Comparing Conventional Public Transport to Ride-hailing Apps: A Snapshot of User Experiences from Metro Manila

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Abstract—**Ride apps offer alternative and controversial solutions to commuters in Manila, a Southeast Asian megacity characterized by inadequacies in transport infrastructure and law enforcement capabilities. In the literature, there is scarce empirical analysis of how ride-hailing technologies compare with pre-existing conventional transport systems from the perspective of the users of the technologies. To address this gap, this paper employs in-depth semi-structured interviews with respondents from Manila to examine the issues encountered by users of the conventional transport systems and how they perceive these in comparison to their experiences with ride-hailing technologies. These comparison-driven narratives are important, as they can inform subsequent studies on what motivates the patterns of use and attitudes toward pre-existing systems and new technology-driven entrants. The analysis presented in this paper is a provisional snapshot of a work in progress on the phenomenon of ride-hailing apps operating in Southeast Asian megacities.**

Keywords—public transportation, urban mobility, ride-hailing apps, Manila transportation

I. INTRODUCTION

Ride apps have offered alternative yet controversial transportation solutions for commuters in Manila, a Southeast Asian megacity characterized by inadequacies in transport infrastructure and law enforcement capabilities. Ride-hailing apps instantaneously connect commuters with drivers, ostensibly providing reliable rides and preventing the drivers from cherry-picking passengers. At present, most studies focus on either the business implications of these ride apps or the legal disputes among competing interest groups in the transport sector, usually in the context of large, affluent cities in North America or Europe [4,5,11,13]. In the academic literature, there is a scarcity of detailed qualitative analyses of how ride-hailing technologies compare to pre-existing conventional transport systems from the viewpoint of commuters from Southeast Asian megacities. To address this gap, the current paper veers away from surveys, and instead, the author employs in-depth semi-structured interviews with respondents to examine their experiences with conventional transport systems and how these compare to their experiences with ride-hailing technologies. These comparison-driven narratives are important, as these experiences motivate the patterns of use and the attitudes toward both incumbent actors, such as conventional public

transport (CPT) groups, and technology-driven entrants such as ride-hailing apps. The provisional analysis presented here is part of a larger, ongoing research project to understand the implications which arise when on-demand platform technologies operate in contexts that are ripe with market potential and riven with structural or institutional issues-- which is exemplified by the ride-apps phenomenon in Southeast Asian megacities.

Foremost among Metro Manila's broader problems is its high population density which strains urban infrastructure and contributes to overcrowding on public transportation. Metro Manila has a population of 13 million, making it a megacity. It has a population density of 21,000 people per kilometer squared [10]. For comparison, that is four times as dense as London. Manila's urban transport infrastructure is hardly adequate to cope with the current population. Since 2004, city trains in Metro Manila have been servicing 500,000 passengers a day, which is 42% above the maximum capacity [3]. Traffic congestion in Manila is severe. According to a traffic index constructed from GPS data, where a higher number indicates better traffic conditions, London scored 2.24. In comparison, Manila was in the worst group, which scored near zero at .33 [17]. Moreover, Manila faces challenges in effective law enforcement pertaining to transportation-related crime. Infrastructural and institutional deficiencies with Manila's transportation system coupled with the promise of financial rewards from servicing Metro Manila's population has provided an entrepreneurial opportunity that has lured ride app companies to the city. For example, GrabTaxi, headquartered in Malaysia, entered the Manila market in the second quarter of 2013 [7]. Uber launched in Manila in February 2014 [16]. Minor players such as Wunder carpooling and angkas (two-wheeled taxis) have also established a presence. These entrants claim to provide novel technological transportation solutions that are superior to CPT–a notion which further highlights the need to empirically investigate how users compare ride-hailing apps with CPT.

Conventional public transport is defined here as the longstanding modes of transportation that are recognized by law, widely accepted by the public, and imbued with long histories–all of which grant these modes the virtue of being a normal and legitimate part of Metro Manila's transport system. This definition includes jeepneys, buses, vans

registered tricycles, and for similar existing literature, see [1,6,8,9,12,14]

Jeepneys are medium to large vehicles with one main rear door, leading to a cabin with a very low ceiling. Jeepneys can convey around 16–20 passengers who sit on two long parallel benches set flush against opposite sides of the vehicle. These vehicles are often manufactured by small scale factories, some of which are backyard operations that rarely follow strict production standards. These vehicles ply routes of at least 4 km and travel medium and long distances. Passengers can typically hail and alight nearly anywhere as there rarely is an established set of stops.

In Manila, buses are very large vehicles that are considerably larger than Jakarta's TransJakarta buses and London's single-decker city buses. There are two kinds of buses: the air-conditioned ones and those ventilated by big windows. In terms of size, the air-conditioned type called a bus in Metro Manila is more akin to what is called a "coach" in the United Kingdom. This bus travels very long distances, often connecting far-away suburbs or satellite provinces to Metro Manila's central districts.

These are vans sold by reputable international car makers as public transport vehicles. These seat a fixed number of passengers, ranging between 8 and 10 taxis. This excludes longstanding modes that are possibly extra-legal, such as motorbikes (habal-habal), and pedicabs. The CPT, as defined here, stands in contrast to ride-hailing apps, which are relatively new entrants that have yet to accumulate the level of normalcy and history possessed by the incumbent modes of transport. The empirical data analyzed in this paper indicate that respondents have generally found CPT to be inferior to ride-hailing apps in terms of comfort, safety, and ease of reaching a destination. By explicating the differences in user experience between CPT and ride-hailing apps, this paper's findings provide a foundation for inquiries into the complex socio-political implications of technology-driven platform solutions in contexts with structural and institutional problems.

II. METHODS

This paper uses data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents from Manila. Semi-structured interviews require a questionnaire but also encourage participants to introduce topics they deem important, thus allowing new insights of theoretical interest to surface [2].

A pilot interviewing phase was conducted with eight ride-hailing app users who were initially gathered through snowball sampling and interviewed online channels from February to March 2017. The pilot study helped determine the kinds of variations to be included in the second phase of data gathering. Students and workers were identified as the main groups that must be considered in the sample because they constitute the majority of public transportation commuters. The pilot study also indicated the value of considering variations in work schedule (day shift versus night shift), and fixity of workplace (i.e., whether a worker has a single workplace or travels to several different workplaces throughout the day). Other desirable characteristics for the sample would be high variability in terms of home location, places of work or study, income level, and frequency of ride-hailing app use.

For the second phase of interviews, participants were gathered through purposive sampling, which ensured that diverse groups relevant to the research questions were represented in the sample [2]. To create a sample which captures the desirable variations, some strategic choices were made. To ensure that students were included in the study, participants were recruited from the University of the Philippines–Diliman campus. The university attracts students from all income groups and from far-flung districts around the city, thereby providing variability to the sample in terms of income and home locations. Moreover, because of the campus' central location, students from other schools and employees from some distance were able to be interviewed at the university. Respondent recruitment was also conducted on a wider level to include employees working at business districts from a range of sectors. There were 133 interested participants. Out of this pool, 22 were selected with the aim of achieving variability in terms of home location, place of work or study, income level, frequency of using ride-hailing apps, or other rare aspects of empirical and analytical importance. As an example of the latter, the only applicant who was a person with disability was immediately included in the pool. Selected participants were requested to attend a face-to-face in-depth interview lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. The second phase of interviews took place between October and November 2017. The 8 interviews in the pilot study and the 22 interviews in the second phase of interviews comprise the 30 interviews used as this paper's data. It is important to note that the interviews roughly pertain to how things stood as of 2017.

In accordance with Oxford's guidelines for ethical research, information sheets about the research were given to all participants in advance and their consent to participate was requested and duly documented. Interview transcripts were processed through NVivo 12 Pro using detailed eclectic coding to capture the full range of experiences shared by interviewees, supplemented by extensive analytic memo writing to ensure an introspective consideration of the data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Positive Perceptions of Conventional Public Transport

The respondents had few positive things to say about Manila's CPT. Twenty-four respondents made only 39 statements about their commuting experiences that could be considered as positive in some way. Twelve respondents commented that public transport was cheap--especially jeepneys and the trains (Metro Rail Transit and the Light Rail Transit) --marking the affordability of these modes as the most widely corroborated positive assessment of public transport.

Four respondents shared that riding public transport gave them the chance to engage in enjoyable, interesting, or insightful social interactions. One respondent reminisced that as a student he looked forward to commuting home with friends, as those were the few opportunities they had to chat and bond. Even if they went home to different parts of Metro Manila, the nature of commuting means that many of them shared the same routes along major roads before going their separate ways. This opportunity for bonding with friends disappeared when colleagues dispersed immediately upon leaving work, whisked away by cars procured through ride apps.

Another respondent recounted that he met acquaintances on his commutes with whom he could spend time deepening their relationship. Two respondents saw educational value in using public transport, as the scenes of human struggle they witnessed made them appreciate the grit of Manila's urban poor and their own elevated social status. One respondent intimated, "Yes, commuting makes me see that…people really fight for their lives, so they can survive. So that they can eat. And you think… You really feel blessed because you're given that opportunity to have that kind of work compared to them." It is notable that the second most corroborated positive statement about conventional transport concerns pleasant social interactions. This was a surprise, given that in the existing literature, commuters only made references to more practical positive factors such as cost, safety, and convenience. The comments about social interaction as a positive aspect of public transport were also revealing because the statements were more about fortuitous human encounters than the actual quality of the transport infrastructure. This emphasizes the dearth of positive statements from respondents that directly related to the public transportation infrastructure. There was a general smattering of comments about public transport being okay *naman*, a vague expression which approximates "so-so" in English. However, the lack of specificity also indicates ambivalence and reveals that there is little concrete positive public feeling for public transport. While there are specific references to positive attributes, these are weakly corroborated. Two respondents praised the UV Express as comfortable, and three commended the trains as fast. Three interviewees said that the transport system was well-connected and accessible, owing to the large numbers of jeepneys plying major and minor roads. The welcome presence of courtesy lanes or seats in trains and buses, and their increasingly strict implementation surfaced twice. The convenience of having tricycles which convey passengers point to point, albeit for short distances, garnered a single mention. Respondents who shared positive statements often followed them with caveats, hinting at a lack of conviction behind the positive portrayal of their commuting experiences. For example, when modes of transport such as the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) were cited for speed, respondents also complained about the lack of carriages or overcrowding. Fares might be cheap, as one interviewee opined, but "Negative, everything else."

To strive for balance in the interviews, some respondents who had not expressed anything positive about public transport were probed for their positive perceptions and experiences about public transportation. After a pause, one respondent obliged yet gave tangential answers. "Well, it's not really that positive, but when you ride the jeep and the jeepney driver wants to go home and you already paid, he'll give you your money back and ask you to ride another jeep. There's that." Yet another recounted how a food supplement company promoted its brand by providing a free bus to a particular district, remarking, "That's it. That's the only happy memory I have of riding public transport." Considering that this bus is not part of public transport but a privately contracted bus for marketing purposes, it would seem that this interviewee has not had any happy memories of CPT. Four respondents firmly claimed that they had no positive views of public transport. Their responses ranged from restrained to indignant. A female office worker in Ortigas politely told me, "I really can't say anything positive

about public transportation." A teacher in Quezon City who regularly goes through a harrowing commute from a province outside Metro Manila exclaimed, "No. I am totally devastated by it!"

B. Negative Views about Conventional Public Transport

The experiences of interviewees with CPT were overwhelmingly characterized as negative. All 30 respondents pointed out many negative aspects of public transport from their own experience at least 634 times, with most respondents confirming each other's attitudes. The high frequency of negative statements and cross-confirmation is in stark contrast to the few weakly corroborated positive experiences. These negative experiences can be grouped into four categories: reaching the desired destination, comfort, abusive behavior, and safety.

Reaching a Destination

The difficulties in reaching a destination stood foremost among negative experiences. Traffic levels were universally cited as a serious impediment at least 906 times. This issue is well-known in the literature, and therefore, it is of less analytical interest. Putting heavy traffic aside, 29 respondents cited other less well-documented difficulties. The only person who did not to have any such views was an affluent interviewee from the country's uppermost social class who had never used public transportation apart from a few taxi rides.

Being stuck in long queues was cited at least 133 times as a serious source of frustration. While queues for UV Express and taxis have appeared in other study data, the very long lines for trains surfaced much more frequently than expected. Respondents complained that, especially during rush hour, the queues would become a chain of people starting from the train platform, winding down several flights of stairs and spilling onto the street two stories below. The tropical climate, and the lack of proper ventilation, compounded by the body heat of the packed crowd, was reported as often resulting in standing amidst simmering temperatures in a throng of sweating commuters. Taxis, jeepneys, and buses rarely had the formal queues seen with the trains, but the wait for these still posed disagreeable experiences for commuters. Respondents said they would usually have to wait for their rides at ill-maintained sheds which rarely offered adequate protection from rain and sun, or at the roadside, which might become dangerously slippery and muddy, as one respondent complained. In the absence of usable sidewalks, commuters tried to hail right on the roads as vehicles perilously dash nearby. Moreover, during rush hour or at major areas in the city, the waiting time could take from thirty to minutes to more than an hour. From the vast majority of respondents (26) who mentioned negative experiences related to waiting, the following quote from a middle-aged commuter is illustrative, "I waited two hours and a half for a taxi. That time I was going home to New Manila. I think the worst episodes I had is I… I literally broke down in panic." Aside from waiting for a ride, another often cited source of irritation and delay are the frequent stops of buses and jeepneys at any point during the trip to take in more passengers.

Twenty (20) respondents mentioned the scarcity of their target modes of conventional transport at least 36 times. Most of them claimed that it could be very difficult to get a

taxi, jeep, or bus because those that passed by were usually already full. The respondents emphasized the rarity of unoccupied taxis especially during rush hour at major roads and business districts. Due to the scarcity of rides, a considerable number of respondents [11] consistently used metaphors of battle to describe the very physical struggle among the masses of commuters competing for scarce transport vehicles. A well-corroborated narrative holds that the lack of designated stops and the huge numbers of people waiting on the sidewalks lead to awareness among commuters of intense competition for scarce rides. To outdo the competition, commuters constantly anticipate where the transport vehicle will stop to pick up the few passengers it has space for, forcing people to chase the vehicle before it comes to a stop. Thus, commuters naturally get in each other's way, leading to "a mad scramble." Once the vehicle stops, the alighting passengers have to pit themselves against the crowd of expectant passengers forcing their way into the vehicle. Other respondents described it as "fighting," where "people elbow each other" or "box others out." In a telling statement, one frequent gladiator in these battles confided, "The strongest one wins."

Multi-modality, using several modes of transport, or taking several trips on the same type of transport to reach a single destination was a common experience for the vast majority of respondents. Most of them (18) viewed multi-modality as a negative experience causing exhaustion and stress. The other twelve respondents either configured their lives to be very close to work or simply accepted multi-legged trips as a normal part of urban life. Nearly all of the respondents with regular multi-legged trips had to wait for a ride several times during each journey. Multi-modality also multiplies the times they need to participate in pitched battles for scarce seats in transport vehicles, especially during rush hour and at key junctures where many routes–and hence commuters–converge. There are instances when they are able to get seated properly in the earlier parts of their multi-legged journey, but then relinquishing that temporary comfort to find a spot on the next leg of their journey is another source of frustration. Finding space in a vehicle equates to a settling down of both person and possessions -- an equilibrium that gets disturbed by the motions of leaving for the next ride. As it often rains in Manila, commuters often get more drenched when they have more transfers to make. A few respondents cited the hassle of having to fold and unfold umbrellas when they alight one vehicle and transfer to another. Some have voiced exasperation at having to repeatedly carry their belongings into a vehicle, find ways to position these in the cramped vehicle without inviting the ire of other commuters, only to have to repeat the process in another vehicle. A few respondents recalled losing their belongings in the confusion caused by multiple transfers. Multi-legged trips were made even more difficult when they carried heavy items such as school bags, laptops and heavy office documents.

Having to make multiple transfers inevitably meant that commuters often had to walk to the next *sakayan*, which are formally or informally designated areas for hailing rides. Nearly half of the respondents (14) see walking between stops as a vexing experience at least 24 times, thus signifying corroboration. They pointed out problems with physical environmental structures such as the lack of footbridges or the paint of pedestrian crossings being too faded. Elevators for footbridges rarely work, which posed a particular problem for the respondent who was a person with a disability. He also complained that the angles of ramps used on footbridges are sub-optimal and often left him struggling to ascend them.

The normal rhythms of daily life make walking difficult, as respondents often carry heavy objects related to their occupation. Most respondents carried laptops, school bags, and office files heavy enough to make walking difficult. One respondent, a fifty-year-old homemaker, related that during her regular trips to the market to shop for her family's food, she would have to lug around more than ten kilos of fish, meat, and vegetables for 500 meters before reaching the nearest *sakayan*. While few others shared the same plight, it is entirely reasonable to say that many other shoppers at Manila's markets have the same issue to some degree. Compounding this problem, *sakayans* are not optimally located, sometimes forcing people to walk quite a while between them. One respondent also confided that walking in the heat increased her blood pressure and endangered her health. While she was the only respondent to mention a serious health issue, the large number of elderly commuters in Manila suggests that health concerns are more widespread for commuters than was represented in the interview sample.

Respondents further complained about difficulties in walking to the *sakayan*. Sidewalks, when they were present, were often inappropriately turned into parking lots, forcing pedestrians to weave through obstacles and shar the road with speeding motor vehicles. Respondents also shared worries about their safety while walking, as they claimed Manila's streets to be infested with snatchers, catcallers, and other "good-for-nothings." Moreover, respondents cite the grime, filth, pollution, and chaos of Manila. As a consequence of all these factors, respondents reported physical exhaustion and nervous strain from constant vigilance during their commute.

Comfort

Nearly all of the respondents (28) experienced at least one of several factors leading to discomfort during their commute, with a total of 127 negative references. Comfort was defined as personal ease experienced while in conventional transport vehicles and the surrounding environments such as the train platform and the like.

The vast majority of respondents (24) complained about overcrowded transport vehicles, especially trains, buses, and jeepneys during rush hour. There was a strong corroboration that all modes of CPT except for taxis are prone to overcrowding. Jeepney drivers and barkers are notorious for calling passengers in even if those inside can barely sit. This is one of the reasons why 12 respondents cite jeepneys as the worst mode of public transport. Since jeepneys have very low ceilings, it is impossible to stand inside, save for young children. So, rather than stand, new passengers have to squeeze themselves into the little gaps between people who had already taken a seat. In an illustrative description, one respondent described the ordeal, "I'm practically squatting. That happens especially in Manila. You're like sardines." Buses are also heavily implicated because barkers let in as many passengers as can be crammed onto the bus.

Unlike jeepneys and buses, vans seat a fixed number of people, but they can also be overcrowded if, "…one is sitting next to someone who's not necessarily petite. Your row–it would be really cramped. It would be really tight. So, you

would have to endure that the whole ride until somebody gets off." Nonetheless, it is the trains which reach extreme levels of crowding, so much so that people do not sway or fall when the train moves, even if they do not hold unto anything. Two male respondents in their 20s even reported experiencing breathing trouble as the mass of bodies squeezed against their chests. One said, "…the MRT is crowded, and you're not allowed to breathe because you might end up pushing the person next to you."

However, the physical discomfort of being tightly packed together has other implications. The cramped space in buses and trains means that people can barely move, making it difficult to get to the door when they needed to exit. All mothers in the sample emphasized that it was much more difficult to maneuver toward the exit when accompanied by children. Three respondents even reported having missed their stops because of the difficulty of extricating themselves from the tangled bodies barring their way.

For a clear majority of respondents (22), some of the physical features of public transport vehicles lead to uncomfortable rides. For example, the air-conditioning on the buses, vans, and trains do not always function properly, resulting in stiflingly hot commutes. The vehicles also give a bumpy, uncomfortable ride, which one savvy interviewee confidently blamed on malfunctioning suspensions in poorly maintained vehicles. The seats of buses and jeepneys may also be too narrow to fully accommodate an adult. In some cases, the upholstery is already hard and worn out.

A majority of respondents (16) mentioned aspects related to lack of cleanliness and hygiene. A third of respondents (10) reported offensive odors in public transport vehicles. The pungent smell of armpits and the concentrated odors from sweating commuters often pervaded the overcrowded trains and buses they rode. Aside from these, riders of jeepneys, which usually do not have windows, are fully exposed to smog and pollution. Respondents also associated a wide variety of odors with taxis–musty, dusty, moldy, and smelling of rugby glue (used as an addictive inhalant with dangerous mind-altering effects). Sometimes, they reported the taxis also reek of cigarette smoke or the sharp smell of petroleum. Respondents also criticized the unsanitary state of public transport vehicles and their immediate environments. Buses and train platforms were often littered with trash. Respondents agreed that many taxis were dirty, having dusty cabins or unwashed seat covers. One respondent even witnessed a swarm of cockroaches inside a taxi.

Abusive and Exploitative Behavior

Abusive and exploitative behavior from providers of public transport is a nearly unanimous source of negative experiences among the 30 respondents, with 104 negative references about duplicitous or discourteous behaviors from barkers, conductors, and drivers most especially.

Taxis were nearly universally singled out for frequent passenger cherry-picking, which is the practice of refusing to convey people whose destinations are not to the driver's liking. It is well corroborated that taxi drivers often decline to use the meter, and instead negotiate with the passenger to force the latter to pay a fixed fare. Even when drivers agree to use their meters, they nonetheless sometimes force passengers to commit to additional charges before accepting them. Due to the difficulties of getting a ride, passengers have little leverage to resist the exploitative bargaining strategies of taxi

drivers. At least two of the nine students in the sample report that drivers refused to give student discounts, which are legally mandated entitlements for students.

According to a considerable number of respondents (10), drivers are occasionally rude, with taxi drivers being more likely than others to engage in rough behavior to intimidate passengers. The drivers, conductors, and barkers for buses and jeepneys also duplicitously lure passengers by claiming that the vehicle "has space for more." According to one interviewee, there had been several times when he refused to ride a visibly full jeepney and consequently, the driver shouted expletives at him. One respondent complained that when she was unable to get off a bus because it was too overcrowded to even wriggle toward the door, the conductor berated her instead of helping clear the way. Another respondent claimed that when he refused to pay more than the published rates, tricycle or jeepney drivers would call other drivers to gang up on him, forcing him to pay more. A female office worker in her mid-twenties was repeatedly accused by her taxi driver of being a prostitute. Three respondents report taxi drivers who rant or give "unsolicited sermons" despite the passengers expressing their desire to be left in peace during the ride. While the specific manifestations are diverse and backed by only a few respondents each, the overarching theme of rudeness and duplicity are strongly corroborated. This suggests that there is a non-trivial risk of regularly encountering rude or duplicitous behavior in the normal course of commuting.

Safety

All 30 respondents expressed resoundingly negative experiences related to safety, citing at least 133 safety-related incidents and issues. Safety is often referred to as the absence of crimes which threaten a passenger's personal wellbeing and the good conditions of transport which decreases the risk of accidents and structural malfunctions. An overwhelming majority (n = 29) worry about personal safety while traveling on CPT, citing past personal experiences and the rampant criminality in the city's highways, alleys, and transport systems. The perceived threats include stealthy pickpockets, violent robbers, catcallers, sexual predators, rapists, gropers, deranged beggars, and drug addicts. The dilapidated state of transport vehicles is also a widely shared comment. Buses and jeepneys look old and poorly maintained. The MRT has a reputation for breaking down, which a few respondents experienced first-hand.

C. Comparisons between Conventional Public Transport and Ride-Hailing Apps

Respondents made clear comparisons between CPT and ride-hailing apps. Twenty-three respondents–a sizable majority–strongly corroborated that ride-hailing apps are more expensive than conventional public transportation. For four respondents, the difference per trip can be palpable but not large, especially on short trips. For routes that are served by the cheapest forms of public transport such as jeepneys and buses, respondents state that ride-hailing cars can be substantially more expensive. The respondents who gave detailed computations revealed that the price differential is often more than 100%. For example, one respondent who lives in Sta Lucia, Pasig and works four kilometers away in Eastwood, a bustling business district, only spends a total of Php 43 on his daily commute using non-taxi modes such as jeeps. However, taking a ride-hailing app for a single journey

costs him around Php 100, which is more than double the cost of his return trip using jeepneys. Consequently, using ride-hailing apps on a return trip makes his daily commute four times as expensive. A respondent points out that the cost differential between ride-hailing apps and trains is among the highest. Trains travel on major highways with traffic and yet, the fares for such long distances only range from around Php 13 to 30 due to government subsidies. Ride app cars traveling such long distances will rarely avoid heavy traffic or choke points, increasing both travel time and costs for passengers. The same respondent claimed that this trip on the MRT which costs Php13 would cost him Php150-160, which means a cost increase of at least ten times. Of the twenty-three respondents who found ride-hailing apps to be more expensive than some modes of conventional transport, only two people explicitly found taxis cheaper than ride-hailing apps, one of whom indicated that taxis are only cheaper when the ride apps trigger surge pricing. This suggests that taxis are not necessarily cheaper than ride-hailing apps.

Surprisingly, seven respondents asserted that there are various instances whereby ride apps end up being cheaper than some combination of CPT. While seven is a modest number, it is still more than one-fifth of the sample. Of these seven respondents, six claimed that after repeated trial and error, they found that since Uber does not charge flag down rates the way GrabTaxi does, it is cheaper than regular taxis in the absence of surge pricing. According to one respondent, there are short trips whereby available combinations of public transport are more expensive than ride-hailing cars. This respondent revealed that in many areas in Marikina such as Marikina city center, tricycles charge a steep minimum fare of Php 50. For the same routes in Marikina, Uber only charges Php 40. Per the usual scheme in public transport, each new ride incurs a minimum fare, to which there are incremental charges based on additional distance. The minimum fare is generally much higher than the incremental fares. For example, the minimum fare in jeepneys is 8 pesos, yet the incremental charge per kilometer (after the first 4 km) is Php 1.50. Consequently, even if public transport is generally cheap, numerous transfers involve multiple minimum fares, potentially costing a commuter more than if a minimum fare is charged once on a single, lengthy trip. Illustrating this effect, the respondent shared that starting a multi-legged trip with Marikina's tricycles would cost him 100; but with Uber, he would only paid Php 90 with some help from Uber's student discount.

Six respondents found that cost differentials between ride-hailing apps and comparable public transport modes are non-existent or negligible. Two of these respondents invoked a feeling that the costs are the same, while others gave more specific explanations. The fact that ride-hailing apps can be more expensive than taxis, the cost advantage is often nullified because taxi drivers may demand tips and extra charges or impose a fixed, exorbitant fee. One respondent emphasized that choosing UberPool or GrabShare (carpooling options) and using student discounts could sometimes actual reduce the cost differential to trivial amounts. Yet another clarified that ride apps are only similarly priced to taxis when surge pricing is not in effect.

Beyond issues of cost, there was a pervasive tendency to compare ride-hailing apps and modes of CPT in terms of comfort, convenience, and safety. Twenty-eight respondents - an overwhelming majority - decisively corroborated that on average, ride-hailing cars are superior to CPT. The most frequently cited advantages of ride app modes are that they are more convenient and they help commuters avoid the many difficulties involved in origin to destination conveyance and multi-modality. Respondents agreed that using the apps spares them the effort and stress of waiting for an uncertain ride, physically competing with other commuters, and suffering in long queues. The reliability of ride-hailing apps is also in stark contrast to the pervasive uncertainty encountered when getting a ride via CPT. Ride-hailing apps also ease the burden of making multiple transfers and walking between sakayans, while carrying heavy objects or enduring inclement weather. The only person with a disability in the interview sample confided that these factors make ride-hailing apps more disability friendly than any CPT. Ride-hailing drivers also often use GPS-based navigation apps such as Waze, reassuring passengers that the driver knows where to go.

At least 20 respondents–a clear majority–reported that ride-hailing vehicles were more comfortable than CPT. The overcrowding in public transport vehicles is also absent in ride-hailing vehicles especially in services such as UberX and GrabCar where one person or group rides in a car. Even if carpooling services in these apps such as GrabShare and UberPool–bring together several different groups of passengers in one vehicle, the fixed number of passengers prevents overcrowding and passenger discomfort. Facing of Manila's blistering temperatures is also made easier by the superior air-conditioning of most ride-hailing vehicles. On average, the cars used in ride-hailing apps do not have the bad odors reported on CPT vehicles. Respondents also noted that ride-hailing cars were usually new and well-maintained.

All 30 interviewees unanimously viewed ride-hailing apps as safer than CPT, often basing their statements on negative personal experiences while commuting and some-times on perceptions shaped by word-of-mouth observations. The positive outward appearance of new cars used in ride-hailing apps stands in contrast to the dilapidated condition of CPT vehicles, thereby making interviewers feel more confident in the structural integrity and road-worthiness of the vehicles. Drivers from ride-hailing apps were also regarded as being safer drivers, with some respondents believing that these drivers own the cars and therefore drive with greater care. Twelve out of 16 female interviewees had been worried about sexual harassment issues or had personally encountered sexual harassment while commuting in Metro Manila. These respondents commonly found the ride-hailing apps to be a safer transport option to avoid the tight queues, crowded vehicles, and city streets where sexual harassment incidents commonly occur. The feature in ride-hailing apps which allows friends and family to track their travel was also mentioned as an advantage of using ride-hailing apps over CPT.

Due to the many perceived and experientially vetted advantages of ride-hailing apps over conventional public transport, at least 14 of the interviewees explicitly stated that the increased cost of ride-hailing apps was "worth it" and was a sufficient reason to use ride-hailing apps over CPT whenever possible and financially viable.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the academic literature, there is little comprehensive qualitative analysis of how ride-hailing technologies compare

with pre-existing conventional transport systems from the perspective of user experience. To address this gap, this paper gathered insights from 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with ride-hailing app users in Metro Manila. Interviewees were selected with the aim of maximising sample variability in terms of home location, place of study and work, age, income, and frequency of use, among others.

The empirical data reveals that while interviewees held positive views about CPT, very few specific reasons were cited, with the most common being the affordability CPT modes such as jeepneys, buses and trains. The conviction behind these positive statements are weak as evidenced by the numerous caveats attached to the initially positive appraisal of CPT. A few respondents went as far as refusing to acknowledge anything positive about their experiences with CPT. In stark contrast, general experience with CPT is overwhelmingly negative for all respondents, with a very high frequency of negative references and very strong corroboration among them. Negative experiences stem from difficult origin to destination conveyance, multi-modality, lack of comfort, exploitative behavior of service providers, and issues with safety.

CPT is generally cheaper than ride-hailing apps. However, a nuanced analysis of the data indicates that the cost differentials against ride-hailing apps vary among several modes of transport, with trains buses and jeepney often being cheaper than ride-hailing but taxis being conditionally more expensive. Moving beyond the issue of cost, there is a clear and strongly corroborated trend among interviewees to unfavorably compare CPT to RHA when it comes to convenience, comfort, and safety.

The comparison-driven narratives presented here are important as these provide the foundation for subsequent inquiries about the motivations behind the usage patterns and attitudes toward CPT and ride-hailing apps. The provisional empirical analysis presented here is part of a larger, ongoing research effort to understand the implications arising when on-demand platform technologies operate in contexts ripe with market potential, and yet riven with structural and institutional inadequacies. The findings of the current study must be seen as a baseline from which the level of corroboration may increase, or new themes emerge, as subsequent phases of data gathering are completed and more detailed coding cycles are carried out.

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