Research Article

Continuity and Preference of Ride-Sharing Service in Bangladesh: A Cultural Analysis

Samiha Anwar, Arko Halder*

Department of English, Dhaka International University, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the proliferation of app-based ride-hailing services within the urban transportation systems of Bangladesh, with a particular focus on socio-cultural assimilation and growing prominence. The primary objective of this research is to analyze the current dynamics of ride-sharing services in Dhaka and Chattogram, identifying the underlying factors that have contributed to their widespread adoption. It is done by qualitative data from interviews with 20 regular users in Dhaka and Chattogram. Empirical findings reveal that the preference for such services is predominantly driven by considerations of comfort, perceived safety, user convenience, and the potential for supplementary income. The analysis is done within the theoretical paradigm, employing Jan Nederveen Pieterse's theory of Globalization as Hybridization, John Storey's discourse on Popular Culture, and Frederic Jameson's critique of Consumerism. Through this lens, the research demonstrates that while the concept of ride-sharing is rooted in Western socio-economic contexts, its localization in Bangladesh has led to the emergence of a hybridized cultural practice. Moreover, the study reveals that ride-sharing services have transcended their functional role, evolving into a significant facet of contemporary popular culture within urban Bangladesh. This transformation is further illustrated through the theoretical construct of consumerism, which elucidates the appeal of such services to the modern urban middle class. The paper not only underscores the cultural and economic factors contributing to the rise of ride-sharing platforms but also offers recommendations for their sustainable development and potential future expansion within the Bangladeshi context.

Keywords: *Ride-Share, Transportation, Globalization, Culture, Consumerism, Uber, Bangladesh*

Introduction

Bangladesh has witnessed a significant shift towards ride-sharing platforms like Uber and Pathao, reflecting a global movement. In recent years, drastic, roller coaster changes have been observed in the transportation service of the urban areas in Bangladesh, notably in Dhaka. Worsening traffic conditions in the cities, inconvenience in public transport, and the huge expense of buying a car or motorbike have spearheaded the development of ride-sharing in Bangladesh (Tribune, 2018).

Ride-sharing services can provide a practical solution to these challenges by combining fast commuting in congested cities with comfort at moderate costs. Moreover, the swift rise of these platforms has created effective employment opportunities for many individuals. Although it originated from Western countries, with Uber founded in San Francisco, California, United States in March 2009, it has become a new digital trend within Bangladesh's transport infrastructure. Ride-sharing apps have overshadowed traditional transport agencies which fundamentally change the commuting systems of city dwellers. (Dhaka Tribune, 2020; Jaman, 2023).

In the context of Bangladesh, where there is a growing demand for app-based transportation, it is essential to investigate the factors leading city residents to choose these services. Thus, this research aims to examine the current scenario of ride-hailing services in Bangladesh and explore the underlying reasons for users' preferences. The analysis will utilize the theories of Cultural Studies, such as "Globalization as Hybridization", "Popular Culture", and "Consumerism". Since very few studies have analyzed data through cultural theories, this research provides a novel addition to modern academic discourse in this field.

Scenario

Ride-sharing services have become increasingly popular, with Uber, Pathao, and inDrive transforming commuting in Dhaka. Using a mobile device is essential to access these services. The rise of Uber encouraged competition that leads to the launch of other apps like Pathao, Obhai, inDrive, and Bahon. With the growth of this competition, various kinds of innovation also grow, resulting in economical and helpful alternatives for commuters. In spite of the fact that these companies intervened with mobile-based taxis as their prioritized services, eventually, they transitioned into similar commute services, like start-ups like OBHAI, and Goti. (Tribune, 2018).

Rationale

As app-based transportation services rapidly expand in urban areas, the quality of these services shows significant variation, spanning from high-end services that offer exceptional riding experiences to basic alternatives that simply meet essential transportation needs. As urban residents increasingly seek out convenient transportation solutions, numerous service providers have arisen to exploit this trend, resulting in a varied marketplace where consumers can choose options that meet their specific needs and preferences (Uddin, 2018; Jaman, 2023). However, there is a notable lack of scholarly research in this area, particularly in the context of Bangladesh, which necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the latest developments in ride-sharing services.

Objectives

This paper is prepared to analyze the present condition of the latest app-based transportation in Bangladesh, which has become a popular cultural trend. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To determine whether city dwellers in Bangladesh prefer ride-hailing services to public transport.
- To identify the reasons for choosing this service
- To examine how ride-sharing services influence the transport culture of urban areas in Bangladesh.

Literature Review
Contemporary Studies

In a ride-sharing service, a vehicle owner collaborates with a passenger who enters their pick-up location and destination through an app or website, generally for a fee (Doe, 2021). The first ride-sharing app, Uber, was founded in March 2009 in San Francisco, California, United States. Uber serves 785 metropolitan

areas around the world (Thought Excercise, 2017). As of 2025, Uber has around 68 billion users globally, reflecting its substantial impact on urban transportation. After the launch of Uber, many other countries started to join this arena and became successful. This app-based transportation has become easily accessible worldwide. OLA is an online transportation network company originating from India, established in December 2010. LYFT is another app which is founded in the United States in 2012. DIDI is a Chinese app-based transportation service launched in 2012, and Singapore launched Grab in the same year (IDLC Finance PLC). Then, there emerged many more ride-hailing services which have been spread globally.

Bangladesh launched Uber on 22 November 2016 with the partnership of Grameenphone. Pathao launched its operations in 2015, focusing initially on delivery services with its own vehicles. However, the company's strategic shift towards motorcycle ride-sharing was prompted by Uber's entry into the Dhaka market in October 2016. Although Pathao achieved significant success in this area, it was not the first to introduce motorcycle-based ride-sharing in Bangladesh; Share-A-Motorcycle (SAM) holds that title, having launched on May 7, 2016. Pathao's innovative business model ultimately proved to be more effective, allowing the company to outshine its competitors in terms of popularity and market presence. The importance of Pathao's success was highlighted when Uber introduced UberMoto in late 2017, which closely mirrored Pathao's motorbike taxi service. This development had a ripple effect on the transportation sector, inspiring a wave of similar services like Amar Bike, Bahon, Chalo, Dako, Goti, Muv, Dhaka Moto, Amar Ride, Taxiwala, Ezzyr, Hellow Ride, leading to a vibrant e-hailing market in Bangladesh. (Tribune, 2018). This competition is highly potent in mediating the interplay of global and local forces in the ride-sharing market.

Cultural Studies

In the essay "Globalization as Hybridization", Jan Nederveen Pieterse defines globalization as "globalization is a theory of Westernization by another name, which replicates all the problems associated with Eurocentrism: a narrow window on the world, historically and culturally" (Pieterse, 1993). According to him, when the traits of globalization come into contact with a culture, the core of that culture loses its essence, and it becomes a hybrid one. Because of this hybridization process, sometimes it results in a cultural scenario that contemplates both local and Western dominance, which ultimately leads to singular identity expression. That culture resembles the West, as more or less globalization means hybridization. With the touch of globalization, the main essence of a tradition gets affected and it becomes "neither modern nor traditional" (Pieterse, 1993). To provide a clear understanding, Pieterse pulls from the idea of Rowe and Schelling. Rowe and Schelling assert that "hybridization is defined as the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (William Rowe, 1991).

In "Cultural Studies", "popular culture is the set of practices, artifacts, and beliefs shared by the masses, and is constituted by the everyday life of the masses: the food habits, fashion, forms of transport, the music, the reading habits, the spaces they occupy and traverse" (Nayar, 2011). To define popular culture, John Storey claims that "popular culture emerged from the urbanization of the Industrial Revolution." (Storey, 2012). He also pulls out the definition of Raymond Williams, who sees popular culture as "'well-liked' by many people" (Williams, 1961).

Consumerism is related to globalization as it refers to a social and economic system that promotes the constant acquisition of goods and services. It encourages individuals to obtain these items in ever-increasing quantities. Fredric Jameson asserts, "The emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism." (Jameson, 1982). In the context of Bangladesh, consumerism shapes not only individual choices but also collective cultural practices, reflecting the influences of global trends. Consumerism, recognized as the pursuit of the 'good life,' has become one of the prevailing social forces world-

wide, bridging gaps across class, gender, religion, nationality, and ethnicity. Every culture has a significant connection with consumption. In short, culture is a product that is made, marketed, and consumed (Nayar, 2011).

Methodology

Approach:

The report has been prepared using a quantitative approach to meet the objectives. Quantitative methods prioritize objective measurements and involve the statistical analysis of data. This data is collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, as well as through the analysis of pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques (Labaree). This method responded to the demand for effective data gathering and precise analysis of the findings.

Sources:

The data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been gathered through questions and by asking people about their usage patterns and views regarding the ride-hailing services. Secondary data has been gathered from available journals, articles, and websites.

Data Collection:

The data was collected from both original (primary) and existing (secondary) sources. Sources such as IDLC, Daily Star, Dhaka Tribune help to gather data to run the research. Questions were also asked to 20 individuals who use ride-sharing apps in Dhaka and Chattogram. These participants were selected through a convenience sampling method to ensure a diverse representation of users.

Data Analysis:

The analysis of data has been done according to the purpose of the study. It is done based on the theoretical perspectives of John Story, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, and Frederic Jameson. To analyze the data, these theories have been drawn from "Cultural Studies". The data analysis involved statistical techniques to identify trends and patterns, ensuring a robust interpretation of the findings.

Analysis of Continuity and Preference of Ride-Sharing Service

Until 2015, the transportation services of Bangladesh were not the same as it is now. The traditional road transportation service was confined to public vehicles and private vehicles, where the private vehicles were owned and used by certain persons. The picture is not the same anymore. Ride-sharing enables individuals to access a pool of drivers via a mobile app without the need for traditional infrastructure or employees, as drivers are participants on an income-generating platform. Consequently, the emergence of dynamic ride-sharing startups has posed significant challenges to conventional transportation companies.

Expansion of app-based transport service

It's not only the technology but better service that transformed the landscape for the Taxi industry in countries like the U.S.A., Canada, and Australia (Partners, 2018). Starting from the United States, Uber has expanded throughout many countries and gained immense popularity. It now works in 785 metropolitan areas. Uber has paved the way for further business in this sector. After the launch of Uber, China, India, Singapore, and other countries launched their app-based ride-sharing service (Uddin, 2018). It has been gathered that these services usually pay the authorities on a per-ride basis. In these countries, one vehicle is shared by a few passengers, and the cost of transport is also paid in shares, which has not yet been launched in Bangladesh.

Uber, once the leading player in the global ride-hailing market, is gradually losing ground to local competitors with similar business models, having exited the Chinese market after significant losses to Didi Chuxing and merging operations in Russia with Yandex. Recent reports indicate that Uber is preparing to sell its Southeast Asia business to GRAB and is struggling in India, where local rival Ola has over three times its reach (Vardhan, 2018).

Continuity in Bangladesh

The ride-sharing culture, which originated in the United States, has also been adapted to the culture of Bangladesh through the launch of Uber and other local ride-sharing services like

Pathao, MUV, SAM, SOHOJ rides, Amar bike, etc. The capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, is a city of heavy traffic. Though the traffic problems have not been reduced, the city people find relief as they can fast commute with comfort because of the commencement of this service (Dhaka Tribune, 2020). Uber, Pathao, and others are modern innovations designed to alleviate the challenges of urban commuting (Reaz, 2018). But here, a twist has been noticed. The ride-sharing service was inaugurated because its main aim was to share a ride with a few people. In that case, few people can ride in a single vehicle at the same time to go to their destination, where the cost of the ride would be shared by everybody. Because of this service, the same amount of money would be shared by every passenger in that car, so that the cost can also be reduced. The popularity of ride-sharing services in other countries stems from shared rides and cost savings, which help reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and ease traffic congestion. However, many commuters still rely on personal cars for daily travel, prompting major cities to promote ride-sharing as a smarter transportation option (RideAmigos, 2021). But the scenario of Bangladesh is not the same. Here, the sharing of a single ride has not been initiated, and that is why people choose a bike ride more than a car in Bangladesh. Although this sharing of rides has not been encouraged, which would be more accessible, still, people are choosing this because of consumer policy. App-based transportation is transforming urban mobility, making dynamic ride-sharing increasingly appealing to those seeking public transport options. This shift is challenging traditional taxi services and reshaping how people navigate urban environments (Cetin, 2017).

Reasons for preferring the service

To better understand the effect of ride-sharing as a transport mode in Dhaka or the urban areas of Bangladesh, we need to take into consideration the reasons for choosing ride-hailing instead of public transport (Cetin, 2017). The reasons that created the room for ride-sharing in Bangladesh are as follows:

Fast Commuting

Dhaka, home to 36% of Bangladesh's urban population, is among the world's most densely populated cities, with average traffic speeds dropping dramatically from 21 km/h to just 7 km/h over the past decade. This congestion results in a loss of 3.2 million working hours daily, prompting young urban dwellers to seek alternative transportation options. As the fastest mode of transport at 16 km/h, bikes have become the preferred choice for busy professionals, allowing them to reach their destinations more quickly than by bus, car, or CNG (Tribune, 2018).

Convenience

Public buses and CNG vehicles are the primary modes of mass transportation for Dhaka residents. While public bus services have improved, issues such as overcrowding and conductors' bad behavior persist, leading to dissatisfaction among commuters. Similarly, CNG fares have risen, and complaints about driver behavior have increased, creating an opportunity for ride-sharing services to offer a more convenient and cost-effective alternative (Tribune, 2018).

Additional Income

Most people in Bangladesh belong to the middle class, whereas the young generation from middle-income families cannot afford to buy a car, and thus, ride-hailing service provides an impetus for young people to own a bike and have an additional income by getting incorporated into a ride-sharing network (Tribune, 2018). This also results in a boom in bike sales. Motorbike sales soared nearly 50% in two years. In 2015, only 1.43 lakh units of motorcycles were sold, while in 2017, the number increased to 3.60 lakh (IDLC Finance PLC).

Employment Opportunities

The ride-sharing sector in Bangladesh has the potential to create approximately 40,000 jobs, as evidenced by the number of drivers and riders in the network. Services like Uber and Pathao have delivered tangible benefits, with surveys indicating that ride-share car owners can earn around BDT 60,000 a month, significantly higher than the average monthly income

of BDT 30,000 for Dhaka residents (Tribune, 2018).

Affordable and Comfortable Travel Options

A ride-share car user typically spends about BDT 300 per trip, allowing frequent users to save significantly while enjoying the comfort of a car experience. In contrast, ride-share bike users pay less than 150 BDT per trip, while CNG users spend around 250 BDT per trip without the enhanced services offered by ride-sharing options (IDLC Finance PLC).

Future Trends in Ride-sharing Service:

Several ride-sharing apps have integrated CNG vehicles into their networks, with OBHAI successfully signing up CNG drivers and owners, although many remain hesitant to join other platforms like "Hellow". The local ride-sharing services of Bangladesh have the opportunity to launch their service internationally. Pathao has already been launched in Nepal. Thus, this service can flourish in Bangladesh in foreign countries. As Indian Ola considers expanding into Bangladesh and Didi Chuxing invests in ride-sharing companies, the growth of ride-sharing could significantly impact car sales in the country, similar to trends observed in the U.S., where many users have delayed purchasing their own vehicles (Farhin, 2018). Moreover, it has become the need of the time to introduce the sharing system of car riding, like in other countries, in Bangladesh. To address the ongoing need for travel to work, school, errands, and shopping, it is essential to provide practical, efficient, and accessible alternatives that can match the convenience of driving personal cars.

Theory, Findings, and Analysis

Three Cultural Studies theories have been drawn to analyze the paper. To simplify the presentation, the analysis and findings have been represented according to the theoretical point of view.

Ride-Sharing and Hybridization:

Firstly, from the collected data, it can be seen that the transportation system of Bangladesh has through a huge diversity after the commencement of ride-hailing apps. Where the city people of Bangladesh cannot imagine having a ride that can be obtained with the help of an app or the internet, it has become an ordinary scenario nowadays. Before 2015, ride-sharing services were available in other countries like the USA, China, Singapore, etc., but the people of Bangladesh were not used to this service. The origin of ride-sharing was in the USA, and from there it spread across the world as an emblem of modernity or globalization. It becomes more obvious when one of our study participants expresses, "It seems that we are becoming more modern and aligned to the global network through this service." So, it can be analyzed through what Jan Nederveen Pieterse said in his essay "Globalization as Hybridization". According to him, another name for globalization is Westernization. What we take as a criterion of modernity is the impact of Western countries. With the rumble of technology in the 21st century, people across the world are becoming dependent on technology day by day and using it in every sphere of their lives. Thus, in the name of digitalization or modernization, with the launch of ride-sharing companies, the transport culture of Bangladesh has been mixed with Western and has become a hybrid one. Nederveen's statement, "neither modern nor traditional," resembles the present transport practice of Bangladesh (Pieterse, 1993).

Ride-Sharing and Popular Culture:

Secondly, the app-based transport culture is the new alternative presently. It continues to be one of the most happening markets in Bangladesh. Because of its benefits and many other reasons. Because of the preference for ride-sharing services, it has become a part of the culture in Bangladesh. Since popular culture is defined as "well-liked by many people" (Williams, 1961), ride-sharing can be seen as the popular culture of the city people of Bangladesh because it is also liked by everybody. In this case, few participants agreed that "I use this service more often because it saves my time and it has become a significant part of my daily transit." John Storey claims that "popular culture emerged from the urbanization of the Industrial Revolution." (Storey, 2012). So, the app-based ride-hailing in Bangladesh is the result of

urbanization, which stems from globalization, and it has become a popular culture now. For becoming a ride-hailing service as a popular transport service, it has a clear connection with not only globalization but consumerism as well.

Ride-Sharing and Consumerism:

Finally, the ride-sharing service can be analyzed through the lens of consumerism. The main reason why these companies are so famous is the result of consumerism. Consumerism is related to globalization (Consumerism, 2023). As this service is the result of globalization, it is connected to consumerism (Cetin, 2017). In the present day, the people of Bangladesh prefer private transportation to public vehicles. People nowadays choose comfort and safety rather than saving money by wasting their time, and consumerists grab this opportunity. In the past days, the roads of Dhaka city were to be seen blocked with public buses and CNGs. Now the number of cars and bikes is on the rise. The cars and bikes of ride-sharing apps are seen more than public vehicles. People are choosing these services because they do not have to wait for the bus or bargain with CNG drivers. So, people are gradually preferring comfort, and they are prone to app-based transport. Even a few years ago, there were not as many advertisements for cars and bikes as we see today. Now it has been seen that an increase in the advertisements for cars and bikes everywhere. The advertisements of these apps are seen as well. Using ride-sharing services like Uber or Pathao can reduce travel costs significantly, with trips costing about 300 BDT for cars and 150 BDT for motorbikes, compared to nearly 250 BDT for CNG auto-rickshaws, which are less popular in Dhaka. Despite the ride-sharing industry being valued at approximately taka 2,200 Crore annually, it still only accounts for 23 percent of the overall transport sector in Bangladesh (Reaz, 2018). Thus, because of the consumerism policy, the ride-sharing service has been able to find a room. Since every culture has a significant connection with consumption, the culture of Bangladesh does not differ in this sense. In short, culture is a product that is made, marketed, and consumed (Nayar, 2011).

Conclusion

The study has attempted to provide a scenario of ride-sharing services in Bangladesh and the reasons behind their popularity. It is hoped that the research information provided by this study will prove useful. Though ride-sharing companies are relatively new, they are already transforming the transport industry with remarkable force and speed. Millions of users worldwide rely on these services, and many more are expected to adopt them shortly. As consumer markets grow in various regions, competition for each user is escalating. In the arena of Bangladesh, people are choosing ride-hailing services because of convenience, additional income, employment creation, comfort, and safety. The findings indicate that a strategic integration of ride-sharing services could promote urban activity in the existing transport system. These are the main reasons that commuters are becoming more reliant on this service and making it the latest substitute for traveling. But what needs to happen is the reduction of traffic congestion in the city. This may be possible if the sharing system of car riding is being proposed. The primary challenge is that our society needs a significant number of individuals to travel and move simultaneously. When fewer people share the same car for moving, it will need less number of vehicles on the roads of the city, which would create less congestion. This transition could be assisted by policymakers by considering the implementation of enthusiasm for shared rides and the enhancement of infrastructure to accommodate these services. Thus, ride-sharing could serve as a vibrant solution that has gained significant popularity with the emergence of new technological systems. The long-term impacts of ride-sharing services on urban transport dynamics should be explored in further research, identifying the potential for sustainable practices within this sector.

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