Marginalised Groups' Survival in an Informal Sector in Tanzania: An Examination of Networking Strategies among Touts in Bus Terminals in Dar es Salaam City

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Abstract

For a prolonged time, bus passengers condemn the touts in bus stands as distressing individuals. This perception is, being challenged by strong criticism, especially where the unemployment problem in the formal sector is rapidly increasing and poverty in most developing nations is extensively growing. Hence, making people choose informal jobs as the case of touts is apparent. Some scholars perceive the informal sector as a source of living and survival for the unemployed and young people not in the formal job. However, little is known about how touts as marginalised individuals survive in an informal sector setting such as bus terminals, where there are multiple working challenges. Primarily, this is due to data limitations about touts' survival strategies in informal job. This research paper examines the networking strategies employed by touts in selected bus terminals - Temeke, Ubungo and Kimara in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to survive in the informal sector. The findings indicate that touts working in bus terminals are among the impoverished groups in the country. Touts' economic survival in such an unsecured informal sector depends on the establishment of better social relations among themselves and their family members.

Keywords: marginalised groups, touts, informal sector, networking, Tanzania

Introduction

The need to fill in the gap created by failures of formal institutions on various fronts attribute to the flourishing of the informal economy in most African countries since the 1980s (Mhando, 2016). Most African countries adopted economic liberalisation policies under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s which also facilitated an exponential increase of people who engaged themselves in the informal sector (Tim, 2012). SAPs were introduced across Africa with encouragement and pressure from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). SAPs led to many job losses for civil servants because of the privatisation of public enterprises. But liberalisation of the economy forced many people, including those who were employed by the government, to seek alternative livelihood strategies. Economic liberalisation policies adopted by many in African states helped to improve the economy of both the governments and citizens. Self-employment in tout activities has been one of the informal sectors which absorbed many people in most urban areas majority being youth. According to Okpara (1988), touts are freelance workers at bus and railway stations, airports, ferry points, and especially motor-parks, who undertake the self-imposed responsibility of recruiting and organising passengers who wish to travel by the mentioned transportation means. Through this work, the touts receive a fee, or more appropriately, a 'commission', that is generally paid by the drivers or vehicle office supervisors just before their departure.

Touting in Tanzania has two faces: there are touts who conduct their touting business for upcountry buses and there are those who work within the city or towns. All these are famously known as *Wapigadebe* in Swahili. The peak time for their touting activity is in the morning when most passengers acquire their tickets and travel upcountry regions. But some few passengers make their booking and complete the payment one day before their travel. The passengers are not free from the 'hands and noisy mouths' of the touts who sometimes force to help the passengers carry their bags and other parcels. Like other income-generating activities in the informal sector, touting has never been an easy job. Scholars of informal jobs show that in many countries, the touts face continuous attacks, intimidation, and humiliation (Adaawen, 2012; Peters, 2009). But the passengers who visit the ticketing offices feel disturbed and embarrassed due to touts who usually make noise forcing the passengers to book their tickets from a particular bus agent. These are typical behaviour of the touts working in the informal sector in many African urban areas.

Despite national, regional and global initiatives to ensure both men and women achieve full and productive employment, most people in Africa South of Sahara working in the informal sector are categorised as marginalised and work for survival (UNPD, 2019; Allen, 1998; Mahadea, 2001). Touts working in bus terminals are among the marginalised individuals living in urban areas whose living conditions are of deficient standard (Uyieh, 2018; Klaeger, 2012). Haines and Wood (2002) argue that the capacity of the informal sector to absorb the most marginalised groups cannot be overstated. Hence, to a greater extent, it helps to get rid of individuals who may resort to crimes as their survival mechanism. However, it is undeniable that the majority still live in abject poverty partly due to low education levels that limit them to access other economic opportunities (Offiang, 2015). Lack of specific stipulated standards guiding working conditions, payments, working hours, duties and rights of touts explain the vulnerability of the group working in the sector (Pearce and Maunder, 2000). In addition to touts helping passengers buy tickets, they also carry their luggage, make bookings for hotels, and arrange for local transport. Nevertheless, touts are viewed by bus passengers as distressing individuals who intimidate, steal passengers' properties, and collect illegal money (Pius *et al.*, 2017).

Several studies dealt with the topic of touts' engagement in the informal sector, their contributions, challenges as well as passengers' perceptions on their presence in bus terminals (Manjokoto and Ranga, 2017; Pius *et al.*, 2017; Rushton, 2016; Okpara, 1998). However, there is a dearth of literature on touts' survival strategies while working in the informal sector, like bus terminals. As such, this paper focuses on examining the survival networking strategies employed by touts while working in a challenging informal sector setting such as bus terminals. It also seeks to examine ways that touts use from stakeholders such as their families and non-family members to support in addressing the challenges they face. Specifically, the paper intends to; first, identify factors and actors that influence touts to work in the informal sector. Second, the article examines the challenges and coping strategies employed by touts while undertaking their day to day activities. Understanding the survival strategies employed by touts and support provided to ensure their continued existence in the informal sector is significant to empower vulnerable populations.

Literature Review

Informal employment is a common feature in most developing countries that involve the majority of low-income earners (Uyieh, 2018; Klaeger,

2012; Allen, 1998; Mahadea, 2001). Generally, the term informality lends to multiple definitions and interpretations. The informal sector may refer to a sector that lacks compliance with taxation and registration by employers, and lack of protection and services that the government can provide to workers (Yeboah, 1998). The working environments for informal workers are highly contested due to the existence of multiple challenges ranging from a lack of formal contracts, social security issues, less recognition of their output, and in many contexts, such workers appear to be poorly trained, and are more likely to be poorer than workers in the formal sector (Kucera and Roncolato, 2008). High inequality is also correlated with the prevalence of informal work; workers with equivalent skills earn less in the informal sector than their counterparts in the formal sector. Besides, the wage disparity between formal and informal workers is greater at lower levels of skills. In all these challenges, the touts are inescapable. Most activities undertaken by workers in the informal sector are unregistered, irregular or temporary (*Ibid.*).

Several factors contribute to the formation of networks responsible for influencing and supporting individuals to work and survive in the informal sector. Influence from friends and peers cannot be ignored since friendship ties and networks can help an individual find opportunities in the informal sector. Friends are essential people to assist one another in accessing various opportunities such as jobs, provide support of various kinds such as third-part influence on important decisions that can positively affect a person (Yeager, 1997). According to Rawlins (1992), a friendship develops through voluntary decisions. Hence, it is privately negotiated through human interactions and associations ongoing on a day to day basis. Friendship does not develop through specific, identifiable events, but rather through a gradual and less deliberate process (Levinger, 1983).

The role of friends as actors influencing one to work in a particular place cannot be overemphasised. Close friendship among individuals can provide emotional support, interdependence and self-affirmation, to mention some. Among the key factors that may influence friendship among people is a deep level of similarity among them. Such similarity compels the friends to interact with each other as they can easily communicate and foster trust and reciprocity (Brass *et al.*, 2004). Besides, similarity can be observed on dimensions such as age, sex, education, prestige, social class, tenure, and occupation (Carley, 1991; Ibarra, l993; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). The above literature suggests that people of the same social-economic status and calibre are likely to have

similar attitudes. It becomes easy to influence their fellow in various issues, including joining or working as touts.

Further, the surrounding environment where people have been raised can act as factors that influence an individual's decision to engage in a particular activity. For instance, through frequent observation of what others are doing, one can opt to enter into a certain activity if it has the potential to cause improvement in sources of earning income. Related to that, Hao (2013) argues that choices are a function of characteristics of individuals, households, and land endowments. Land productivity and the total land among people living in rural areas influence how people can participate in farming activities among rural dwellers in North China. Barber and Erickson (2001) argues that individuals are not made with their perceptions, neither can they produce them in seclusion; mindset formation and change take place mostly through a social connection within a particular surrounding. As individuals attempt to understand reality, they compare their ideas with those of others. Burt (1982) affirms that within a provided setting where individuals live, they can compare their attitudes and behaviours with those of others taking up comparable roles, instead of being affected by direct communications from other individuals in distinct roles.

Besides the above factors, interpersonal networks have positive outcomes for individuals. The networks may help an unemployed person get a job, improve performance in some actions due to better skills, gain influence from others, and get a promotion (Brass *et al.*, 2004). Closed networks and ties among individuals generate trust critical to facilitating mutual and beneficial relations through reciprocity of actions (Coleman, 1988). Additionally, networks among individuals have several advantages, including transferring vital information that may influence definite attitude similarity due to imitation of better actions from friends. Through networks, people may have access to different crucial types of resources to help them to survive.

Surviving in any challenging working environment, such as in the informal sector, depends on the strategies one employs while addressing the difficulties faced. This is especially critical in the transportation sector where most people working in, touts included, face a number of challenges. According to Pearce and Maunder (2000), people who work in the transportation sector, such as bus drivers and conductors, face problems such as access to medical and health checks, limited access to loans and other financial services. Touts face similar and additional challenges such as low pay and viewed by passengers as stubborn, thieves and threatening

(Pius *et al*., 2017). One of their essential duties is to sell tickets on behalf of business owners, or else, direct customers to the owner's selling offices. Many touts are engaged in secondary ticketing business to earn a living. According to Rushton (2016), this activity helps touts to get paid a commission from the office upon bringing customers which add the cost of a fare to customers. Coupled with low social status in society due to their low education level, touts like other workers in the transportation sector are usually excluded from various social benefits such as health insurance and credits (Offiong *et al*., 2015). With this challenging working environment, it requires a lot of personal and collective efforts to cope or survive in such an informal sector. In most of the bus terminals, developing countries touts are the critical agents in looking for and convincing potential bus passengers to select services offered by various buses.

Theoretical Background

This study employed the 'social network theory' as a mirror for understanding our discussion. The basis of 'social network theory' (SNT) is that "networks create social capital for individuals (Burt, 1992) and societies; hence the use of such networks may be beneficial in terms of connection to various opportunities and helping each other during socio-economic challenges. SNT underscores that "an individual's potential stock of social capital consists of the collection and pattern of relationships in which one is involved and to which has access, and further to the location and patterning of her/his associations in larger social space" (Claridge, 2004:1). Therefore, we use SNT to conceptually understand the touts networking strategies with their family members, friends and supporting stakeholders like ticketing officers in the bus terminals. These forms of networks introduce individuals in touting activities and support them to sustain in the informal sector.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative technique in gathering and analyzing data. Using qualitative methods in studies with vulnerable individuals is recommended as the data can quickly reveal information about the context, meaning, coping (Tischler, 2009). Primary data were obtained through an in-depth interview. The method was selected to obtain detailed and rich information from the selected respondents. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), interviews are a very reliable way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, and definitions of situations and their constructions of reality. Three bus terminals (Ubungo, Temeke, and Kimara bus terminals) from Dar es Salaam Region were purposively selected for data

collection based on the size of activities carried out in these bus terminals. These host upcountry buses coming to Dar es Salaam City, the biggest business city in Tanzania, from all regions hence easy to provide, valuable information of the phenomena under study. This study used purposive sampling to select touts given their possession of rich information and experiences related to the activities undertaken at the bus terminals in Dar es Salaam. As Punch (2009) explains, in purposive sampling, researchers deliberately or in a targeted way, select a sample that adequately informs the researcher about key issues under investigation. Five touts as key participants in each bus terminal were involved in the study. Three bus office supervisors who commission touts to look for passengers were interviewed to obtain diverse opinions about the matter under investigation.

Trustworthiness of the study

All data collection methods, design and approach have been selected. A checklist for all interview questions was tested with different categories of respondents before the actual research ensured accuracy and relevance of the questions. To gain relevant data, researchers established rapport and trust with respondents before interviews that helped participants to provide full cooperation. As Courch et al. (2014) posit, study participants who are powerless, and disadvantaged are suspicious and show hostility to the researchers given the past experiences in contact with various actors such as authorities and news reporters. Sources triangulation method was applied to check out the consistency of data collected from respondents with different characteristics such as experiences in the activity.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy and Dar es Salaam regional and municipal offices to access data from relevant sources. Before interviews, respondents were informed about the study's aim, and a consent form was signed by both parties to ensure voluntary participation and anonymity of respondents. It was necessary to ensure that data collection, analysis process and dissemination of findings respect respondents' dignity and protect them from any harm that may arise due to their involvement in the research.

Results and Discussion

The nature of touting activities compels the touts to be in a constant move to look for passengers. Hence, touting is a busy activity that involves looking for passenger visited the areas to get commission depending on the number of passengers brought to the ticketing manager. Persuading, convincing, and

sometimes forcing the passengers are the techniques used by the touts to succeed in their business. This was evident at Temeke, Kimara and Ubungo bus terminals visited during the fieldwork as presented and discussed.

Factors and actors influencing touts to work in the informal sector

The first objective of this paper was to examine factors and actors influencing touts to work in the informal sector, specifically in the bus terminals. About the main factors that influenced touts to work in bus terminals, most touts provided similar responses. They mentioned unemployment as the primary reason that attracted them to touting activity. One tout responded this during an interview session: *"…. because of the problem of lack of employment my uncle advised me to work here then I accepted"* (MD 3 UBG). Related to this response, Salami (2002) also posits that unemployment problem and poor living conditions faced by many people in urban areas force individuals to become a tout. From the interviews with touts and bus office supervisors, several advantages that tout get have been unveiled. Touting activity has enabled touts to accrue relatively enough income to support their living notwithstanding unstable daily earnings. These statements substantiate the benefits accrued by touts by engaging in touting activity in the bus terminals:

> "*The benefit I get from this work it depends, other days you can get ten thousand other days fifteen thousand [equivalent to 4.5 to 6.5 US $] life goes on. However, during the good season (more customers) we get more*". (MD 1 KMR)

As such, touts have unveiled that they been accessing a number of advantages by performing touting activities:

> "*The first benefit we get is that we help each other in many social issues for instance when you are sick, you may not be able to buy a certain drug/medicine, you see!... you may not have money, or you may have very little to address your problem. So, we mobilize each other to assist our colleague who has limited financial resources to support for his medical treatment. So, through cooperation, we can solve that problem*."
> (MD 2 TMK)

From the above extracts, one can understand the advantages of engaging in touting activity. Besides addressing unemployment problem, touts are

connected to their colleagues and can help each other in the context of financial or income difficulties. Touts also support each other during difficult times. With a collection of above four (4) US dollars a day, one can cater for basic needs, at least to support necessary family expenditures.

Several actors were responsible for influencing touts to engage in the activities. Touts' friends and relatives, especially their elders like uncles and parents advised and influenced them to work as touts. It was also unveiled that some relatives had previous experiences in the touting activity which facilitated networks with individuals they knew before. However, some touts denied external actors having and influence on them. They said that they were self-motivated to work in the bus terminals. These quotes from some touts who were influenced by parents and friends narrate clearly:

> "…..*I got this work through my grandfather, who did this work in the past. He took me from the village since 1995 and brought me here at the stand where there are many types of works*". (MD 2 TMK).

> "*Initially, I was selling water here at the bus stand, but my friend convinced me to do this work. Mmmh, he told me that it is a paying job compared to water selling*". (T 04 KMR)

> "*As I said, it was my friend. I have friends with whom we collaborate in many things like when you are sick, or family member is sick. I normally run my family through this work. I pay the school fee for my children. I normally get 1,000 [0.43 US $] to 2,000 [0.87 US $] per head/passenger*". (T 06 KMR)

The above quotations clarify how close relatives, like parents, uncles and friends, have been important actors in influencing individuals to work as touts. Connections with relatives and friends have influenced and convinced unemployed individuals to work in the informal sector as touts. It shows that close family ties have significant contributions supporting addressing marginalised groups' challenges such as unemployment. The findings of this study are partly in corroboration with those of previous studies which revealed that through interpersonal networks positive outcomes to individuals might arise. Such outcomes include getting a job, improved

performance in some actions due to gaining better skills, gaining influence and getting a promotion (Brass *et al*., 2004). According to Coleman (1988), closed networks and ties among individuals generate trust. Hence, friendship ties can help individuals develop mutual trust and reciprocity to support each other. For instance, the above scenario of friends influencing fellows to shift from water selling to touting is in line with a previous study by Offiong et al. (2015) that assessed touting activities in selected urban motor parks in the Ibadan metropolis. It revealed that over three-quarters of touts working in the motor parks were introduced into touting by friends. Friends are essential people to assist one another in accessing various opportunities such as jobs and supporting various kinds such as third part influence on important decisions that can positively affect a person (Yeager, 1997). Close friendship among individuals is critical to providing emotional support, interdependence and self-affirmation to mention but a few. Likewise, Hao (2013) cements the role played by other actors like family members in influencing individual decision making. He argues that choices are a function of characteristics of individuals and households, among others.

Challenges faced by touts and their coping strategies

The second objective was to examine the challenges and coping strategies employed by touts while undertaking their day to day activities. Both touts and ticketing officers mentioned several challenges facing touts. The officers usually act as office supervisors in undertaking their day to day activities. The study has found that, the majority of touts were working in a challenging environment in various dimensions. The challenges include unpredictable income, lack of insurance in case of the financial crisis, tight working schedules and difficulties in getting access to negotiate with potential passengers. It was narrated by touts that what they normally get per day depends on the presence and availability of customers in a day and their willingness to pay for any service offered by touts. Besides, negotiation skills on both parties (touts and passengers or/and agents) regarding ticket prices also determine what the touts get. Given the challenges of getting reliable and relatively sufficient income, it becomes difficult to be reached with other services such as insurance benefits. Some responses from both touts and ticketing officers demonstrate the challenges encountered by touts:

> "…*yes, touts are faced with many challenges, especially when they meet rude passengers outside the office. Some passengers prefer to get all necessary information from the office. They never*

> *trust the touts. Another challenge is loss of luggage; this is very serious here at the office. Bad enough, some passengers when asked the value of such parcel do not tell the truth, they can provide unrealistic value of their parcels...*" (ID: TEMEKE-TO-01)

The problem of losing luggage, as mentioned by the ticketing officer from the above extract, was pointed by most respondents (both touts and ticketing officers) working in the bus terminals. The problem was associated to careless management of luggage among the ticketing officers at Temeke, Ubungo and Kimara.

The further inquiry established that the bus ticketing managers provide support to the touts in resolving such misunderstanding when they happen. Bus ticketing in such a scenario become mediators in bringing things in order.

Besides the above extract, another tout with vast experience in the activity had this to say regarding the complicated process of getting their customers/potential passengers:

> "*The first challenge is that you follow a person you do not know; you don't have any clue about him or prior agreement with him or her. So, you have to go and meet a person in a manner as if you are trying to beg something from him so that the customer himself can understand that this person has come with respect let me listen to him. Then you have to observe him if he is comfortable with what you are telling him. Then you greet and welcome him and introduce yourself, and ask him whether he wants to make travel arrangements or has come with other issues apart from travelling to southern part*". (TMK T 02)

The study, also, found that passengers remain helpless if they come across rough touts who sometimes force them to book a bus that is not of their interest. They even grab the bags without the passengers' consent and yet a passenger has to struggle to restore the chaotic situation as there is no arrangement to defend the passenger's interest especially in contest with the touts.

The above process, as narrated by the touts themselves, substantiates the difficulties that touts face. How to call, approach, and win a passenger to buy a ticket attests to a lack of formal procedures used in the touting activity like many other informal sector's activities. This leads to many of the emerging challenges in touting activities. The responses above explain one reason which customers' preference is to get correct information from the responsible office. The above findings are in line with a study conducted by Pius *et al* (2017) which uncovered negative views of passengers on touting activity taking place at Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, Abuja. In such situations, many passengers find touts as people who engage in extorting money, obtaining illegal fees from passengers, as well as thieving and intimidating people. If there are no strategies in place to address related challenges, the state of affairs is likely to continue in the bus terminals and airports where touts are present because usually touts work under pressure to get income to sustain their lives. Chances that touts deceive potential passengers on the kind and quality of services offered by the bus are high, especially when the passenger diverts from tout's expectations. If passengers are not keen enough to scrutinise information given by touts, they may be deceived.

Given the available challenges in working in an informal sector like touting activities, various strategies enable touts to survive. Several interviewed respondents said that touts had practiced the strategy of 'supporting each other' as a way of addressing both economic crisis and poor health challenges. Supporting each other was found to tout's primary survival strategy to work and sustain in the informal sector. For instance, touts narrated how they support each other when some of their colleagues get sick, lose their close relatives or family members and when they fail to earn income to cater for their family or get a fare to travel. The explanations below substantiate how touts have been helping each other as part of managing their challenges:

> "*These friendship ties help me in my day-to-day challenges. For instance, I may work up in the morning without any cent to get breakfast. Here comes my friend and might give me at least some token to get a breakfast… Moreover, sometimes, you do not even have bus fare. In some days, you may stay here until evening without fare to go back home… Of course, friends may assist in solving the issues related to bus fare, and that helps a lot in return in the next day*". (T 02 TMK).

> "*We help each other, and it happens you do not have even bus fare so friends may help you so that you come back to the job on the following day*". (T 01 TMK)

The above extracts explain the strategies employed by touts to address their challenges and cope with their working environment. The strategy like relying on 'friendship ties' help them to assist each other especially in the context of critical financial needs to support their daily livelihood particularly for meals and bus fare. These enable touts to stay active during working days and manage to facilitate their movements especially going back home in the evening. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping refers to "persistently changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to control any form of external and internal demands that are considered beyond the person's resources". For instance, problem-focused coping aims to reduce stress, emotion-focused coping aims to reduce the emotional distress associated with the stressor, and seeking social support involves engaging with others to share and solve problems (Tischler, 2009). The existing strategy of providing socio-economic support to each other has to, some extent, enabled some touts to solve their day to day challenges. However, for touting activity in the bus terminals to provide a relatively decent employment opportunity, more strategies are needed. Together with the touts' self-initiative, both state and non-state actors should initiative strategies to ensure a better working environment.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine survival networking strategies employed by touts who work in the informal sector to get income to cater for their basic needs and address their faced difficulties. Engagement in touting activities has proved to have a significant contribution for marginalised individuals like touts to get income to cater for basic needs. Through existing friendship ties developed in their working environment, trust and reciprocity touts survived during difficult times such as socio-economic crisis. Given the challenging working environment in which touts undertake their day to day activities, several survival strategies need to be put in place and strengthened by the touts themselves and various other actors. It is crucial to ensure that touts accrue a relatively more and stable additional income to cater for basic needs. Both state and non-state actors responsible for supporting marginalised groups such as touts need to extend special and affordable insurance services to address some of the challenges and improve their living standards. For instance, touts can be mobilised through organised socio-economic groups to access health insurance provided by the

National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). It is critical because when friends and family members are not in a good position to assist them, they will resort to other ways to formal insurance schemes to address their challenges. Bus owners need to employ technology to easily access and communicate with their potential customers for mutual benefits. Effective use of technology can help to reduce existing tensions between touts and potential customers when touts compete in calling passengers. Using appropriate ICT facilities can help touts to meet passengers quickly and help bus owners keep transaction records proper and ensure the government collects taxes effectively. Hence, at creating a win-win situation among all stakeholders, bus service owners, passengers and touts.

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