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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PASSENGERS' PREFERENCE FOR SELECTED MASS TRANSIT COMPANIES IN SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

*Ezenwa, A. E, Chikwendu, D.U and Dike, D.N

Department of Transport Management Technology, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on passengers preference for selected mass transit companies in South eastern Nigeria. Data were collected from 114 passengers who patronized the selected mass transit in the study area with the aid of a structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages. The results of the study showed passengers preference for Imo Transport Company Limited, then Rivers Transport Company Limited, and then Abia Line Network Company Limited. Findings revealed that passengers were satisfied with the general quality of service, fares charged, vehicle standard, attitude of drivers and crew, and drivers' safety consciousness on the highway. Findings also revealed that vehicles were also readily available when required. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made: Government should develop other modes of transportation to enhance proper integration of transport services in the country. The companies should open up more routes to increase extent of vehicle utilization which will result to increase in income. The government should assist the companies to improve the standard of facilities such as tarrying of parks, building of adequate passenger waiting hall and other passenger comfort facilities. More importantly, Government should improve the condition of Nigeria roads.

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INTRODUCTION

Transportation is the movement of goods and passengers from one place to another. According to Ikeogu (2008), Transportation is the movement of people, freight and information from one geographical location to another while conferring value on them. Transportation plays an important role in the social, political and economic development of any society be it rural or urban, transportation constitutes the main avenue through which different parts of the society are linked together. (Aderamo and Mogaji, 2010). The world relies on transportation to fuel its economic growth and development. Without transportation, people cannot travel to their work places; materials will not be delivered to the manufacturing sites and goods will not get to the market at the time they are needed. Transportation of both people and goods is necessary component of global development. In the words of Oni, (2004), Transportation is the cornerstone of civilization. Therefore as society grows in terms of population and functions, the need for interaction among its various components also grows thereby requiring quality and effective transportation system. Hence, Munby (1968), asserts that "there is no escape from transport even in most remote and least developed of inhabited regions. Also, Hailey (1957) optioned that "there seems to be no other type of development which can affect so speedily a change in the economic and social condition of backward nations except transport." Transportation takes place in all geographical areas and this chiefly categorized as rural or urban. Overtime, accessibility has increase and this has led to greater reliance on mobility. According to Oni (2004), "as the society and Economic organization becomes complex, the relevance of transport grows." This trend could be traced back to the industrial revolution, although it has significantly improved in the second half of the 20th century for

various reasons. Today's society relies on transportation system to support the wide variety of activities. These activities include commuting, supplying energy needs, distributing goods and acquiring personal want. The development of sufficient transport network has been a challenge to meet the growing needs and ultimately to participate in global economics. Transportation measures the result of human activity between and within locations. It focuses on items such as travel time, route undertaking, and mode of transportation, resource use and sustainability of transport types for the natural environment. Other sections consider topography, safety aspect of vehicle use and energy use within individual and group journey. The specific purpose of transport is to fulfill the transportation demand since it can only exist if it moves something be in people, goods or information. Transportation is one of the most important human activities world-wide, it is an indispensable component of the economy that plays a major role in the spatial relation between locations. One of the most remarkable features of public transport industry in Nigeria is its long and chequered history. Its origin dates back to the advent of urbanization in Nigeria with its technology gradually moving from the crude up the motorization ladder. Besides the slow improvement in the technology of the national road transport system, the public transport industry had been plagued by the problem of general under development. Public transportation comprises all forms of societal mobility where the passengers do not travel in their own vehicles.

According to Schumacher (Anim, 1991), Development does not start with goods, it begins with people, their education, organization and discipline. He argued without these three, all resources remain latent and untapped potentials. The public passenger transport industry in Nigeria has been in decline for decades. Clear evidence can be drawn from the geometric increase in the number of commuters as against the sharp drop in the total number of available buses. A survey carried out shows that the registration of vehicles in Imo state dropped significantly 2003 to 2007.

*Corresponding author: Ezenwa, A. E, Department of Transport Management Technology, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria.

A glance at the data collected by the state Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) shows that 7,290 vehicles were registered in 2001 as against 7,116 registered in 2003, also in 2007, 5216 vehicles were registered in the state. The story is not different in other states of the federation. This can be traced to the effect of inadequate, maintenance and renewal of equipment and facilities as this is visible in all sub -sectors; inadequate replacement and maintenance of vehicles contributing to high social cost of atmospheric pollution resulting in high operating cost. In turn, such excessive operating cost decreases operating revenues, thus making vehicle replacement difficult. According to Olomola (2003), inadequate provision of transport infrastructure and services provide a basis for explaining the incidence of poverty across various Nigeria communities in both urban and rural areas. The categories of transport problems that can be identified are: Bad roads, Fuel problem (high fuel prices, shortage of fuel supply and subsequent high transport cost); traffic congestion (long waiting time, bad driving habit, hold-ups) inadequate mass transit vehicles and overloading; high cost and shortage of spare parts, poor vehicle maintenance and old vehicles. It is clearly established that inadequate transport facilities and services as well as the constraints imposed on the mobility and accessibility of people to facilities such as markets, hospitals and water sources have grave implications on deepening poverty levels. Thus, there is need for urgent policy measures to address the prevailing travel and transport problems. Today, road transport account for about 90% of the country's goods and passenger movement (Filani, 2002). Although, planned investment in the transport sector witnessed a slight shift of emphasis to water and air transport in the rolling plan of

1991 to 1993, and 1994 to 1995, the road sub -sector still accounted for over half of the total investment (Rolling Plans, 1990 to 1999). As an urban area grows in size, all other areas of human endeavour are expected to increase in real income and the failure of public transportation to offer an effective service. According to Diejomaol (1982), the inadequate state of public transportation have contributed to the proliferation of public private transport operators who use adapted vehicles, mini - buses and taxis for their operations. Following the above discourse, Ogbazi (1992), said that transportation systems involves the mode of travel as well as the channel along which one travels such as roads through vehicles, the cycles, waterways, terminal facilities etc. despite this, individual commuters travel with mass transits based on various reasons which may include comfortable services earlier got, reference from a friend and the nature of the vehicle. The study therefore focused on passenger's preference for selected mass transit companies in South Eastern Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized three state government-owned mass transit companies from the South-East that runs the franchise programme, which include, The Imo Transport Company (ITC) Limited, with its operational headquarters located in MCC/Uratta Road, Owerri, Imo State. The Rivers Transport Company (RTC) Limited with the operational headquarters located at Waterlines Complex, Aba Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, and Abia Line Network Company Limited (ALNC) with its operational headquarters located in Aba, Abia State. The population for this study consists of senior managers in the selected state – Owned mass transit companies

Table 1. Socio – demographic characteristics of respondents

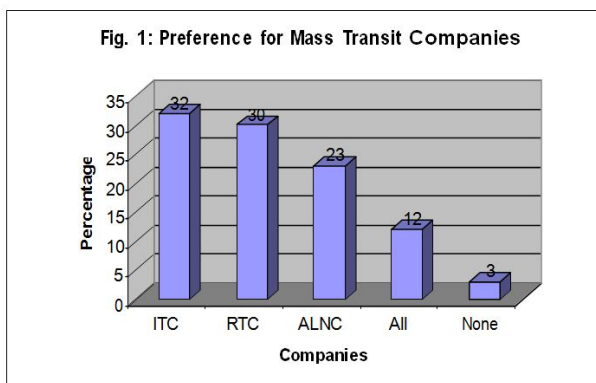
Socio – demographic characteristics of respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
male	72	63
female	42	37
Age		
18 – 25yrs	34	30
26-35yrs	34	30
36-45yrs	26	23
46-55yrs	14	12
56yrs – above	6	5
Marital status		
single	49	43
married	62	54
Divorced	0	0
Widowed	3	3
Qualification		
None	0	0
Primary	0	0
Secondary	34	30
Post secondary	80	70
Occupation		
students	40	35
Civil servants	37	32
Business men	28	25
Others	9	8
Frequency of travel		
Very regular	37	32
Regular	62	54
Minimal	12	11
By chance	14	1
Irregular	2	2

as well as supervisors and senior staff in the Operations Unit. A structured questionnaire was administered to 120 respondents who were randomly selected from the study area. However, information for 114 respondents was used for analysis. Data were analyzed through the use of frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the Table 1, 72 respondents, representing 63% of the respondents are male while the remaining 37% are female. All respondents are passengers traveling with the selected transport companies. Also, 30% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 18 – 25yrs, another 30% of the respondents are within the ages of 26 – 35yrs, 23% are within the ages 36-45% while 12% are within the age bracket of 46-55yrs and 5% are 56yrs and above. The results show that majority of the respondents in this study are adults in their youthful ages, which represents the majority of the population and are the people who use the services of the companies for their mobility needs; their responses to the questions will go a long way to assist in the assessment of the companies. Findings revealed that 43% of the respondents are single while 54% are married. Entries from Table 1 reveal that 70% of the respondents had post secondary education. The data shows that the respondents are well qualified to give their assessment of the companies as they are major users of their services. It was found that 35% of the respondents are students, 32% are civil servants, and 25% are business men while others represent 8%. This shows that the respondents are well qualified and their assessment of the franchise scheme of the companies. The table above suggests that 32% of the respondents are very regular users of the three state-owned companies, 54% of the respondents are regular users of the state-owned mass transit companies, 11% use the companies' services minimally while 2% of the respondents use the companies by chance. Results showed that 95% of the commuters use state-owned mass transit companies. This could be added to the moderate fares charged by the companies when compared to privately-owned transport companies providing the same quality of service. Figure 1 shows that 32% of the passengers patronize Imo Transport Company Limited, 30% patronize Rivers Transport Company Limited, 23% patronize Abia Line Network Company Limited, 30% of the patronize Rivers Transport Company Limited and 12% Patronized all the three transport companies

Preference for mass transit companies



From Table 2, 11% of the passengers rated the quality of service offered by the government-owned mass transit companies as high, 26% rate the quality of services as high, while 58% gave a moderate rating to the quality of service; 5% are of the view that the quality of service is low. From the data, the quality of service provided by the state-owned mass transit companies is moderate. This view was corroborated by Mba (1992). According to him, the performance of many of the agencies is often below standard; their services are often grossly inefficient and unsatisfactory. This is as a result of the public service attitude that public business is nobody's business, hence the need for government to pay more attention to improving the quality of service through policy Promulgation and implementation. From Table 2, 13% of the respondents are of the opinion that the fares charged by these companies are high, 68% of the passengers indicated that the fares charged are moderate. From the entries in Table 2, majority of the passengers are of the opinion that the fares charged by the companies are moderate. This is true as government – owned mass transit companies were established to assist in alleviating the mobility and accessibility problems of the urban poor through the provision of subsidies to the companies. Also, 23% of the respondents indicated that the standard of vehicle is high, 56% say it is moderate, suggesting that majority of the passengers are of the opinion that the standard of vehicles in the companies is moderate, this is true from observations. Therefore, the companies should by way of policy, state the standard of vehicles that should be registered in the franchise scheme and also specify the maximum number of the years the vehicles can operate in the company before being in disfranchised from the company.

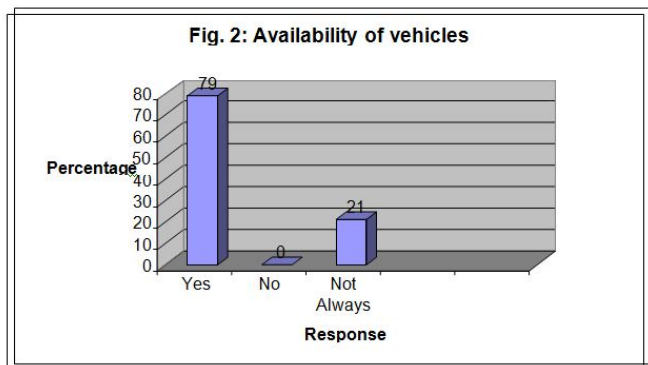
This is necessary as some of the vehicles in the franchise scheme are worn out, resulting in frequent breakdowns on the highways. Also, 10% of the passengers are of the view that the attitude of drivers and Crew is very good, 46% say their attitude is good, 39% say their attitude is fair while 5% say their attitude is poor. The results suggest that the attitude of drivers and crew in government-owned and managed transit companies is good. This is so because of the training and retraining programmes frequently organized to orientate the drivers and crew and to improve their awareness of customer service especially with the creation of safety and customer care unit in these companies. Findings showed that 4% of the respondents say that the companies' vehicles are very frequently interrupted on the highways by law enforcement officers, 14% say they are frequently interrupted, 23% say the vehicles are interrupted but minimally, 26% of the respondent say the companies are very minimally interrupted on the highways by, law enforcement officers while 33% say they are not interrupted on the highways at all. From the statistics above, majority of the respondents say the companies are not interrupted on the highways by law enforcement officers. This is so because the vehicles are believed to be owned by the government as they bear the state government -own logo and bear the name of the company; even where there is interruption, it is always for the purpose of inspection and drivers license checks and not for extortion as is the case with privately-owned and managed transport undertakings. From the foregoing, it can be said that the drivers are high safety conscious on the highways. This is as a result of the establishment of the safety unit in all the transport

Table 2. Analysis of passengers' opinion as per services provided by the state-owned mass transit companies

Services	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
General quality of service is high	12 (11)	30 (26)	66 (58)	6 (5)	0 (0)
Fares charged are high	0 (0)	15 (13)	77 (68)	21 (18)	1 (1)
Vehicle standard	8 (7)	26 (23)	64 (56)	14 (12)	2 (2)
Attitude of drivers and crew appealing	11 (10)	53 (46)	44 (39)	6 (5)	0 (0)
Frequency of interruptions on the highway by law enforcement officers	5 (4)	16 (14)	26 (23)	30 (26)	37 (33)
Rate of drivers' safety consciousness on the highway	20 (18)	45 (39)	43 (38)	6 (5)	0 (0)

companies, particularly government-owned transport companies, while drivers are frequently educated on safety measures as well as seminars organized by agencies such as the Federal Road Safety Commission and other orientation agencies. These have led to reduction in accidents involving the government-owned or franchise registered vehicles in government transport companies.

The companies should open up more routes to increase extent of vehicle utilization which will result to increase in income. The government should assist the companies to improve the standard of facilities such as tarrying of parks and building of adequate passenger waiting hall and other passenger comfort facilities. More importantly, Government should improve the condition of Nigeria roads.



From the Figure 2, 79% of the passengers indicated that there are vehicles each time they want to travel, while 21% indicated that vehicles are not always available each time they want to travel. The information suggests that there are enough vehicles to accommodate passengers except in some exceptional situation where demand outweighs supply particularly during festive periods/holidays.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that Government should increase funding of the transport sector in the country. This will lead to the development of other modes of transport to enhance proper integration of transport services in the country and reduce the burden on the road.

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