An Analysis of the Socio-Economic Aspects of the Trishaw (Three-Wheeler) Market as a Mode of Unregulated Public Transport (UPT)

Prof. Amal S Kumarage Professor of Department of Transport & Logistics Management
Senate Research Grant No: 282

1. Introduction

In today's world one of the most challenging problems that we face is providing optimal, efficient, cost effective and also environmentally friendly transport services. According to Aworemi, Salami, et al (2008), the demand for public transport depends on two factors. First, "the desire to make a particular trip and to do so by public transport. Second, the characteristics and nature of the public transport modes that are available." Providing an optimal public transport service which maximizes social welfare is a major challenge confronted with transport stakeholders in developing countries. Impoverished conditions in public transport such as bus and rail transport in developing countries have given rise to a formation of Informal Public Transport (IPT) modes. Further, increasing urbanization, population and industrial development is increasing the demand for urban transport services. As a result, demand for comfortable yet affordable public transport has become inevitably high (Hilling, 1996). Informal Public Transport (IPT) modes are widespread social phenomena in Sri Lanka and have become an integral part of the transport sector. The most common and visible IPT mode in Sri Lanka is the use of Three-Wheelers. Even though many representatives of Sri Lankan society consider it as a nuisance; congestion of traffic, noise and air pollution, association with illegal activities, and price irregularities, from the standpoint of passengers, the ready availability, flexibility in ‘door to door’ service, ease in communication and “affordability” have found the grounds for the existence of Three wheelers as a primary IPT mode.

This study examines the socio-economic aspects in Three-Wheelers from both passenger and Three-Wheeler drivers' perspective. Researchers of this study believe that it is important to understand how Three-Wheelers exist in a competitive market environment. Moreover, due to lack of scientific investigations on this trade, the researchers presents a socio-economic profile with a profound analysis of the pricing mechanism, market structures, customer preference, trip purposes, perception of three-wheeler imports, and social exclusion of three-wheelers, from functional and structural differentiation perspectives and theories- of pricing.
2. Methodology

Since there is no institution responsible for the Three-wheelers and their operations in the country is recent, there is a lack of studies on socio-economic data on Three-Wheeler drivers and passenger profiles in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the research team carried out a survey to gather empirical data from Three-Wheeler drivers and passengers in the Moratuwa Division. The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic, economic and social data from both Three-Wheeler passengers and Three-Wheeler drivers from the Moratuwa division. Beside primary data, secondary data such as Central Bank reports, Census and Statistics Reports, Vehicle registration statistics and Urban Transport Study Reports were used to understand and analyze trends. Due to time and resource constraints, the survey was administered to a sample of 200 Three-Wheeler drivers and 100 passengers recruited face to face at convenient locations, including, supermarkets, markets, three-wheeler stands, bus stands, shopping centers and near schools. These interviews were conducted in April 2008 by undergraduate students of the school of Social Services, Sri Lanka. Triangulation (interviews and observation) method was used to gather accurate data, even though field work was carried out under the direct supervision of key researchers. There is no simple and feasible way to check for potential bias in sampling, since conscious effort has been made to ensure that sample is as representative as possible. Therefore, this study should be considered as exploratory research design that is able to provide insightful and useful information.

3. Results

This study provided results in two categories; commuter's perspective and TW drivers' perspective. The study also provided a sociological and economic analysis of the findings.