

BEYOND THE RIDE: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES OF TUK-TUK SERVICE PROVIDERS IN A DYNAMIC TOURISM ENVIRONMENT WITH REFERENCE TO BENTOTA, SRI LANKA

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1. Introduction

Transportation and tourism have had a mutualistic relationship, and tuk-tuks offer visitors an intuitive way to travel around, and their compact size and flexibility make them suitable for navigating narrow traffic areas. Based on the preliminary survey, even while visitors frequently express pleasure with the services rendered by tuk-tuk drivers, there is still a significant gap in research regarding the challenges these drivers encounter in offering service to clients.

2. Research Methodology

This qualitative, exploratory case study enables tuk-tuk drivers of Bentota to express subjective experiences and explore the challenges in the context of a tourism-driven economy. A total of 13 tuk-tuk drivers in Bentota were selected to reach data saturation using purposive sampling, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The data were thematically analyzed by coding and finding patterns to identify major challenges.

3. Findings and Discussion

This study explores operational, external, and financial challenges like language barriers, road infrastructure problems, rising maintenance costs, seasonality, and competition from ride-hailing apps interrupting daily operations. Ride-hailing platforms and hotel rebranding, which gained much strength after COVID-19, are riskier than the already existing challenges. Some of the viable solutions suggested by tuk-tuk drivers in overcoming their challenges. This is the damage to the image, both regarding tourists' confidence in drivers. It displays the necessity for an equal tourism landscape for all, and it is useful to the policymakers and the communities for many beneficial lessons.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The study concludes by emphasizing that solving challenges faced by tuk-tuk drivers is vital, both in terms of a sustainable livelihood and service quality to the tourists. It is reassuring to see the openness of the drivers regarding solutions like standardized communication, advocacy for maintenance, and better partnerships with the hospitality sector. Long-term implications of the solutions suggested, and assessment of changing dynamics of the tuk-tuk services as the tourism industry evolves could be further pursued in future research.

Keywords: Bentota, Challenges, Operational challenges, Tourist transportation, Tuk-tuk service providers