation and suppleness of service. Regardless of the findings of this study, and no matter what opinions we have about the *okada* operations, we cannot overlook its influence on the socio-economic wellbeing of the people of the rural communities in the Akuapem North area. Nevertheless, the adverse effects should be given the needed attention and policy decisions be made to control their activities.

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following policy suggestions are made:

- The government should create decent job opportunities for the youth.
- Scholarship schemes should be established to aid needy kids to further their education.
- The laws on motorcycle users wearing protective helmet and gear must be obligatory and strictly enforced to improve safety when used for public transport.
- The Municipal Assembly should organise frequent public education for riders on the adherence to road safety regulations and safe riding principles so that the risks involved can be minimised.
- Further studies should be conducted into the usage of *okada* in other rural areas to determine whether the finding of this study could be extended to the entire country.

#### **Acknowledgement**

The author is grateful to the commercial motorcycle riders in the Akuapem North Municipal area. Thanks to Mr. Emmanuel Osae who collected and organised the data.

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