"We have to speed, take shortcuts, and break traffic rules to meet our daily targets": Factors Underlying Traffic Offences among Motorists in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigates the factors responsible for traffic offences among motorists in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. Drawing from the Routine Activity theory, the study adopted an exploratory design, involving the conduct of 25 in-depth interviews (IDI) with motorists (15 commercial and 10 private) and 5 key informant interviews (KII) with traffic officials. The cluster, simple random, purposive and accidental sampling methods were used to select Local Government areas, motor parks, motorists, and traffic officials for the interviews. The study reveals the factors influencing traffic offences, including road conditions, and enforcement ineffectiveness, impatience, pressure to meet targets or deadlines, lack of knowledge of traffic rules, among others. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive multi-faceted approach to address traffic offences, including enforcement, education, and digitized control solutions.

Keywords: Traffic offences, Ibadan Metropolis, Road Safety, Underlying factors, Routine Activity Theory.

Introduction

It is widely recognized that road safety behaviours are influenced by personal factors, inattentiveness, lack of focus, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, risk-taking behaviour such as playing computer games and driving without a license (Kunnawee, Ketphat, & Jiwattanakulpaisarn, 2013). In high-income countries, young drivers from affluent households are more prone to speeding and breaking speed limits compared to their peers from lower-income families (Kunnawee, Ketphat, & Jiwattanakulpaisarn, 2013).

In Nigeria, road traffic laws and regulation violations mostly include unused seatbelts, exceeding expected speed limits, driving recklessly, use of vehicles with unauthorized plate numbers, negligence in the use of fire extinguisher, overtaking wrongly, overloading, use of phone while driving and failure to comply with traffic lights and signs (FRSC, 2023; Mustapha, 2023; WHO, 2018; Anyanwu et al., 2016).

The consequences of deviation from traffic regulations are numerous among which are accidents, injuries and fatalities; economic losses, such as damage to vehicles, properties and infrastructure; emotional trauma such as stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (FRSC, 2023; Mustapha, 2023; WHO, 2018). Although there are efforts by both Federal and State Governments to tackle traffic challenges through traffic guidelines, rules, and regulations, to guide road users, punish traffic offenders, and also to deter prospective offenders from violating traffic rules, the rate at which road users especially motorists deviate from standard traffic procedures is still alarming.

Despite all the governmental efforts, the public resistance to traffic standard procedures in Nigeria makes it a major concern, particularly in urban

areas like Ibadan Metropolis. Several studies have focused on traffic violations in Nigeria (Mustapha, 2023; Johnson & Bassey, 2017; Anyanwu et al., 2016), but negligible attention has been given to the specific factors underlying traffic offences among motorists in Ibadan metropolis. Investigating the underlying factors would help to gain insight into the root of traffic offences in the metropolis. This is the gap that this study fills.

Theoretical Framework

This research applies the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) to examine the factors underlying traffic offences among motorists in Ibadan, Nigeria. The proponents of this theory, Cohen & Felson (1979), suggest that offences occur when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. In the context of traffic offences, these elements manifest in unique ways. For instance, a motivated offender could be a driver in a hurry, the suitable target could be violating traffic laws, and the absence of guardianship may be the lack of traffic police enforcement. A motorist might run a red light in an area where they know there are no traffic cameras or law enforcement officers, believing they will not be caught, which aligns with the elements of RAT. The Routine Activity theory has been used in a number of studies. For example, Pratt, Holtfreter and Reisig (2010) had similarly showed that one's online routine activities, shaped by one's socio-demographic characteristics, strongly shape the person's risk of falling victim of Internet fraud. Aderinto et al (2025a, b and c) recently applied the theory in their study of common features and vulnerability of students to school attacks in Northern Nigeria.

Methods

This study employed an exploratory design. The study utilized qualitative interviews to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the factors responsible for traffic offences among motorists in Ibadan metropolis.

The study was conducted in Ibadan metropolis. Although traffic offences are common in all cities of Nigeria, Ibadan was selected because it is the largest city in terms of land area, and the third largest city in terms of population, that accommodate diverse motorists.

The study was conducted among private and commercial motorists and traffic officials. Motorists were selected at major parks in the city. These parks are the major hubs for both inter-state and intra-city transportation. Officials were also selected from traffic commands around the major motor parks selected.

Ibadan was clustered into the existing eleven major Local Government Areas. Five Local Government Areas (Akiyele, Egbeda, Ibadan North, Ibadan South West, and Lagelu) were then selected from the eleven, using a simple random sampling technique. The motor parks within these five Local Government Areas namely Challenge Motor Park, Gbagi Motor Park, Iwo Road Motor Park, Moniya Motor Park, and Ojoo Motor Park were purposively selected. Three commercial motorists were also purposively chosen from each selected motor park, making a total number of fifteen commercial motorists. Afterward, an accidental sampling approach was used to select ten private motorists, while five traffic officials were also selected purposively.

The selected group of motorists and traffic officials uncovered rich, context-specific data that contributed to understanding the reasons for traffic offences in Ibadan; as the traffic officials and motorists, are those who primarily navigate the congested roads transits and intersections in Ibadan metropolis, encountering urban-specific road challenges, such as heavy traffic, frequent roadblocks, and local norms regarding road use that violate traffic laws and regulations and enforcement. The mix of motorists and traffic officials, ensured a diverse range of driving experiences and behaviours within Ibadan metropolis.

The study employed the In-depth interviews (IDI) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) methods to gather comprehensive insights from selected motorists and traffic officials in Ibadan metropolis. The IDI and KII guides engaged open-ended questions with the selected motorists

and traffic officials to provide detailed explanations, share personal anecdotes, and discuss their thought processes as rationale behind committing traffic violations.

The interviews were conducted in major parks that were convenient and comfortable for the selected motorists and also at command offices for traffic officials. Each interview was recorded and notes taken to ensure accurate capture of the data for analysis.

The data collected through the IDIs and KIIs were transcribed and translated verbatim and subjected to content and thematic analysis. The deductive method was deployed to identify themes from the transcribed and translated data.

Ethical consideration was undertaken to address the integrity of the study and the protection of the target participants of the study. As regards the confidentiality of data, the instruments were made anonymous. The motorists and traffic officials were not required to reveal their identity. Participants had complete control over their involvement in the study, with the freedom to join or decline without any coercion or consequences. Individuals were also informed about the study's purpose, methods, and benefits.

Findings

Factors Influencing Traffic Offences among Motorists in Ibadan Metropolis

Most of the respondents interviewed identified factors including individual behaviors, systemic issues, and environmental conditions that influence non-compliance of motorists with traffic rules. The role of traffic enforcement officers and their presence or absence was also examined to understand how it shapes motorist behavior.

Impatience was one of the most frequently mentioned reasons for traffic violations in Ibadan. Many motorists are driven by the need to save time, particularly during rush hours or when running late for appointments. This often leads to risky behavior such as speeding, running red lights, and taking illegal shortcuts.

A respondent explained:

> *The major reason is that people don't want to be patient. Maybe someone is supposed to resume work by 8am, and it's already very close to the time. Instead of passing the long, but legal route, they just take the one-way to get to their office within one minute instead of five minutes* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/38 Years)***

Similarly, another respondent added that:

> *Impatience is the major reason why people engage in traffic violation. Everyone is in haste; the motorists don't want to enter into the designated park before picking the passengers* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/40 Years)***

This sense of urgency is further exacerbated during peak hours or in areas prone to traffic congestion.

Additionally, it was gathered that the poor road conditions and infrastructure in Ibadan, significantly influence traffic violations. Poorly maintained roads, potholes, and inadequate signage often force drivers to make illegal maneuvers to avoid damage to their vehicles or navigate unclear routes.

A respondent highlighted:

> *When the road is very bad, many people would always want to turn back and take a shorter route, even if it is one-way. Instead of passing through the bad road, they will choose the route that looks better* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/38 Years).***

Similarly, another respondent added that:

> *For that of road conditions, this I have personally seen many times. Let's take for instance, that you have like maybe, a 100-meter road, and the road is poor or bad, you see people drive on other people's lane, because their lane is bad. They do this because they want to protect their vehicles, I mean they don't want to enter pot-hole, they don't want to damage their vehicles. So, at times, road condition too can force people to commit traffic offence* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/40 Years).***

The absence of well-constructed alternative routes further compounds the problem, making compliance with traffic laws difficult for many motorists.

Furthermore, economic hardship was frequently cited as a major driver of traffic offences. The high cost of renewing vehicle documents, obtaining licenses, or maintaining vehicles often lead motorists to evade compliance with traffic regulations.

One respondent elaborated:

> *Many people couldn't afford to renew their papers or driver's licenses because the cost is too high. They would rather take the risk and bribe an officer when caught than spend so much on these documents* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/55 Years).***

One commercial driver also had this to say:

> *Besides, the economic pressure in the country has added to people's problem the more. This has caused many of us to be unable to maintain our vehicles properly* ***(IDI/Male/Commercial Driver/37 Years).***

It was also noted that many motorists in Ibadan lack adequate knowledge of traffic rules, either due to insufficient training or failure to undergo proper licensing procedures. This ignorance leads to inadvertent violations and unsafe practices.

A respondent noted:

> *Most of the drivers plying our roads daily don't take time to acquire even basic driving skills before getting on the road. Once they get money to buy a car, they start driving without understanding the rules* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/47 Years).***

Also, many of the respondents interviewed, identified the presence or absence of traffic officers, as one of the major determinants of traffic violations, affirming that it significantly affects motorists' behavior on the road. Participants consistently noted that drivers are more likely to adhere to rules when enforcement officers are visible but tend to flout regulations in their absence. The respondents highlighted the effectiveness of law enforcement in managing traffic offences as a major factor that impact the behavior of motorists on the road. Participants discussed how the actions (or inactions) of enforcement officers either deter or enable repeat violations. Their insights reveal a complex relationship between enforcement practices, corruption, and motorists' attitudes toward compliance. Many participants highlighted that the inconsistency in how traffic laws are enforced contributes significantly to repeat violations. Some motorists believe they can get away with offences due to the unpredictable nature of law enforcement actions.

An interviewee had this to say:

> *If there's no proper enforcement, people will always go against the law. There are some traffic offenders that, if they see that there is no law enforcement officer on the ground, they will do anything they want to do, and once they are caught, they will look for ways to settle their case. This encourages them to continue violating traffic rules* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/38 Years).***

One respondent also shared:

> *Very well, especially the road management officers. When they are not where the traffic light is, drivers will just do whatever they like. But if they know someone is monitoring them, they will behave better* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/38 Years).***

Another respondent recounted a specific instance:

> *There was a time I was driving around 1:00 am, carrying my daughter to the hospital. The traffic light was red, and I was asking myself why I should wait when there's no one coming and no officer monitoring. So, I just passed. This shows how absence affects compliance* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/38 Years)***.

This statement reflects how the perceived absence of strict, consistent enforcement emboldens motorists to break the rules repeatedly. This inconsistent presence of enforcement officers, coupled with corrupt practices like bribery, undermine the credibility of traffic enforcement and encourage repeat violations.

Also, the qualitative data gathered revealed that the cultural, social, and economic factors influence traffic violations in Ibadan. Participants noted that informal or nonchalant approaches to road usage among some drivers, especially commercial motorists, contribute to persistent violations.

A respondent shared a commonly observed behavior:

> *In Ibadan, many commercial drivers don't pay attention to their vehicles. For instance, if their trafficator is faulty, instead of fixing it, they wave their hands to indicate either the left or right turns. They even say, 'Shoo poo r'owo mi ni?' meaning 'Can't you see my hand?' This has become a norm, especially among commercial drivers* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/55 Years).***

This reliance on informal signaling reflects a broader cultural tendency to disregard standardized road usage norms, increasing the risk of accidents and miscommunication on the road.

In addition, commercial drivers were identified as key contributors to traffic violations due to their high visibility and frequency on the roads. Their behaviors often influence private motorists, who may emulate their actions under the assumption that such practices are acceptable.

A respondent explained:

> *The behavior of commercial motorists in Ibadan is more or less affecting us the private motorists. At times, we follow what the commercial motorists do. If a commercial driver takes a one-way, a private motorist may think, 'Let me follow him because he passes there all the time* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/39 Years).***

This social dynamic creates a ripple effect, normalizing rule-breaking behaviors across different categories of drivers.

Moreover, economic pressure, particularly among commercial drivers, was consistently highlighted as a major driver of traffic violations. Many commercial drivers operate under daily financial targets, which incentivize them to prioritize speed and efficiency over compliance with traffic rules.

A respondent detailed the pressures faced by commercial drivers:

> *For instance, I am currently driving a hired vehicle on an installment plan, with a daily target of Ten Thousand Naira. If I am the owner of the vehicle, I can make Five Thousand Naira, and go back home to rest. But to meet this target, I may want to take some risk like speeding sometimes, take shortcuts, or park beside the road, either to pick or drop passengers, in order to maximize trips* ***(IDI/Male/Commercial Driver/35 Years).***

A respondent also said that:

> *Commercial drivers have many bills to settle. For instance, their child might be sick, and they need money for hospital bills. These pressures make them drive recklessly to ensure they meet their targets* ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/55 Years).***

While economic pressure is more pronounced among commercial drivers, private motorists are not entirely exempt. Rising costs of fuel, vehicle maintenance, and documentation also push private drivers to evade certain compliance requirements, such as renewing expired documents or avoiding routine vehicle repairs.

A respondent explained:

> *With the current economy, even private motorists find it hard to renew their papers on time. Some prefer to risk driving without documents and settle with*

a bribe if caught, rather than spend so much on compliance ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/40 Years).***

Findings from the qualitative study also revealed that the absence of adequate social and traffic management infrastructure in Ibadan exacerbates the influence of cultural and economic pressures. For example, the lack of organized parking spaces or efficient public transportation systems forces drivers to improvise, leading to illegal parking or road misuse. This creates an environment where violations become a necessary compromise for many motorists.

A respondent pointed out:

Illegal parking is common, but does the government provide parking spaces? Drivers do park wherever they can because there's no alternative ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/55 Years).***

Similarly, another respondent added that:

I never knew that place was a no-parking area, I just parked for a passenger to alight from the vehicle, as I saw an OYRTMA officer stretching his hand inside the vehicle to remove the key, telling me that I parked wrongly..... They should structure our roads in such a way that there would be enough parking space for us to park our vehicles ***(IDI/Male/Commercial Driver/37 Years).***

Also, responses from the qualitative study reveal how the respondents consistently pointed to bribery and corruption among law enforcement officers, as a major factor enabling repeat violations. Motorists who can "settle" officers with bribes are less likely to fear the consequences of breaking traffic rules.

A respondent explained:

Bribery is one of the major reasons people repeat offenses. For instance, when a traffic offender is caught and asked to pay a bribe of one thousand or two thousand Naira, they will not see it as a big deal. Instead of paying a fine or facing the law, they will just give the officer the money and go. That makes them not to be afraid of committing the offense again ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/40 Years).***

The normalization of bribes creates a system where violations are treated as minor inconveniences rather than serious offenses, perpetuating non-compliance.

Additionally, some participants criticized law enforcement for showing undue leniency toward repeat offenders. Familiarity between offenders and officers often leads to reduced penalties or outright dismissal of violations, which undermines the deterrent effect of traffic laws.

Respondents had this to say;

There are some motorists that the enforcement officers already know. When such a person violates a traffic law, instead of enforcing it strictly, they will overlook the case or just collect 'something small' from them. This makes the offenders think they can do anything and go free ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/38 Years)***

Some of the traffic officers, most especially the OYRTMA are too friendly with the motorists; so, immediately they (motorists) get to the officers or where they are supposed to obey the traffic rules, they may say oh, that's KAMORU, he is my friend or a younger brother to my friend, or my in-law. So, that's one reason why they keep disobeying the traffic rules ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/40 Years).***

This dynamic erodes the authority of traffic regulations and diminishes public trust in law enforcement.

The data gathered also reveal that lack of proper documentation and follow-through when handling traffic offences, contribute to repeat violations. Without mechanisms to track offenders or ensure penalties are applied uniformly, motorists feel no long-term consequences for their actions.

A respondent noted:

Many traffic violators don't even have their records kept properly. There is no system to track repeat offenders. Once

they are caught and they pay something, the case ends there. Next time, they do the same thing because they know it will not follow them anywhere ***(IDI/Male/Private Driver/61Years).***

The absence of structured processes for managing violations enables habitual offenders to operate without fear of escalating consequences.

Discussion of Findings

The factors influencing traffic violations in Ibadan reveal a complex interplay of personal, systemic, and environmental challenges. Impatience and the rush to save time, poor road conditions, and economic pressures emerge as key drivers of non-compliance. Kitara and Karlsson (2020) also showed in their study of the effects of economic stress and urbanization on driving behaviours of Boda-boda drivers and accidents in Gulu, Northern Uganda that economic stress is an important factor that affects drivers' behaviour and increases their risks to motorcycle accidents. Additionally, the lack of adequate training and awareness leaves many motorists ill-equipped to adhere to traffic rules. Shaaban (2021) had highlighted the importance of training for young drivers to ensure road safety. Abbas et al (2024) in their study of Karachi, Pakistan motorists also suggest that there may be low levels of driver knowledge of certain road rules, negative attitudes about certain safe driving practices, and low levels of value placed on driving license. Their analysis suggest that knowledge and attitude affect driver practices in Karachi, Pakistan.

The presence or absence of traffic officers plays a significant role in shaping motorists' behavior, with visible enforcement acting as a deterrent to violations. However, inconsistent enforcement and the prevalence of bribery diminish the effectiveness of this deterrent, perpetuating a culture of non-compliance. Himawan (2023) also noted the issue of inducement of the traffic police and its implications on rule enforcement. The author noted that people complain that dealing with police means spending money and involving the police in problems actually adds to the problem. Cultural and social factors, combined with economic pressures, significantly influence traffic violations in Ibadan. The normalization of informal driving practices, particularly among commercial motorists, encourages rule-breaking behaviors that private motorists often emulate. Economic pressures further exacerbate the situation, with financial targets driving commercial drivers to prioritize profits over compliance. Rising costs also push both commercial and private motorists to cut corners, from neglecting vehicle maintenance to avoiding documentation renewal.

The routine activity theory also underscores the importance of situational factors in determining whether an offence will occur. In environments with poor law enforcement, insufficient traffic management, or outdated infrastructure, traffic offences are more likely to happen. Uzondu, Jamson, and Marsden (2022) found that many road traffic offences in Nigeria occur because motorists perceive that there is little risk of apprehension, which corresponds to the "absence of capable guardianship" in RAT. This sense of impunity, combined with the desire to avoid traffic delays or congestion, encourages many drivers to engage in illegal behaviour.

Conclusion

Traffic offences constitute one of the major social problems which compromise the safety of the motorists, as well as other road users. The study's findings underscore the significance of traffic offences in Ibadan Metropolis, revealing a wide range of key factors contributing to these offences, such as bad road conditions (e.g., congestion, poor signage), and enforcement effectiveness (e.g., officers' presence, technology utilization). The way traffic offenses are handled by law enforcement in Ibadan has a profound influence on motorists' behavior. Inconsistent enforcement, coupled with widespread bribery and leniency, discourages compliance and enables repeat violations. The absence of a reliable system to track offenders and enforce escalating penalties further exacerbates the problem, allowing habitual offenders to operate without significant deterrence. To address these issues, law enforcement agencies must adopt stricter, more transparent enforcement practices. Measures such as digitized offender tracking, public accountability mechanisms, and anti-corruption initiatives can help restore credibility and ensure that traffic laws are applied uniformly.

By doing so, law enforcement can create a culture of compliance and reduce the prevalence of repeat violations of traffic rules in Ibadan.

The study also emphasizes the need for a multi-faceted approach to address traffic offences, incorporating enforcement, education, and engineering solutions. By tackling these root causes, Ibadan can foster a safer and more orderly traffic system.

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