

HOW WOMEN USE SOCIAL NETWORKS TO NAVIGATE “INFORMAL” PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEMS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TSHWANE AND KAMPALA

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ABSTRACT

Public transportation in Kampala and Tshwane are akin in more ways than one, most significantly the prevalence of low-capacity, privately-owned minibus taxis which enjoy the highest modal share in the capital cities of Uganda and South Africa respectively. Minibus taxis, although popular due to necessity, are known for several challenges including lack of safety and personal security, poor mechanical condition of vehicles, difficulty in obtaining information due to the informal nature of operations, and lack of standard fare structures, among others. However, due to the absence of viable mode alternatives, women must endure these conditions to access social and economic opportunities. The objective of this study is to highlight the ways through which women demonstrate agency and use their social networks to overcome some of the challenges associated with travelling using informal public transport. Understanding the existing social systems is important to understand the core characteristics of an effective information system for informal transport but can also be harnessed or supported by the more formally organised information sources to improve the commuters' experience.

This study was conducted by collecting and synthesising travel behaviour data in both Tshwane and Kampala. Data collection was done using paper-based travel diaries, photovoice (photos/video clips and voice messages) and information horizon interviews (drawings showing information sources and recorded interviews) in a strongly qualitative-based mixed methods study. The comparative case study approach was used to analyse the cultural and legislative contexts of the cities, as well as any convergent or divergent themes in the role of social networks. The findings of this study provide an opportunity for formalisation efforts of the minibus taxi industry through the provision of accurate and reliable information using already existing and trusted channels of information to assist women with navigating the informal transport industry.