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PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF TOUTS IN MUSHIN AND OSHODI
NEIGHBOURHOODS - LAGOS STATE – NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the activities of touts from the perceptions of Oshodi and Mushin residents and seeks to expose the factors necessitating the increasing involvement of youths in the obnoxious trade, as well as the security implication of touting in Lagos neighbourhood. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study. Major findings revealed touting as a survival strategy, linked to the rising level of unemployment, poverty, lack of education and parental care; and the perceived success of senior touts in the transportation corridors as motivating factors enhancing the activities of youths as touts in the two communities. Contrary to the researcher's expectations and major studies, residents highlighted the contributions of touts in neighbourhood security and crime control through the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and other local vigilante groups. A situation 65 percent of interviewed respondents attributed to the low crime rate in the two neighbourhoods. Based on these findings, the study recommends that governmental policies on employment should make provisions among others for unskilled, uneducated and energetic youths in urban development, as well as in neighbourhood security.

Keywords: *Unemployment, Obnoxious trade, neighbourhood Security; Oodua People's Congress; and Governmental Policies.*

Statistically youths between the ages of 15-24 years make up nearly 30 percent of the population in developing countries, and for the foreseeable future, are the largest and potentially most significant human resource cohort in the developing world (USAID, 2007). The World Bank 2008 estimates that by 2010 the worldwide number of youth in this age bracket will reach 1.8 billion and 1.5 billion of them will live in developing nations. Despite the growing numbers, many countries (of which Nigeria was listed) continually fail to recognise or invest in the assets, resources, and potential embodied in their young citizens. Evidences are bound that the vast majority of young people lack basic education, marketable skills, decent employment, and are not positively engaged in civil society (Isamah and Okunola, 1997, Okojie, 2003).

The implication of these no doubt explains the reason why the security of neighbourhoods, lives, and properties in major cities in Nigeria have been threatened. Out of school and un or underemployed youths (mostly males) are seen loitering the transportation corridors as touts during the day and at night, constituting nuisance all over, most especially in the neighbourhoods of Mushin and Oshodi suburbs in Lagos Metropolis. Analysis of touting and areaboy in Nigeria prior to the 2007 administration of Governor Fashola, revealed a high level of insecurity in Lagos state where series of crimes and violent activities were attributed to the increasing number of *areaboy*s and touts along transportation line (Heap, 2000; Iginla, 2007). Such negative outcomes not only impose costs on young people and their families, but also on the economy and society at large.

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The city of Lagos, like most cities in developing nations, has shown, a widespread unemployment rate, migration of skilled and unskilled youths, the collapse of family structures, the disintegration of traditional values of communalism and child labour (Omitoogun 1996). These have also led to the daily socialization of children on the street, early exposure to street economy, formation of youth gangs around major motor parks and the development of common interest in advocating some form of deviance as a means of survival (Schneider, 2006). Over the years the Lagos State Transportation Corridors, (the bus-stops, streets and motor parks), have come to be seen as a safe haven and avenue for the recruitment and training of individuals into deviant careers, one of which is touting, often embraced by the unemployed, unskilled and sometimes homeless (Owumi, 1994; Adisa, 1994; Omitogun 1996).

The United Nation Development Programme (2002) described the activities of youths who take to touting as involving coercive and persuasive requests, petty crimes and sometimes-violent offences to acquire resources, generally cash in the urban main business district and crowded areas, disturbing the civil society and defying the civic authority. Like gangs, touts have also been noted as drug peddlers and to be engaged in all sorts of criminal activities (Adler, 1992; May, T., Edmunds, M., and Hough, M. 1999). Most scholars have also come to label them as thieves, thugs' jobless and indolent, with violent attitudes and behaviours (Owumi, 1994). A common feature of past research is the one-sided 'nothing good' account from the vantage position of scholars and policy makers; it is in this regard that this study seeks to understand the activities of touts from the position of residents in the communities where touts are predominant and mostly domiciled in Lagos State.

Based on the literature reviewed, this study examined Oshodi and Mushin residents' perception of touts and their activities. Consequent on this, three research questions were raised and answered.

1. How do residents of Mushin and Oshodi perceive the activities of touts?
2. What are those factors prompting individual into touting as a career?
3. To what extent has tout contributed to the insecurity of lives and properties in Mushin and Oshodi?
- 4.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. It involves the use of quantitative and qualitative data obtained using questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study engaged two hundred and forty respondents (240); a hundred and twenty each from the two communities (Mushin and Oshodi) in Lagos State. The choice of these communities was informed by the fact that it is the most problematic in the activities of the category of people generally referred to as touts. Also the high concentration of unemployed youths, the problem of security of lives and properties, criminality and security issues are usually linked to touts in any neighbourhood. The sample contains both males and females residents within the age brackets of 18-65 years. The respondents comprised of 134 males and 106 females. The sample population was drawn without bias using a simple random sampling technique in the selection of households and eventual respondents in Oshodi and Mushin Local Government Areas. Two hundred and forty questionnaires were administered; ten in-depth interviews (IDIs) and four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among residents; while series of field observations and life histories of touts were done to complement the views of the residents. The analysis involved a description using a simple percentage distribution alongside content summaries of responses from the qualitative data using the SPSS and NVIVO-8 software package.

Reponses from the communities understudied revealed that touting is on the increase in the states (lagos) and around their neighbourhoods. This Over 74 percent of the sampled respondents noted as shown in table 1. Though this was expected, as the economic situation in Nigeria regarding youths, unemployment and rural-urban migration, apart from still being urban

bias, has not improved considerably in comparison to what it used to be in the 1970s, early 1980s and early 1990s.

Table 1: Youths Involvement in Touting

Do you think a lot of youths are taking to touting?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	178	74.2
No	59	24.6
NR	3	1.3
Total	240	100.0

Field Survey, 2009

Extant accounts and literatures have shown that the trend has been on the increase negatively since the 1980s (Burns, 1980; Isamah, and Okunola, 1997; Okojie, 2003; The Guardian 2009). There is a correlation however that as unemployment increases in any country, the tendency is always higher for the informal economy to also grow, and invariably other survival options, which have been labelled as criminal, undignified or deviant in nature. Thus the activities of youths in touting is like every other informal trading, a phenomenon regarded as prevalent throughout the world but nowhere more visible and contributively to local economies as in the developing world (ILO, 2007). Buttressing the above point, various interviewees⁵ noted that it was no longer a job for a particular ethnic group or indigenes of a state. The involvement of Igbos, from the Eastern part of the country in touting was highlighted which was uncommon in the past, but to be limited to the Yorubas in Lagos and other Western States.

However, the inception of the Present Lagos State Governor since 2007, has turned the Lagos Transportation corridor around for the better in terms of the speedily displacement of touts from various bus stops and commercial centres, but not in all its entirety especially in the interior. Field observations and responses revealed that touts are gradually becoming more visible at night, at the closure of the State patrol officers and other law enforcement agencies⁶. The situation was described in both communities thus:

An Oodua people congress (OPC) Leader in one of the Focus group discussion noted that Mushin and Oshodi touts are so many that everyone can be referred to as tout. 'They live with us and we live with them. As far as the population of Lagos keep rising, and government is not providing jobs for the uneducated, and the unskilled, the problem will not reduce' (Male/Mushin/12/09/09). The above summations led to the probe questions on available type of touts and how their activities are viewed. The nature and categorisation of touts from interviews and focus group discussions revealed a three broad classification:

1. Full-time touts: these set of touts owe absolute loyalty to NURTW (Full membership of NURTW);
2. Associate/Affiliate touts: these are friends and assistants of Full time touts
3. Potential or Wannabes: These are usually the youngest people associated with a gang – youth

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Category two and three are likely recruits into touting career, some of them are as young as 10 years' hanging around with gang members with the belief that gang life is normal and worthwhile, as well as one day getting a job with the Nigerian Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) or Road Transport Employees Association (RTEAN). The of touts activities are summarised below from in responses of residents in both communities as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Residents' Perception of the Activities of Touts

Perception of Touts Activities (How would you describe Touting?)	Frequency	Percentage
A Career	25	10.4
A Source of livelihood	78	32.6
Not a career/job	62	25.8
Opportunists	34	14.2
Exploiters	41	17.1
Total	240	100.0

Field Survey, 2009.

Table 2 shows the various perceptions of touts regarding their activities. Responses however shows that the least percentage of residents saw touting as a career as asserted by 10.4 percent. Others 14.2 percent and 17.1 percent saw them as opportunist and exploiters. Notwithstanding majority (32.6 percent) perceived their activities as a source of livelihood. This invariably contradicts the 25.8 percent of the respondents who emphatically disapprove their activities as a career. However to a reasonable extent survival is one of the major attribute of a career, going by Gardiner's definition: 'a career is related to a person's course or progress through life especially when publicly conspicuous, or abounding in remarkable incidents (Gardiner, 2006). Also touting as a source of livelihood, corresponds with what Arthur, M. B., Inkson, K., and Pringle, J. K. (1994) referred to as one of the characteristics of a boundaryless career, which exist and persist in societies where traditional career boundaries have been broken, where patterns of paid work are broken for unemployment reasons, and where individuals perceives their future regardless of constraints. From his submission and the institutional anomie framework one can say in essence that touting results from the failure of the system, thereby creating a new pathway and independence rather than dependence on traditional organisational structures for survival. Some of these views were highlighted and captured also by residents' interviewees living around the transportation corridors. Contrarily there were some interviewees who tend to differ from others regard the idea that touting has become a job.

The above summation however, has some common elements which point to touting as a survival strategy which gives leverage for sustenance in a society whose informal sector is not properly organised. Similarly the activities of touts and the security implication in the neighbourhood were strongly discussed with revealing information about the Oodua People's Congress; (a cultural and ethnic militia group) involvement in security of lives and properties in

Lagos State. Excerpts from some of the interviews revealed thus: that touts involvement with the OPC movement made it mandatory for traders and shop owners to pay for security of their wares and properties. This was a major contribution of touts to the two neighbourhoods.

Touts In Neighbourhood Security and Crime Control

The involvement of touts in neighbourhood security was a major and important finding of this research, which was basically highlighted by residents of Mushin and Oshodi LGAs, about 65 percent of the residents recalled how touts and unemployed youths in Lagos generally embraced the Gani Adams faction of Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC). The congress expanded its activities from an initial politically motivated 'cultural work' into other aspects of politics and security; also in the settlement of local disputes and vigilantism. It was at this point that a lot of youths, and touts were said to have embraced and ventured into security business (Akinyele, 2001; Omojola 2003; Adebani, 2005; Nolte, 2007). The formation and operation of OPC in the 1990s brought about a drastic reduction of criminal activities and the involvement of touts in local security, and the wide spread of vigilante groups in Lagos State. This is a period Nigerians apprehensive about the Criminal Justice System, thus in large measure, touts venturing into vigilantism can be referred to as an adaptation to a lost sense of security of the neighbourhood where they operate and, by extension, a profound lack of faith in the Nigerian Police. Situations like these have also been noted in some black neighbourhood during the 1930s economic depression in the United States, with relatively deprived population: disadvantaged, socially isolated and stigmatised youths coming together to provide security for the community based on the peoples law. A term Anderson (1999), referred to as 'street justice'.

Existing study further confirms that 88 percent of members of ethnic militia are economically inactive youths; *areaboys* and school dropouts (CDCMS, 2003). A further analysis shows that for touts to have been involved in local vigilantism, it means that not all touts are thieves as widely alleged by residents/Lagosians. The involvement of touts in vigilantism during this period and the perceived ability of vigilantes to control crime more effectively than the relevant arms of the state explain the complex role of vigilantism not only as a source of crime control but also as a potential source of income generation and possible career. For this reason many governments and studies on community policing have tolerated or even encouraged local vigilante groups (DFID, 2008/2009). These views were common among residents/traders in the Mushin and Oshodi business districts.

On the contrary there were few respondents who thought otherwise saying that, it is the same touts who were stealing properties, traders' goods and setting markets ablaze. For others they saw activities of touts in relation to security in market places as full of pretence and farce. An analysis of the statements shows that since most markets are surrounded by major bus-stops there is usually the tendency for touts especially those without accommodation to fall back to the market which serves as resting place at night. It was therefore easy for touts to be accused of stealing and setting markets on fire in order to cart away goods and valuables from the shops.

Accusation of all touts as criminals was debunked by some of the security personnel interviewed, however not without mentioning that some of them constitute menace to the society. A community leader in Mushin noted that the NURTW and the police have been warned severally to clampdown on the activities of the criminal elements in the Union:

Other interviewees submissions were consistent with positions of scholars (Isamah and Okunola, 1997; Okojie; 2003) on the push and pull factors necessitating the choice of becoming a tout. Thus there is a convergence view by both residents and touts in attributing touting to the increasing problems of urbanisation, unemployment and underpaid jobs in the country. Other respondents noted that touting is far better than taking to crime...*'At least, what they do is far better than armed-robbery'*. It is important to state here that most of them will certainly go into other criminal ventures if they are laid off the streets without alternatives given. Series of

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suggestions were also made among the discussants. Notable among these were opinions of a male and female in the communities as stated below:

Area boys should be registered and organised by the government into respected body to aid commercial drivers and collect revenues on government behalf. That would be better than forcing them into a life of more violent crime in the transportation industry (Female/Mushin/IDI 18/09/09).

Touts are in existence no doubt, but it is because the government wants them to be if not how can one describe the ugly situation whereby graduates are now becoming touts and thugs, molesting helpless citizens without the government doing anything. Government should provide jobs and skill empowerment programmes for them ((Male/Mushin/19/09/09).)

Emphasising touts as wasted manpower potentials and the need for their rehabilitation was highlighted by a landlord noting that the failure of the Nigerian government on one hand and the entrepreneurs on the other, in building industries created the whole situation of unemployment and deviant survival options in cities⁷. These submissions are not unconnected to the increasing rate of unemployment, declining regulated wage labour, and growing numbers of job-cuts, which created corps of laid off workers, unemployed graduates, secondary school leavers and those whose services are, for the time being, still required, to throng motor parks in order to negotiate a living off Nigeria's battered economy. Also the findings bring to the fore and contradicts earlier findings that majority of area boys are illiterates and nothing good (Oyeniya, 2007). This long held view was not accepted or supported by majority of the respondents living in the communities where the research was conducted. Comments from respondents signalled the fact that there are individuals in the society who perceive touts and touting as income earning or mildly speaking as an alternative amongst many to the problems of securing a job in the country.

Though this contradicts various literature views and portrayals of touts as individuals with born criminal tendencies, lowly educated, and individuals from broken homes who take to deviant ways of survival with little or no regards to the economic situation affecting their families, parents and siblings alike (Omitoogun, 1996; Adisa, 1994; Momoh, 2005; Heap, 2000; Emordi, 2005). However a common feature in the various interviews from resident-respondents and discussions with those in touting shows that, touts like every other worker, apart from earning some form of income, entitlement and salary, also grow in rank in terms of positions and years in service. This further shows that touts provide some form of commercial services. Homeless touts (a situation common among youths/adults migrants outside Lagos) were also observed. The effect of this according to various studies of homeless adolescent in Europe and America are enormous especially as it contributes to increasing level of risky behaviours, criminal act, and in some cases the level of suicide (Whitbeck and Simons, 1990; Molnar, Shade, Kral, Booth, and Watters, 1998).

However findings revealed that homeless touts condition were capitalised by traders and residents around market places, super markets and other commercial outfits like filling stations to serve as night guards after day-time hustling; to provide security. This observation corroborates Ismail's (2009) terminology of Securo-commerce, the exchange of money for value and security among touts, also defined as the combination of both commercial and security - the trade in security through payments demanded and received by touts in junctions and bases from formal

and informal economic actors, residents and visitors, and even the state, in exchange for protection from physical and psychological violence.

Field observations further reveals that training (test of stamina) and punishments among erring touts are usually militaristic in nature (Corporal punishment, Court-martial, and Instant justice). These give an insight into the structural and organizational elements of contemporary touts and the mechanics of differentiation and territoriality among them. This also corroborates the summation of Ismail (2009); that a mutation has taken place in the evolution of 'area boyism' and youth associational life in Nigerian transportation corridors. Extant accounts therefore offer limited insights into the structural and organizational elements of contemporary area boys in touting, regarding group solidarity, as it provides youngsters with support, companionship, and protection. Group solidarity was noticed to be enforced by various mechanisms. Members create a private language using code words, and gestures. Also of importance is the strict code of loyalty and honour; punishment of norm breakers harshly without recourse to a higher authority.

Table 3: Residents Perception of Factors Prompting Individuals to Touting

What do you think is prompting youths to the business?	Frequency	Percent
Unemployment	67	27.9
Lack education	59	24.6
The nature Lagos Environment	14	5.8
Success of some Touts	18	7.5
Lack of Parental Care	44	18.3
Poverty among parents	38	15.8
Total	240	100.0

Field Survey, 2009

The table shows the various responses of residents pertaining to the factors prompting youths into the business of touting. As expected and as most literature and research have shown, one of the major problems affecting youths in African cities is unemployment (Sheldon, R. G., Tracy, S. K., and Brown, W. B. 2001; Koolhaas, 2002; Okojie, 2003; Katumanga, 2005. Simone, 2005 Kessides, 2007). Unemployment⁸ ranked highest among the rest. About twenty-eight percent (27.9%) majority of the respondents asserted to unemployment. Other reasons given were lack of education among youths⁹ (24.6 percent); lack of parental care¹⁰ (18.3 percent), and poverty (15.8 percent). All these are characteristic features of most cities in developing world of Africa, Asia and South America, where hitherto strong family ties and social networks which once serve to ameliorate poverty are gradually disappearing and engendering deviant survival and urban violence widely associated with youths in cities. The implication will not only tell on development but also on security which determines where foreign investors stake their investments.

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Table 4: Residents Knowledge of Touts Income and Successful Individuals Out of Touting

Do you think one can make a living from touting	Frequency	Percent
Yes	106	44.2
No	134	55.8
Total	240	100.0
Do touts earn enough income to cater for themselves?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	118	49.2
No	112	46.7
NR	10	4.2
Total	240	100.0
Do you know some individuals who have become successful through touting	Frequency	Percent
Yes	138	57.5
No	101	42.5
Total	240	100.0

Field Survey, 2009

Table 4 shows the responses to some questions on the knowledge and perception of touts by residents. The responses showed that 44.2 percent of the sampled respondents think that one can earn a living through touting as against 55.8 percent who thought otherwise. On whether touts earn enough income to cater for themselves, responses were slightly higher in the affirmative (49.2 percent), while 46.7 percent had a contrary opinion. The knowledge about touting as a career which has produced some successful individuals was noted by majority of the respondents 57.5 percent. Typical example of a success story of a tout was narrated by a respondent in terms of the amount touts get daily thus:

The amount of money touts make is quite much daily; Nobody will imagine that some of them earn over ₦5000 daily. I know a particular man who was able to build a house and own a car from the proceeds. Today he is highly respected among youths; many of these youths see him as a symbol of success (FGD/Female Oshodi).

Among others there were those who had a contrary opinion. This was signified by 42.5 percent, they were not aware of any one who has become successful from touting. As highlighted by a resident, it is not nice a thing to call success from touting a success because it is not a thing to be proud of. Emphatically she concluded, ‘Take for instance, nobody will like to be called a relative of a tout, no matter how rich the tout maybe’.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study showed clearly that a lot of youths have been identified as taking to touting as a survival strategy in Mushin and Oshodi suburbs in Lagos state. This is basically attributed to the alarming rate of the unemployment situation in Nigeria. However it was noted that not all touts are criminal as they have been portrayed over the years in literatures. Important to note in this study, was the discover that touts are not lazy sets of idle men, but strong and full of stamina, which serve as criteria in their recruitment into the transportation industry as members of staff of the National Union of Road Transport Association (NURTW).

On the other hand residents and traders acknowledged touts involvement in neighbourhood security and vigilante services, which ensured protection of lives and properties in

the Oshodi and Mushin and other commercial places at night. This account for the reasons why the two suburbs are relative free of crime but widely acclaimed for breeding criminals by other neighbourhoods. Irrespective of these findings this study recommends that governmental policies on employment should also make provisions for unskilled and energetic youths in the labour and industrial development of cities; as well as regulating their activities in order to prevent touts from becoming violent around the neighbourhoods they operate. Lastly as individuals and markets women are already doing, the state government should also be able to capitalise, enhance and channel the strength and stamina of these categories of youth into security of lives and properties.

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