

# The Development and Impact of Motorcycles as Means of Commercial Transportation in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The collapse of public intra-city transport system paved way for the rise of motorcycles as means of public transportation in Nigeria. Popularly referred to as *Okada*, motorcycles are used for public transportation in most Nigerian towns and cities. In many places, they have displaced the use of motor cars for public intra-city transportation. It is patronised by the populace because of the advantages it has over taxis and buses. Its use for commercial purposes has impacted significantly on the economy and society. Writing from an historical perspective, this paper discusses the emergence of motorcycles as means of commercial transportation, looks at the nature of *Okada* business and its impact on the economy and society. The challenges associated with its use are discussed and recommendations are given on how to regulate the activities of the *Okada* riders to make them contribute more positively to the society.

**Keywords:** development, impact, commercial, motorcycles, transportation, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is the use of motorcycles popularly called *Okada* in local Nigerian parlance for intra-city transportation. The territorial area covered by the study is Nigeria although specific examples have been drawn from Lagos, the bustling economic nerve centre of Nigeria and other cities in the country. The nature of *Okada* transport business in these places reflects the pattern in the rest of the country. It is only in few instances that one can find minor variations. Transportation is important for the development of any society. It facilitates the movement of people, allows for optimum utilisation of resources and provides access to areas hitherto inaccessible. Urban transportation in Nigeria has been largely by road. Indeed, of the trips made by vehicles, seventy percent are done through the private sector dominated public transport (Oyesiku, 2002: 28). Currently, of this figure, motorcycles as means of commercial transportation have the highest percentage in intra-city transport in Nigeria. By definition, intra-city transportation simply refers to the movement of goods and people within a city. A city in this sense is an area or town inhabited by large population of people such as Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Port Harcourt and Calabar, to mention just a few. Intra-city transport is an important element necessary for development in any rapidly urbanising city.

Several studies have been done on the use of motorcycles as means of public transportation in Nigeria. We can only review a few of these studies. Ogunsanya A. and Galtima A. (1993) did a study on the use of motorcycle as means of public passenger traffic in Yola town, Adamawa State. The study identified economic depression and inadequate transport facilities as some of the factors that gave rise to the use of motorcycles as means of public transportation in Nigeria (Ogunsanya and Galtima, 1993: 190). In a similar manner, Adesanya A. (1998) focussed on the evolution of motorcycles for public transportation in Ibadan. He looked at the socio-economic profiles of motorcycle operators, the characteristics of public motorcycles operations and the impact of motor bikes on passengers especially in terms of fares and safety. Another writer, Fasakin also did a study on the factors affecting the daily profits of commercial motorcycle operators in Akure, the capital of Ondo State, South West Nigeria (Fasakin, 2001: 63-69). Further more, Kayode Oyesiku, dealt with the subject of public transportation in his Inaugural Lecture. Among other issues, he looked at the rise in the use of *Okada* for public transportation in Nigeria pointing out that the decrease in the supply of new vehicles of all types since the 1970s contributed to the emergence of motorcycles for commercial transportation (Oyesiku, 2002: 29).

A common feature to the existing studies on commercial motorcycles transport system in Nigeria is the non-historical approach adopted by the various writers. This is where this paper differs from previous studies. We are looking at motorcycle transportation from the historical perspective. This paper attempts to trace the origin, development and impact of motorcycles as means of public transportation in Nigeria. Our central concern is to find out the historic role of commercial motorcycles in the development of the society. In so doing, we shall try to answer the following questions: What factors gave rise to the use of motorcycles for commercial transportation in Nigeria? What is the nature of the *Okada* transport business? What has been the impact on the economy and society?

## 2. Before the coming of commercial motorcycle operation

Before the emergence of motorcycles for commercial transportation, intra-city transport in most Nigerian cities was essentially through the use of taxis and medium sized buses. In big cities like Lagos, Ibadan and others, transportation involved the use of vehicles like *molue*, *Bolekaja* (wooden lorries used for carrying goods and passengers), *kabukabu* (private cars used for commercial transport), taxis and mini buses. These modes were operated by private individuals. In Lagos, in addition to privately operated services, there was a municipal bus transport service operated by the government. The other means of public transport was the railway. The railway was developed to convey people from one point to the other. Although the use of motorcycles had existed since the colonial days in Nigeria, they were used only as private means of transportation. There is no evidence that motorcycles were used for commercial purposes before the 1970s.

From the 1980s, intra-city transport system in the country experienced a deterioration. This was as a result of the obvious inadequacies of the mass transit system due to an upsurge in the population of most cities. For instance, the population of Lagos went up from 1,499,200 in 1973 to 3,790,000 in 1980, that of Ibadan from 928,646 to 1,001,000; Kaduna 150,000 to 237,000 and Port Harcourt from 231,000 to 477,199, all within the same period of 1973 to 1980 (Author's compilation from Gadonu, et al, 1979 and Adeniji, 1981). Whereas population was increasing, the number of vehicles used for public transportation was decreasing. In 1984, the number of vehicles registered for public transportation in Nigeria was about 165,000. Four years later, this figure dropped to about 100,000 vehicles. The figures for Lagos are particularly revealing. About 16,500 new vehicles were registered for public transportation in 1983 but the figure reduced to about 1,500 in 1988 amidst a rapidly growing population and the growing need for public transportation (Ikeano and Akinrolabu, 1991:25). The table placed at the end of this paper clearly shows the trend in the registration of new vehicles for commercial operations in Lagos between 1980 and 1987. From the table, we can see the progressive decline in the number of vehicles registered for public registration between 1980 and 1987. It is interesting to note that the *Molue* (Maul him) and *Danfo* (Kombi buses) dominated intra-city commuter transport system in Lagos in the 1980s. The number of these buses, however, also declined steadily over time as shown in the number of newly registered buses in that table. This picture is replicated across the major cities of the country.

A major factor that was responsible for the decline in the number of commercial vehicles in Nigeria since 1980 was the high cost of procuring the vehicles. The economic depression in Nigeria in the early 1980s resulted in a sharp increase in the prices of basic commodities including automobiles. As a result of this, many motor transport operators could no longer afford to invest in the procurement of new vehicles. Some of the operators resorted to the use of imported second hand vehicles known as *Tokunbo* which were equally expensive and in some cases unserviceable. The economic depression of the 1980s thus set the stage for the introduction of an affordable means of intra-city transport. This was found in the use of motorcycles.

## 3. The emergence of commercial motorcycle operations

In Nigeria, the use of motorcycles by private individuals had existed for a long time. Although many used it for private purposes, a few made use of it to transport farm produce and to hawk their goods like bread, medicines, newspapers etc. The commercial use of motorcycles began in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State of Nigeria in the early 1970s. Its use for commercial services grew after the nationwide retrenchment of civil servants in 1975/76 (Adesanya, 1998: 26). Apart from Calabar, documentary evidence also shows that motorcycles were first introduced

for public transport in the northern Nigerian town of Yola in 1970 (Ogunsanya and Galtima, 1993: 194). By the 1980s, the use of motorcycles for public transportation had gradually spread to other parts of Nigeria.

A combination of factors can be identified as responsible for the use of motorcycles as means of intra-city transport in Nigeria. One important factor was the rapid rate of urbanisation in the face of inadequate means of transportation. In Lagos for example, as the city expanded in the direction of Oko-Oba, Agbado, Abule Egba, Ikotun, Egbe, Ipaja and other areas, it was often difficult to get the conventional means of transportation to move people into and out of these areas. Commuters often struggled at peak periods for commercial vehicles to convey them in or out of these areas (Ikeano, 1991:24). The inadequacy of the transport system was handled with the emergence of motorcycles for commercial purposes on the streets of Lagos.

Another factor that contributed to the emergence of motorcycles for commercial transportation in Nigeria was the high rate of unemployment prevalent in the country in the 1980s. This was a fall-out of the downturn in the Nigerian economy at this period. As part of its efforts to manage the economic problems of the time, the civilian government under Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) introduced severe austerity measures which resulted in the mass sack of workers at the federal and state levels between 1981 and 1983. The General Muhammad Buhari military regime that succeeded the Shagari administration in 1983 also pursued a policy of staff rationalisation in the civil service. For example, in July 1985, more than 6,000 federal workers were sacked across the nation (Oladejo and Omotunde, 1985:17). Those who lost their jobs desperately sought for employment and many found a way out by employing themselves in the motorcycle commercial business.

Of the government measures to combat the economic crisis of the time, the one that had the most far-reaching effect on the populace was the Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) introduced by the General Ibrahim Badamosi administration in 1986. SAP brought untold harsh on the people; it compounded the woes of the people by reducing the earning powers of the average Nigerians. The list of the jobless and the unemployed swelled as a result of the effects of SAP. The policy led to the collapse of many companies. Even companies that did not fold up could not operate in full capacity. Particularly affected were the textile and other manufacturing companies operating in the country. Many of the textile industries had employed large number of people within the Lagos industrial axis in the 1970s and 80s. In the face of SAP, many of the workers were laid off. It was this group of unemployed and jobless people that now pioneered the commercial motorcycle business in Lagos.

Another way in which SAP affected the economy was that it led to high inflation. The inflation affected the cost of imported goods including automobiles. This made it difficult for transporters to replace their aging vehicles with new ones. In order to solve the transport problem, the government introduced a Mass Transit Programme at both the state and federal levels, but it failed to solve the intra-city transport problem. The government vehicles were grossly inadequate for the population that needed their services. (Awowede, 1997: 45). In the Lagos area, for example, the decrease in the supply of commercial vehicles for public transportation dates to the late 1970s. Oyesiku contended that in relation to population growth, the level of motorisation per capita rose from 248 in 1980 to 454 in 1995. The implication of this is that as the population grew rapidly and activities got more diversified, especially in Lagos, the vehicle fleet decreased thus necessitating the need for other means of commuter transportation. (Oyesiku, 2002: 29). The other means of transportation that emerged to fill the gap was the motorcycle transportation system.

Another important factor that contributed to the growth of *Okada* business in Nigeria was the relative lucrative nature of the business. Generally, the *Okada* operators derive reasonable profit from their operations. Most of the operators interviewed claimed that they make an average of about N1,000.00 to N3,000.00 on a daily basis after satisfying all expenses (Personal Communication with Mr. Raphael Adeyeye, *Okada* Rider, on 24 June, 2011). The lucrative nature of the business had made motorcycle transport business to grow into a big industry in the country.

The advantage which motorcycles has over other transport modes can also be said to have accounted for its use for commercial transportation and the widespread nature of the *Okada* business. One of these advantages is that it reaches areas where commercial vehicles may not reach due to bad road. There is no road that is too narrow and there is no area too remote for motorcycles to reach. Besides, unlike motor cars, they are able to take passengers to their door steps. Also they are faster and save time than other means of transportation. They are capable of manoeuvring their way through traffic congestion and they do not stop like commercial vehicles at bus stops to pick passengers. This makes it a very fast means of transport. Beyond all these, it is cheaper to maintain a motorcycle than

a taxi or bus. The spare parts are cheaper and readily available than those of motor cars or buses. Above all, motorcycles consume less fuel than motor vehicles (Olaore, 2011: 37-38). Given all these advantages over other means of transportation, we can understand why passengers prefer to use motorcycles rather than other means of transportation. We can also appreciate why businessmen invest in its operations for intra-city transport. While the above combination of factors contributed to the emergence and widespread use of motorcycles for commercial transportation in Nigeria, the same factors have helped to sustain its operations over the years.

#### 4. The nature of commercial motorcycle transport

The commercial motorcycle business has grown into a major business concern in Nigeria and it is a fairly well organised business with considerable patronage. Motorcycles ply virtually every route including the highways until the recent effort by some state governments to restrict their operations. In Lagos State, for example, *Okada* could be found plying major roads in Epe, Ikorodu, Badagry, Mushin, Oshodi, Alimosho, Ikeja, Victoria Island, Obalende, Surulere and other areas of the city. They cover distances ranging from a few metres to a distance as far as 20 kilometres. They are as effective in the urban centres as well as in the rural suburbs.

The availability and flexible pricing makes the motorcycle affordable to the vast majority of the people that utilise it as a means of commuter transportation. It could reach any nook and cranny of the towns and cities at a price often considered reasonable by the commuters. The fares charged by the commercial motorcyclist range from N50.00 for a short distance to about N500.00 for long distance; in some cases, it could be higher. But it is relatively cheaper and faster than conventional taxi cabs. Using Lagos as an example, a ride from Okokomaiko in Ojoo Local Government area to Mile Two in Amuwo Odofin could cost about N300 to N400. However, the same distance cost N100 by conventional bus transportation while a taxi ride will cost about N1,500.00. A conventional taxi will also charge about N5000.00 for a trip from Agege to Victoria Island, but the *Okada* could charge about N2000.00 for the same trip. The advantage which the commuter derives from this is the time saved due to traffic congestion. A normal bus ride from Agege to Victoria Island could take about three hours whereas the *Okada* will make the same trip in about 1 hour, 30 minutes regardless of the traffic situation (Personal Communication with Mr. Olusola Falana, An *Okada* Rider, 24 June, 2011). The advantage of flexibility, speed and relative cheapness of *Okada* transport service is not something confined to Lagos alone but is an experience shared in other parts of the country where the service is used.

The brand of motorcycle used in Nigeria for public transportation include the following: Bajaj, Jincheng, Sinoki, Haojue, Liponsupra, Susuki, Kawasaki, Honda, Yamaha and K-90. When commercial motorcycle transportation began, K-90 was the brand that was most commonly used. Later, Susuki came into general use. Currently, the most common motorcycle being used for public transportation is called Bajaj. It is said to be durable and consumes low fuel (Personal Communication with Mr. Salisu Omidiran, Secretary of MOALS, Lagos, 16 August, 2011). It is capable of plying rough roads and could conveniently carry two passengers simultaneously, thereby bringing in more profit for the owner.

Most of the brands of motorcycles mentioned above are imported into Nigeria from Asia. There are also assembly plants that assemble and sell motorcycles locally. These companies include Yamaha Manufacturing (Nig.) Limited, Boulous Enterprises, Honda Manufacturing (Nig.) Limited and R.T. Briscoe (Adesanya, 1998:49). The price of motorcycle depends on whether it is new or fairly used. For example, a new Bajaj motor bike goes for between N120,000 and N130,000 while a brand like Jincheng goes for N80,000 (Olaore, 2011: 34-35). The price of a fairly used motorcycle depends on its brand and state.

Over the years, commercial motorcycle operators have organised themselves into various unions at the state and national level. It is compulsory for anyone willing to operate as a commercial motorcyclist to register with any of the affiliated associations of the transport unions. The existing associations are the Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Riders Association of Nigeria (ACOMORAN), Motorcycle Owners and Riders Association (ANACOWA) and in the case of Lagos, there is also the Motorcycle Operators Association of Lagos State known as MOALS. (Personal Communication with Mr. Opeoluwa Rasaki, an *Okada* Rider, 24 June, 2011). ANACOWA is an affiliate of Road Transport Employers' Association of Nigeria (RTEAN).

The motorcycle transport associations performed various functions ranging from the protection of the welfare of members to the enforcement and regulation of the activities of motorcycle operators. They also serve in disseminating information from the government to their members. They organise activities to enlighten their members on government regulations and traffic rules (Olaore, 2011: 29). They equally assist members financially in raising funds to remain in business. In addition to this, they ensure that law enforcement agents such as the Police and Federal Road Safety Corp (FRSC) do not take undue advantage of their erring members. Above all, the associations also check the conduct of illegal riders who often infiltrate the business with the aim of perpetrating criminal activities. This is usually achieved through the issuance of identity cards and vests to registered members of the association.

Generally, there is hardly any state in the country where motorcycle operators are not operating. They are readily available at their various parks and major areas within the towns and cities and even in the suburban areas. Needless to say, they also find patronage among people from all walks of life especially the youth who are eager to get to their destinations with minimal delay and waste of time. Men and women alike patronise the *Okada* and are used to the *modus operandi* of the operators.

Like other business endeavour or occupation, the commercial motorcycle business also has its own peculiar challenges. According to operators of the *Okada* business, some of the challenges they face are health related. For example, an *Okada* rider operates under harsh weather condition which exposes him to various illnesses. No wonder, some of them indulge in taking alcohol, popularly called *paraga* in order to reduce the effect of the direct cold they are often exposed to as they operate in the early hours of the morning. Apart from health problem, there is also the issue of social stigmatisation from members of the public because people generally look down on *Okada* riders. They are seen as people who cannot get better jobs in the society (Personal Communication with Mr. Samuel Oladotun, an *Okada* rider, 27 June, 2011).

Another challenge confronting the *Okada* riders or operators is the high cost of setting up the business. A prospective businessman willing to go into *Okada* business would need between N100,000 and N180,000 to start the business. This includes the cost of purchasing a motorcycle (depending on the brand), the cost of registering or licensing it and registration with the riders' or owners' association. Given the high cost of buying a motorcycle, it is often difficult for new comers to raise sufficient fund to start *Okada* business. To deal with this problem, various solutions have been devised. For example, someone who is a rider but not yet an owner may save part of his daily income and from that purchase his own motorcycle. Another way of acquiring a bike is for a wealthy individual to sell motorcycle to a would-be operator on hire purchase. By this arrangement, an operator is allowed to own a motorcycle which he could use for business with the understanding of paying for it in instalments until the cost of the motor bike is fully off-set (Personal Communication with Mr. Temitope Atanda, an *Okada* operator, 12 August, 2011). Such a buyer, however would be required to provide someone to serve as his guarantor. In addition, the original documents of the motor bike will not be released to him until he has fully paid his debt. Apart from this, operators of motorcycles could also become owners by borrowing money from micro finance banks, cooperative societies, family members and friends (Olaore, 2011: 33). With these arrangements, many young and unemployed people have been able to acquire their own motorcycle. However, lucrative as the *Okada* business is, riders and operators are confronted with many several problems.

## 5. Problems of commercial motorcycle operations

Critics of the *Okada* business maintain that the expansion in the business has increased the number of road accidents in the country. This has led to the loss of lives and in many cases permanent disabilities to victims. For example, in 1989 about 144 cases of *Okada* accident were reported in Lagos State (Ndiribe, 2009). In 1999, 699 cases of *Okada* accidents were reported, representing 21.06 percent of the total accidents in Lagos State for that year (Olagunju, 2001: 26). This, no doubt, is also the picture in other states across the country. Over the years, accidents involving *Okada* riders have kept on increasing in direct proportion to the increase in the number of motorcycles operating for commercial purposes. Recklessness and refusal to comply with traffic rules have been largely responsible for these accidents.

*Okada* riders are also reported to constitute nuisance on the highways since many of the riders do not obey traffic rules. Aside from this, their members are also reported to be extremely violent, resorting to jungle justice to get easy passage of their erring members whenever the situation warrants (Nnadozie, 2009: 26).

Observers have suggested ways of addressing some of the problems and challenges associated with the use of motorcycle for commercial transportation in Nigeria. Some have suggested stiff measure such as an outright ban of *Okada* as a means of public transportation. Thus, the Cross River State government banned its use on November 22, 2009. The Lagos State government also limited its use in some areas of the city to certain hours of the day. But less stiff measures have also been suggested and these include the restriction of *Okada* operations to roads on which the traffic is not so heavy and strict enforcement of traffic regulation on the riders. The thinking is that in doing so, accidents would be reduced on the roads. There is also the view that those who use motorcycles for commercial purposes should be trained on the rules and regulations governing its use. In this regard, the Nigerian Highway Code needs to be updated to cover the operations of the *Okada* riders. The government must also ensure that only riders who pass riding test are allowed to operate on the road. At the moment, there are many motorcycle riders who use the road without valid license. Also, government must strictly enforce the laws regulating public transportation in the country. We need to mention in particular, the regulation on the use of crash elements by motorcycles riders. While serious efforts are being made to enforce this regulation in Lagos, the situation is not exactly so in other states of the Federation; this has to change. Enforcement of traffic rules and regulation must be taken seriously across all the states of the country by the relevant government agencies.

Finally, the government needs to harmonise the operations of the different transport modes for greater efficiency and benefit to the society and economy. At the moment, the situation appears chaotic as each transport mode is “doing it own thing”. An ideal situation is one in which each transport mode works to complement the work of the other, rather than engaging in unhealthy and fierce competition as is currently the situation. Government must work towards achieving the ideal situation.

## 6. The Impact

In spite of all the aforementioned problems and challenges, *Okada* business has impacted significantly on the Nigerian economy and society in many ways. One important positive impact is the provision of employment for millions of unemployed people. *Okada* business has empowered many Nigerians economically (Personal Communication with Mr. Oyeyemi Kazeem on 4 July, 2011). Indeed, many unemployed youths and retired people have found gainful engagement in the commercial motorcycle business. Some of those who are employed in government service still engage in *Okada* business either as owners or riders in order to augment their regular income with whatever they are able to make from *Okada* business.

Some state governments in the country have also used motorcycles as poverty alleviation scheme by procuring and distributing motorcycles to the unemployed in their states as part of poverty eradication programme. A good example is that of Oyo State where the then governor of the state, Chief Alao Akala (2007-2011) bought and distributed motorcycles to various beneficiaries during one of his visits to the local governments in the State in 2009. Also in 2005, the Borno State Government procured and distributed 5000 motorcycles to its citizens to boost public transportation and alleviate poverty (Itodo, 2005:1).

Lack of adequate statistics will not enable us to state the actual number of people engaged in commercial motorcycle business in Nigeria. It is, however, estimated that they are in hundreds of thousands. Apart from those directly engaged in riding the bikes, many people are into the sale of different brands of motorcycles and the sale of bike spare parts. In addition to this, we have a good number of people engaged in the business of motorcycle repairs and maintenance. When considered together, it will be discovered that the economic impact of *Okada* business on the society cannot be over-emphasised. Indeed, the view has been expressed that should government ban the operations of commercial motorcycles, it will lead to an increase in crime rate in the society. This is because many young people who would have been involved in criminal activities in the society are currently employed in the commercial motorcycle business.

Commercial motorcycle operators have also contributed to government revenue generation. Government derives a lot of revenue from money paid for plate numbers and licenses by motorcycle operators. Although we do

not have actual figures of the revenue from this source, we can say that given the sheer number of motorcycles operating for commercial purposes in the country, the revenue to the government must run into billions of naira. This is in addition to the sales of motorcycles and motorcycle spare parts estimated to be about N10 billion per annum.

Furthermore, 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 impregnable by conventional means of transportation. For example, there were some rural suburbs and streets in Lagos that conventional commercial buses and taxis could not reach, such as Ayobo in Ipaja area of Alimoso Local Government, Ajara area in Badagry and Aboru area in Iyana Ipaja, to mention just a few. The *Okada* has now provided a means of transportation for commuters in these areas. In Ogun State, the interior of Mowe and Ibafo town has been opened up by the use of *Okada*.

Despite the positive impact of the use of motorcycles for commercial transportation highlighted above, it has a few negative impacts as well. The greatest perhaps is the high rate of motorcycle-related accidents recorded daily across the country. It is said that more than half of those killed in accidents involving all vehicles are motorcycle riders and passengers. In Lagos State alone, the FRSC reported that 10,471 motorcycle accidents were recorded in the last ten years (<http://www.nigeriannewsworld.com>. Assessed 30 April, 2011). High rate of accidents is attributable to lack of training and traffic education among motorcycle operators, impatience on the part of the bike riders, flagrant disregard for traffic rules and regulations, among other factors.

Another negative effect of the use of motorcycle for commercial transportation is its use for criminal acts. It is estimated that more than seventy percent of crimes committed in Lagos are traceable to armed bandits operating with motorcycles (<http://www.nigeriannewsworld.com>. Assessed 2 July, 2011). The picture is the same in other towns and cities across the country. Such criminal activities include snatching of personal effects like bags, phones; abduction and killing including raping of innocent people. People of questionable character are among the bike operators. When an unsuspecting passenger stops a rider, a criminally-minded rider could take the passenger to spots where she could be raped or robbed. Such criminal activities are usually perpetuated in the early hours of the morning or late at night. This is the reason why in some places, authorities have banned the operation of commercial motorcycles before 6.00am and after 8.00pm.

Another effect of the increase in the use of motorcycles for commercial purposes is the negative environmental impact on the society. The emission from bikes is adding to the pollution of the environment. Scientists still need to conduct research to measure the actual effect of this pollution. But the view has been expressed that increase in the cases of cancer and terminal diseases in the country are not unrelated to the high pollution of the Nigerian environment. The life expectancy in Nigeria is put at 46/47years compared to over 70years in Britain and America and even over 80years in Canada. These Western societies are doing a lot to control environmental pollution. In Nigeria, the pollution of the environment is one of the reasons for this low life expectancy. The country has been losing able-bodied men and women and this is not good for the economy because it means the country is depleting its source of labour. Suffice it to say that the pattern globally nowadays is to reduce environmental pollution by all means. Daily increase in the number of commercial motorcycles in Nigeria does not help in achieving this objective.

Furthermore, evidence from fieldwork shows that it is now generally difficult for artisans to find people who are willing to learn their trade. From bricklayers and plumbers to mechanics and carpenters, the story is the same. Young people are no longer ready to endure the patience of learning under any master. They prefer to work as *Okada* riders where they can make between N1,000 and N1,500 a day. If the trend continues, a time may come that some of these trades – plumbing, carpentry, painting etc may die due to the difficulty of getting successors for the present crop of people in the trade. This is a negative impact indeed on the Nigerian economy and society.

Finally, the point must be made that *Okada* business is affecting the indigenous manufacturing sector of the Nigerian economy in a subtle negative way. *Okada* business is a service industry, not a manufacturing or production sector of the economy. Though its important contribution to the economy is acknowledged, the point must be made that industrialisation has a vital role to play in growing an economy. When a country is industrialised, it is able to sell its manufactured products both in the local and international markets to get foreign exchange. This strengthens the country's economy. *Okada* business is not doing this for Nigeria's economy because the country is not producing the

motorcycles. They are only being assembled in the country. What the *Okada* business is therefore, doing for the Nigerian economy is providing a big market for the companies that are manufacturing the motorcycles in Asia. The Nigerian economy has become a good market for motorcycles manufacturing companies in Asia and this is not good for the indigenous economy. There is, therefore, the need the government to take a serious look at the deeper economic implications of *Okada* business in the country. Apart from this, the time has come for the government to take a holistic look at the business and strengthen the overall strategy of regulating the conduct of the operators of the business.

## 7. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it has been established that several factors contributed to the emergence and proliferation of the motorcycle as a means of intra-city transport in Nigeria. One of these factors was the rapid rate of urbanisation in the country in the post civil war period. Coupled with this, was the collapse and failure of the public mass transit system in the country in the early 1980s and 90s. In addition to this, the national economic downturn since the 80s further encouraged people to seek alternative means of survival and commercial motorcycle venture readily offered such opportunity. The *Okada* business has contributed both positively and negatively to the Nigerian economy and society. The time has come for the government at all levels to take a holistic look at the business with a view to strengthening the overall strategy of regulating the conduct of the operators of the business. Lastly, government needs to take a serious look at the deeper economic implications of the business with a view to ensuring that the country does not just become a dumping ground for bike manufacturers in Asia but that the indigenous Nigerian economy makes the best of the international trade relationship.

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**NEWLY REGISTERED VEHICLES IN LAGOS, 1980-1987**

Category	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Taxis	3,575	5726	7125	2716	2205	3713	2841	1459
Car Hire Services	398	577	514	690	1028	2046	2091	2426
Danfo	6,190	6085	3625	1923	337	684	739	363
Molue/Bolekaja	2,691	555	347	376	331	572	456	294
Mini bus	357	137	89	51	113	195	264	160
Staff Buses	273	429	242	66	149	312	357	308
Inter State	2,995	427	131	79	68	296	200	174
General	12	365	105	35	46	90	227	271
<b>Total</b>	<b>16491</b>	<b>14301</b>	<b>12,178</b>	<b>5936</b>	<b>4277</b>	<b>7908</b>	<b>7175</b>	<b>5455</b>

Source: Lagos State Ministry of Transportation, adapted from Ngozi Ikeano with Fola Akinrolabu, "Transportation: Commuters tell Story of Woes" *Daily Times*, February 8, 1991, 25. [The total column was computed by the author]

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