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COMMUTERS AND TRAFFIC OFFICIALS PERCEPTION ON TAXI DRIVERS DRESS CODE POLICY IN ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of clothing is functional; clothing performs social, protective and cultural functions. It gives a non-verbal communication on the social and marital status, occupation, ethnic, political or religious affiliation of an individual or group of people. Formal dress code is a term for clothing suitable for formal events. Studies revealed that formal dress codes creates a business focused environment and increases professional behaviour at office among co-workers and clients. This study was designed to investigate the societal perception on introducing formal dressing for taxi drivers in Abeokuta metropolis. The population of the study consists of adults who reside in Abeokuta. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 150 participants (passengers and Vehicle Inspector/Road Safety/Police/Traffic/ Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Corp, TRACE officials). The participants were selected from bus parks, and offices. The data was collected through the use of questionnaire. The result revealed that, majority of the participants were favorably disposed to the use of formal dressing by taxi drivers, as this would boost their productivity, increase customers' patronage, improves their morals and add decorum to the profession.

Keywords: Taxi, drivers, commuters, Vehicle inspector, dress code, policy

INTRODUCTION

Dressing is an aspect of human physical appearance which has social significance. All societies have dress codes most of which are unwritten, but understood by members of the society. Dress codes give a non-verbal communication on the person's social class, income, occupation, ethnic, religious affiliation, attitude, marital status, cultural identity, sexual availability, sexual orientation, establishing, maintaining or identifying social norms (Amubode, 2009; Webb-Lupo and Lester, (1987), Moris, (1977) and Ehusani, 2011). Dress code is a set of rules or guidelines regarding the manner of dress

acceptable in a work place (Collins, 2003). Dress code is a set of standards that companies develop to help provide employees with guidance about what is appropriate to wear to work. Dress code ranges from formal to casual. The formality of the work place dress code is normally determined by the amount of interaction employees have with customers (Heathfield, 2012).

Clothing plays a role in impression formation, perception and expectations (Turner-Bowker, 2001). In a study carried out by Rehman, Nietert, Cope and Kilpatrick, (2005), to determine whether the way a doc-

tor dressed was an important factor in the degree of trust and confidence among patients and visitors in the waiting room, the result revealed that patients and visitors trust was significantly associated with preference for professional dress.

Similarly, in a regional study conducted by Mangum, Garrison, Lind, Thackeray and Wyatt, (1991) about professional image inherent in different styles of nurses' uniform by patients, nurses and administrators; result showed that patients rated some uniform significantly different for professional image than nurses and administrators. There was a general agreement among all the respondents on the nurses they would most like to have care for them (nurses dress with stethoscope) and nurses they would least like to care for them (nurses dressed in white pants with coloured top). Consequently, doctors/ nurses uniform tended to influence patients satisfaction of medical care received.

Shao, Baker, and Wagner, (2004), examined the meaning of contact employee dress cues in commercial service settings. They conducted an experiment to test the effects of the appropriateness of service personnel dress on customer expectations of a firm's service quality and intent to purchase banking services; and also explore the moderating effects of involvement and customer gender on the aforementioned relationships. Results showed that appropriate (vs. inappropriate) dress resulted in higher service quality expectations and purchase intent. When customers/clients enter a business environment and the attire reflects professionalism, they are more likely to respond positively. On the other hand, if they perceive sloppiness or unprofessional, they are likely to have conscious/unconscious

thought about the quality of products or services.

Commercial vehicles such as buses and taxis are the main public transportation in many countries. The taxi industry usually provides 24 hours service everyday with most drivers having 12 hours shift, (Mayhew, 2000). The labour force is overwhelming male in cities, although, there is an increased proportion of female in smaller country towns (Stenning, 1996, Keats dale Pty, 1995). Some taxi drivers own their taxis, others lease the cab from their owners, while some companies own fleets of taxis and hire casual drivers and many operate on a pay-in-basis with drivers paying a pre-set amount to owners for a shift - sometimes including fuel cost (Rothengatter, 1999; Dalziel and Job, 1997; Stenning, 1996). Employee drivers can be hired on a permanent, casual or irregular basis.

Over 30 years of personal observation and face to face interview with some taxi drivers reveals that taxi driving in Abeokuta is a male profession and most of the drivers have little or no formal education. Some of the drivers own their cabs while others lease the cabs from their owners and make a daily delivery of an agreed amount. The owner of the taxi is responsible for the servicing, repair and replacement of worn out parts of the cab. The job task are the same. However, various research findings have identified various risk factors and behaviours of commercial drivers such as fatigue, falling asleep, excessive speed and driving under the influence of alcohol (Peden, Scurfield and Sleet, 2004; Braudaleone and Daily, 1950; and Eirlich, Friedman and Ritcher, 2005).

Value of Dress Code on Performance in a Work Place

The image a business project is vital to its success. Formal dress code creates a business environment; increases credibility; increases professional behaviour at the office among co-workers and clients, ability to maintain a professional working environment; less inappropriate behaviour by workers in an organization, generally creates a positive first impression of being well or capable; perception of increases in productivity and perception of intelligence (Egodigwe, 2003; Sikes, 2002 and Lee, 1998). The way one looks directly affects the way he thinks, feels and acts. When one dresses down, he sits down, his manners break down, begins to feel down and he is not effective (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2000). Goodes, (2000: 4), states the findings of research Psychologist Magee that "continually relaxed dress leads to relaxed manners, relaxed morals and relaxed productivity, and leads to a decrease in company loyalty and increase in tardiness". Dolbow, (2000) informed that casual dress in office work place causes casual attitudes and lack of office decorum. Despite the various benefits of formal dress code in a work place, there are some negative effects, these include: employees may be viewed as being too superior by clients or others, formal dresses like suits are expensive to purchase and may be inappropriate in some business settings when dealing with customers; ties and other professional attire may be uncomfortable to wear ((Egodigwe, 2003; Sikes, 2002 and Lee, 1998). Consequently, the kind of occupation an individual is involved in may limit one to a particular form of dressing. Nevertheless, taxi drivers are commercial ambassadors of the city because they are the first person a visitor meets at bus stations, and they should dress smartly

to give a professional image to people who live, visit or bring business to Abeokuta.

Personal observation, experience and interview with road users, customers and traffic/ vehicle inspector/ officials reveal that commercial drivers especially taxi drivers in Abeokuta metropolis have lost their credibility. These drivers have a culture of casual dressing, dirty, they have non-challant attitudes towards their appearance/dressing, passengers and other road users, drive carelessly, do not observe traffic/road signs, highly impatient, rude, possess either expired driving license or have no driving license, possess expired vehicle license, dress shabbily, and lack respect.

Creating Dress Code Policy for Commercial Drivers

According to Columbia Broadcasting System, CBS News, (2010), New York government amended her existing regulations governing a driver's appearance to insist on a professional appearance. This rule requires a driver to be clean and neat in dress and prohibits specific clothing from being worn by taxi drivers, such include: tank tops, underwear, swim wear etc. Similarly, British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC News, (2010) informed that taxi drivers in Wirral have been banned from wearing track suits, flip-flops, or dirty clothing under new dress code introduced by the council. The council wants a professional image for the people who live, visit or bring business to England. Clothing that reveals too much cleavage, back, chest, feet, stomach or underwear; clothing that has words, terms or pictures that may be offensive to others is unacceptable and is not appropriate for a place of business.

In creating an appropriate dress code policy

for commercial drivers, many components have to be examined. These include: customers' expectations, taxi drivers' position, acceptable attire, unacceptable attire, disciplinary measures on the consequences of wearing unacceptable attire, employee's health, safety and legal issues. There should be input from the stakeholders, and consumers for a draft template as sample policy which may need modification. It is important to create a fair and concise policy that does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, religion, disability or any other protected class (Ogrin, 2010). There should be a list of what is appropriate and inappropriate attire for men and women. This should include explicit detail on clothing and an outline of how the dress code policy will be enforced through disciplinary measures (Ogrin, 2010). Creation of a clear dress code policy for commercial drivers especially taxi-drivers in Abeokuta metropolis will prevent inappropriate attire at work and project a good image of the profession.

Problem statement

Aggressive driving behaviors are extremely problematic in many countries (Miles and Johnson, 2003, Ellison, P A, Govern, J M, Petri, H L, Figler, M H, 1995). Few literatures exist on the perception of clients/customers of professional dress code on company's image or customers/ clients' satisfaction. No study attempted to examine introducing professional dress code for commercial drivers in Abeokuta. In Oyo State, the Chairman of the Caretaker Committee of National Union of Road Transport Workers- NURTW (Alhaji, Taofeek Oyerinde) has determined to eradicate thuggery at various bus stations. He disclosed that Oyo NURTW was currently undergoing a re-branding process, and it is now mandatory under the new regime for com-

mercial drivers in the state to comply with the dress code being worked out. According to him, this was aimed at portraying the transport members as responsible gentlemen. He also informed that it is now a serious offence for Oyo NURTW members to engage in the consumption of illicit drinks otherwise known as *paraga* or such other dangerous intoxicants while on the steering wheel, (Obembe, 2012). Similarly, in 2009, the Government of Srinagar directed the drivers of commercial vehicles in the Srinagar City to strictly adhere to the dress code—Khaki uniform and name plate. The objective of the dress code was to identify and infuse sense of discipline among the drivers and conductors of commercial vehicles including matadors and buses. However despite passing of over three years, the Traffic Police have failed to implement the dress code policy (Akmali, 2013). The problem of this study is the indiscipline behaviour, poor value for dressing and unprofessional attitude among taxi drivers in Abeokuta.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of commuters and traffic officials on introducing dress code policy for taxi drivers in Abeokuta..

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of commuters and traffic officials on dress code policy for taxi drivers?
2. Would introduction of dress code policy improve the productivity of taxi drivers?
3. Would dress code policy improve professional driving skills of taxi drivers in Abeokuta?

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Abeokuta, Ogun State, from a sampled population of 150 respondents; these were selected using purposive sampling technique (50 commuters, 25 Vehicle Inspector Officials, 25 Road Safety Officials, 25 Police men and 25 TRACE Officials). The total population of the participants excluding the commuters (number cannot be determined) is 318. This include 42 Vehicle Inspector Officials, 49 Road Safety Officials, 45 TRACE Officials and 182 Police men). The respondents were selected from bus parks and their offices within Adatan and Asero garage, Fajol, Alogi, Somorin, Odo-eran, Elewe-eran and Camp. Self constructed structured questionnaire on a scale of five options was used to gather information. A pilot study was conducted to validate the self constructed instrument which aids the modification of ambiguous questions. The questionnaire was validated using test retest method within a period of two weeks with a reliability coefficient of 0.68. Scores were assigned based on the level of favour to each statement of the questionnaire (Strongly Favoured, Favoured, Strongly Disfavoured, Disfavoured and Neutral). The data was analysed using descriptive statistics- the Mean Perception Score. The decision rule for data analysis was based on the Mean Score using the below classification:

4.5- 5.0 = Strongly Favoured

3.5- 4.44 = Favoured

2.5- 3.44 = Strongly Disfavoured

1.5 – 2.44 = Disfavoured

0.5- 1.44 = Neutral

The salient factors of the study include self esteem, productivity, morals, and professionalism. This study regards self esteem as the feeling of the taxi drivers to be confidence in their ability having no inferiority

complex. Productivity is regarded as the rate at which the taxi drivers delivers quality services to the commuters when compared with time, and value for money while morals is aimed that the taxi drivers would demonstrate an attitude of discipline and right behaviour while driving. Professionalism refers to the high standards of skills and ability that is expected from a trained driver that will give the commuters positive impression of the taxi drivers. These factors are embedded in high self-esteem. High self esteem promotes goals, expectancies, coping mechanisms, and behaviours that facilitate productive achievement and work experiences and impede mental and physical health problems, substance abuse, and antisocial behavior (Brown, 1998; Covington, 1992; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; DuBois & Tevendale, 1999; Flory, Ly-nam, Milich, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2004)

RESULT

Table 1 presents the mean perception of the respondents on introducing formal dress code for commercial drivers in Abeokuta metropolis. In statement number 1 of self esteem perception factor, the mean score is 4.43. It can therefore be deduced that a taxi driver dressed formally would be proud of his profession. Similarly, statements numbers 8 and 9 of productivity perception factor have mean scores of 4.82 and 4.65 respectively. This implies that the respondents strongly favored the use of formal dress code for taxi drivers because it would boost their productivity and increase customers' patronage. This is in line with Magnum et al, (1996); Edodigwe, (2003), Lee, (1998), and Sikes, (2002).

Table 1: Mean Perception of respondents on introducing dress code for taxi drivers

S/ N	PERCEPTION FACTOR	PERCEPTION STATEMENT	MEAN SCORE	DECISION
1	Self Esteem	A taxi driver dressed formally would be proud of his profession.	4.43	Favoured
2		A taxi driver dressed formally will not feel inferior in the presence of others in white collar jobs.	4.66	Strongly favoured
3		Formally dressed taxi driver will command respect from customers.	4.28	Favoured
4		Formally dressed taxi driver will maintain and love to drive a good road worthy vehicle.	3.87	Favoured
5		Formally dressed taxi driver will have targeted location and customers for better charges.	4.78	Strongly favoured
		Self Esteem Mean Score	4.404	Favoured
6	Productivity	Formal dressing will improve the quality of performance of taxi drivers.	3.60	Favoured
7		Casual dressing of taxi drivers will negatively affect their productivity.	4.66	Strongly favoured
8		Introduction of formal dress code for taxi drivers will boost their productivity.	4.82	Strongly favoured
9		Taxi drivers dressing formally will boost customers' patronage.	4.65	Strongly favoured
10		Formally dressed taxi driver will likely charge more.	4.04	Favoured
		Mean Productivity Score	4.354	Favoured
11	Morals	Dressing formally as taxi drivers will make them courteous in the society.	4.72	Strongly favoured
12		Formally dressed taxi driver will not want to be associated with taut/ drug addicts.	4.18	Favoured
13		A formally dressed taxi driver will likely be law abiding.	4.44	Favoured
14		A formally dressed taxi driver will have a good customers' relation.	4.82	Strongly favoured
15		A formally dressed taxi driver will be viewed as a responsible person.	4.87	Strongly favoured
		Mean Moral Score	4.606	Strongly favoured
16	Professionalism	The way a person dresses depicts the kind of job he/she does	4.88	Strongly favoured
17		Formal dress code policy should be introduced into the public transport sector.	4.63	Strongly favoured
18		Formal dress code will aid professional driving skill of the taxi drivers.	4.56	Strongly favoured
19		Formal dress code for taxi drivers will make them to be conscious of road safety and driving policy.	4.11	Favoured
20		Formal dress code will add decorum to taxi driving profession.	4.92	Strongly favoured
		Mean Professionalism Score	4.62	Strongly favoured

Perception Score = Total Mean Score of Perception Factors/ No of Factors
 $17.984/4 = 4.496$

Furthermore, on moral perception factor, statements number 11, 13 and 14 has mean score of 4.72, 4.44 and 4.82 respectively; this shows that dressing formally as taxi drivers will likely make the drivers to be courteous in the society, law abiding and have good customer's relation. This confirms the findings of (Egodigwe, 2003; Sikes, 2002; Lee, 1998). There are many other statements that support the view that formal dress code be introduced for taxi/commercial drivers. The mean professional score of statements 16 to 20 is 4.62. This factor strongly favored the introduction of formal dress code for taxi drivers in Abeokuta metropolis, emphasizing that this will aid professional driving skills of the drivers, they would be conscious of road safety signs and driving policy and it will add decorum to taxi driving profession. The overall perception Score is 4.496, consequently, this study has demonstrated that vehicle inspector officials, and commuters have favorable perception to introducing formal dress code for taxi drivers in Abeokuta metropolis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Clothing gives a non verbal communication delivering various social messages about the wearer. This study has shown that the introduction of dress code policy to taxi drivers in Abeokuta would bring about discipline, increase self esteem, productivity and professionalism among the drivers. This is in line with Lynam, Milich, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2004; BBC News, (2010); Egodigwe, 2003; Sikes, 2002 and Lee, 1998). Egodigwe 2003; Sikes 2002 opines that casual dress have being identified with decrease in productivity, decrease in polite and mannerly behaviour, decrease in commitment and business loyalty, increase in provocative actions, increase in foul language and inappro-

priate conversation. However the formal dress code policy will projects the image of a company. Although, implementing dress code policy can involve some pitfalls for commercial drivers, the benefit this will bring to the profession cannot be overemphasized; it will build up self confidence, respect for the profession, improve services and make taxi drivers appear professional in the society projecting an image of trustworthy, knowledgeable, and responsible person to their customers. Consequently, the National Union of Road Transport Workers-Ogun State Chapter, and taxi drivers association, should be enlightened on the benefits of dress code and be encouraged to embrace the policy.

Implications of Findings

The implication of the findings is to enforce a code of conduct dress standards for appearance of taxi drivers in the workplace-cab. The dress code policy should define acceptable and unacceptable dressing. The government will have to involve representatives of taxi drivers/ commercial transporters in developing and implementing the dress code policy to promote stronger awareness and understanding of the outcome. This will helps to determine how and when the policy might apply, and can assist in identifying possible unintentional outcomes of the policy. For an effective compliance with the policy, there is need to create awareness by publicising the policy in both formal and informal strategies to be easily understood by all taxi drivers e.g. translating the policies into the local language (Yoruba) for the understanding of drivers who cannot read or write. A breach of not complying with the policy would be regarded as an in disciplinary action and should attract a penalty. This will also give an opportunity for a new business focus in the

clothing industry.

CONCLUSION

Casual dress code at work place will lead to relaxed manners, morals and productivity. Casual dresses in the work place will result to casual attitude and lack of office decorum. The use of formal dress in an informal workplace like commercial driving cannot be overemphasized as formal dress attire reflects professionalism, attractive to customers and it will bring about increased productivity. The result of this study has shown that the use of formal dress in the public transportation sector is acceptable and would therefore add decorum to the profession.

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