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Consumers' Willingness to Use Mobile Taxi Booking Applications: A Theoretical Approach Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract

The public transportation sector has undergone significant changes due to the emergence of digital technologies, especially with the introduction of mobile app-based taxi services. In Sri Lanka, the widespread availability of smartphones has contributed to the growing popularity of mobile taxi booking (MTB) apps. This study aimed to examine consumers' intentions to adopt these online taxi booking platforms through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior. A descriptive survey method was used, and data were collected using structured questionnaires. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling techniques were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that factors such as perceived behavioral control, attitude, and subjective norms are key drivers of the intention to use MTB apps among Sri Lankan consumers. These findings can provide valuable insights for e-hailing service providers and mobile app developers, helping them create effective marketing strategies, optimize app design with user-friendly features, and enhance their services to attract more users and increase profitability.

Keywords: E-hailing, Mobile apps, Taxi service industry, Customer intention

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Introduction

The taxi sector is a crucial component of urban transportation systems, offering point-to-point services while simultaneously creating numerous employment opportunities within the workforce. The efficiency of a country's workforce is often closely linked to the effectiveness of its transportation systems. However, in recent years, taxi service providers have faced challenges due to a mismatch between the supply of taxis and the demand from passengers [1, 2]. This imbalance has led to inefficiencies where both passengers and drivers waste valuable time. Passengers struggle to secure timely pickups, while drivers often face long waiting periods to find customers. These issues contribute to increased traffic congestion, particularly during peak hours, and exacerbate air pollution due to slower vehicle speeds. Such inefficiencies have led to growing consumer dissatisfaction, with many passengers filing complaints about the service.

The rapid advancement of technology in recent years has brought significant changes to service industries, including the taxi sector [3-6]. In the taxi industry, these changes have been fueled by improvements in telecommunication, mobile technology, and wireless networks. The widespread use of smartphones and faster internet connections have played a key role in transforming the sector. Today, smartphones are the easiest means for accessing information online and have become an integral part of daily life, with global statistics showing that 32 billion people were smartphone users as of 2019, representing a 41.5% global penetration rate. Furthermore, smartphones offer a wide range of mobile applications (apps), which are

software tools used for various purposes. In 2018, a staggering 174 billion mobile app downloads were recorded, indicating a steady and continuous rise in app usage. Many of these apps are free, contributing to the widespread adoption of mobile applications. These apps serve functions such as communication, gaming, social networking, and browsing. Mobile taxi booking (MTB) apps are a prime example of how the taxi industry has been reshaped, providing a new direction for the sector. MTB applications have emerged as a solution to address the challenges faced by passengers and the traditional taxi industry, especially in urban areas. Often referred to as e-hailing apps, these platforms serve as an intermediary connecting passengers with available taxis. This technological innovation has contributed significantly to the rapid growth of the taxi industry. Through MTB apps, passengers can request rides and make informed decisions about their transportation needs. The integration of technology has sparked a global revolution in how people use taxi services. With MTB apps, users can check the availability of taxis in real-time and plan their trips by simply entering a few details. The user experience has been enhanced with features like graphical interfaces and GPS functionality, allowing passengers to identify nearby drivers. Once a request is made, drivers can either accept or decline the trip. Before confirming the ride, passengers have access to the driver's profile, which includes verification of their legal credentials. The introduction of MTB apps has significantly transformed the global taxi industry. By 2019, the e-hailing market had a user penetration rate of 13.5%, and it was expected to rise to 20% by 2023 (World Statista). Furthermore, the global revenue of the ride-hailing market reached US$ 183,677 million in 2019 (World Statista).

Competition among service providers in the mobile taxi app sector is intensifying due to aggressive promotional marketing strategies. These offers have rapidly attracted consumers to use MTB services for their transportation needs. Compared to traditional taxi services, mobile taxi apps provide numerous advantages, such as lower costs, various payment options, discounts, and reliable service. These benefits not only enhance customer satisfaction but also improve customer loyalty by delivering excellent experiences [7, 8]. Additionally, the ride-hailing concept offers advantages for drivers, allowing them to be hired without waiting and earn bonuses based on the number of trips completed. In their study, Peng *et al.* [9] noted that the adoption of mobile taxi apps helped reduce the disparity between travelers and drivers.

In Sri Lanka, more than fifty MTB-based taxi service firms currently operate in the capital and other urban regions. This trend has seen rapid consumer adoption, surpassing that of traditional taxi services. The growth of the MTB app market in Sri Lanka has led to a decline in the use of traditional taxi services, sparking debates and discussions among consumers. The widespread adoption of MTB apps has notably influenced consumer behavior. Consequently, identifying the factors influencing Sri Lankan consumers' intention to adopt MTB applications is an important area of study, both theoretically and practically. This research aims to explore these factors, using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to understand the behavioral intentions of Sri Lankan consumers in adopting MTB apps.

Theoretical framework

The TPB serves as a foundational cognitive model to understand human actions and their underlying motivations [10, 11]. It is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which was found inadequate when predicting behaviors where individuals have limited volitional control. To address this limitation, TPB was developed as a more comprehensive model for predicting behavior in situations where volitional control is restricted [12]. Over time, TPB has become a widely accepted model for studying the acceptance of innovations, offering insight into how informational and motivational factors shape individuals' behaviors [11]. TPB asserts that three critical factors—attitude, subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC)—influence the intention to adopt new behaviors and the likelihood of acting on those intentions [13, 14]. It is commonly used to study the intention to use new technology and information systems [15, 16] and has applications in fields like marketing, healthcare, sustainability, and public relations.

In TPB, attitude reflects an individual’s evaluation of a behavior as either favorable or unfavorable [17]. Fishbeinand Ajzen [13] described attitude as a person’s positive or negative appraisal of performing a specific behavior.

Subjective norms (SN), another core component, refer to the social pressures that influence an individual’s decision to either perform or refrain from behavior [10]. Weng *et al.* [18] emphasized that SN is shaped by the beliefs and opinions of others, with their research indicating that SN significantly affects users’ continued intention to use MTB apps.

The third element in TPB, perceived behavioral control (PBC), is a key factor in predicting both behavioral intentions and actual actions. Ajzen [10] defined PBC as the individual’s perception of how easy or difficult it is to engage in a behavior. PBC assesses the amount of effort required to perform the behavior and the control the individual perceives over it. This component is particularly significant when studying behaviors like online shopping [16, 19, 20].

The final key variable in TPB is behavioral intention, which represents the individual’s likelihood of engaging in a particular behavior [13]. It is regarded as a primary predictor of actual behavior [10] and is seen as a motivating force that propels individuals to act. Behavioral intention is distinct from related concepts like aspiration and self-expectation, as it is directly tied to the intention to perform a behavior.

Hypothesis design

The TPB posits that a person's attitude influences their intention to act, which ultimately shapes their behavior. Research has found that attitudes significantly affect individuals' acceptance and use of various information systems [21, 22]. Over time, attitudes can shift as individuals are exposed to new experiences and information [23]. Studies have shown that attitudes are key predictors of behavioral intention [16], and Paul *et al.* [24] further established that attitudes strongly influence consumer purchase intentions. In the context of the taxi service sector, mobile booking platforms aim to modify consumer attitudes through promotional efforts to encourage long-term loyalty. As a result, the first hypothesis (H1) posits:

H1: Attitudes significantly influence users' behavioral intention to adopt MTB applications.

Subjective norms (SN), which refer to perceived social influences on behavior, also play an important role in shaping attitudes toward mobile taxi applications. These norms affect users' perceptions of control and their attitudes toward adopting new behaviors [25]. Weng *et al.* [18] found a positive relationship between subjective norms and user attitudes towards MTB applications, with similar results observed in the study by Lim *et al.* [26] in Malaysia. Thus, the second hypothesis (H2) suggests:

H2: Subjective norms significantly influence the behavioral intention of users to adopt MTB applications.

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), which reflects an individual's sense of ease or difficulty in performing a behavior, is another important factor affecting behavioral intention. Research has shown that PBC is a key element in predicting consumers' adoption of online systems [27, 28]. According to Hansen *et al.* [29], PBC plays a crucial role in shaping users' intentions. Therefore, the third hypothesis (H3) is formulated:

H3: Perceived behavioral control significantly influences the behavioral intention to use MTB apps.

In many studies, behavioral intention has been shown to directly influence actual behavior, particularly in the context of adopting new technologies [19]. Sheppard *et al.* [30] argued that intentions are strong predictors of behavior. Similarly, Gieure *et al.* [31] examined the link between intentions and actual behaviors. Hence, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is:

H4: The behavioral intention to use MTB apps significantly affects actual usage behavior.

Materials and Methods

Data collection

The research employed a descriptive survey approach to identify the factors influencing taxi consumers' intentions to adopt MTB apps. The target population for this study consisted of both international and local taxi users in Sri Lanka. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was utilized to select participants from the taxi service user population. Data were gathered through a survey questionnaire distributed by taxi drivers across Sri Lanka. In total, 214 responses were collected, with 181 deemed valid for analysis. The structured nature of the questionnaire ensured the collection of reliable and precise data from the participants. The survey was conducted in English, as it is widely understood in Sri Lanka and serves as a second language to Sinhala, making it accessible to both local and international respondents. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: the first section focused on demographic information to better understand the sample's profile, the second section covered questions on exogenous variables, and the third section focused on endogenous variables.

Variables and measurement scales

A thorough review of the literature on the TPB led to the development of 15 items to measure the four key variables in the study. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," to assess responses. The variables in the model were evaluated using a multiple-item measurement scale. To assess the dependent variable, behavioral intention, the measurement scale designed by Limayem *et al.* [19] for e-commerce adoption was applied. For measuring the subjective norm, the scale used by Tommasetti *et al*. [32] was adopted. The scales for attitude and perceived behavioral control were taken from Rouibah *et al.* [33]. These items were adjusted to suit the context of the current study.

Results and Discussion

Sample characteristics

The descriptive analysis of the sample revealed a balanced gender distribution, with 44.7% male and 45.3% female respondents. The age group of 31-40 years was the largest, comprising 35.9% of respondents, followed by the 18-25 years group (28.2%), 26-30 years group (15.5%), 41-50 years group (8.8%), and those over 50 years (6.6%). Regarding income, 24.9% earned less than Rs. 20,000 monthly, 50.8% earned between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 40,000, 17.1% earned Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 60,000, and 7.2% earned more than Rs. 60,000. Education-wise, 54.7% of respondents had a bachelor's degree, 29.3% had completed high school, and 16% had a master's degree or higher. Internet usage patterns revealed that 59.7% had been using the internet for over 7 years, 20.4% for 3-5 years, and 13.8% for 5-7 years. In terms of spending on taxi services, 5.5% used taxis daily, while 23% spent less frequently.

Measurement model

To assess the suitability of the data for analysis, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using SPSS software. The factor extraction process utilized maximum likelihood estimation with Promax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test yielded a value of 0.920, indicating excellent sampling adequacy. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted to validate the correlation matrix, confirming the data's appropriateness for factor analysis. The model explained 72.37% of the total variance, with the majority of factor loadings exceeding 0.7. One item from the attitude construct was found to be problematic and was excluded from further analysis.

The reliability of the factors was then tested using Cronbach's alpha, with a minimum required value of 0.7 [34]. The results were deemed satisfactory: attitude = 0.848, subjective norms = 0.862, perceived behavioral control = 0.972, and behavioral intention = 0.893.

Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement model. The CFA results demonstrated a good fit, with the following indices: goodness of fit (GFI) = 0.919, adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) = 0.874, root mean square residual (RMR) = 0.032, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.933, and comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.975, all of which satisfied the required validity standards **(Table 1)**.

Table 1. Model fit results of the measurement model

Index of Fit	Chi-Square	df	P	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Value	133.54	87	0.001	1.535	0.919	0.874	0.933	0.975	0.055

The analysis also assessed convergent validity. Hair *et al.* [35] suggest that convergent validity is examined by comparing the model's indicators with an alternative measure, where strong correlations indicate that the scale is accurately capturing the intended constructs. Two approaches were utilized to evaluate the convergent validity of this study. The first involved checking the average factor loadings from the factor analysis, with all loadings exceeding 0.7, thus confirming convergent validity. The second approach involved calculating the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which reflects the proportion of variance captured by the construct relative to measurement error.

In addition, the study sought to verify the discriminant validity of the model. This was achieved by comparing the AVE values to the shared variance estimates (squared correlations). Discriminant validity was confirmed when the shared variance estimates (MSV) exceeded the AVE values across all measures. A summary of the results is provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Discriminant validity measures

	AVE	MSV	Intention	Attitude	Subjective norms	PBC	Actual
Intention	0.682	0.402	**0.826**				
Attitude	0.557	0.536	0.634	**0.746**			
Subjective norms	0.616	0.403	0.589	0.635	**0.785**		
PBC	0.748	0.536	0.540	0.732	0.553	**0.865**	
Actual	4.511	0.027	0.164	0.085	0.027	0.092	**2.124**

Structural model

Once the model's fit was confirmed through the confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS software to examine the relationships between the constructs in the model. The results of this empirical causal model are shown in **Figure 1**.

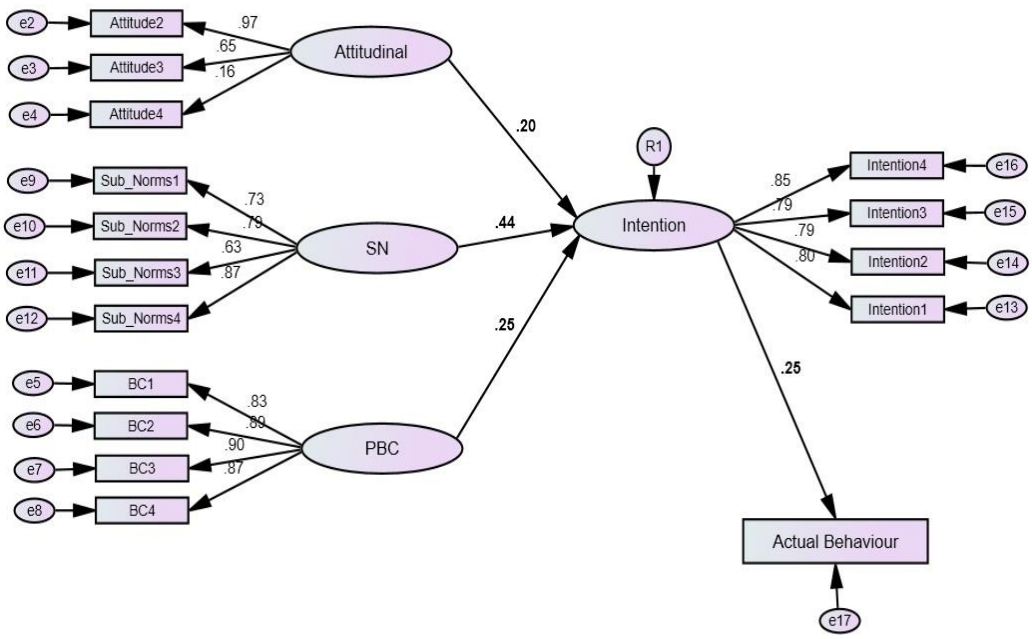

Figure 1. Structural model output
Chi-square = 291.542 / Degrees of freedom = 177 / Probability level = .000

The structural model's fit was evaluated, and the results largely met the established standards for validity. A summary of the model fit outcomes can be found in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Model fit results of the empirical causal model

Index of fit	Chi-Square	(df)	P	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Value	604.03	92	0.000	3. 305	0.829	0.747	0.848	0.887	0.113

Testing of hypotheses

H1: The impact of attitude on users' intentions to adopt MTB apps.

To test Hypothesis 1, the correlation between attitude and the intention to use mobile taxi apps was analyzed using path analysis within AMOS. The test results indicate that the null hypothesis, which claimed that attitude does not influence the intention to use mobile taxi apps in Sri Lanka, was rejected at a 95% confidence level ($P > 0.05$). The analysis found a moderate effect of attitude on users' intentions to use mobile taxi apps, reflected by a squared multiple correlation (SMC) value of 0.196. This suggests that a one standard deviation increase in attitude results in a 0.20 standard deviation increase in the intention to use the apps.

H2: The effect of subjective norms on the intention to use MTB apps.

To test Hypothesis 2, the connection between subjective norms and behavioral intention was assessed using AMOS path analysis. The results showed that subjective norms significantly influence the intention to use mobile taxi apps among Sri Lankan consumers ($P < 0.05$). This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which proposed no effect of subjective norms. The relationship was found to be positive, with a prediction weight of 0.365.

H3: The influence of perceived behavioral control on the intention to use MTB apps.

Hypothesis 3 was tested by examining the relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention through path analysis. The results confirmed that perceived behavioral control significantly influences the intention to use MTB apps ($P < 0.05$). The null hypothesis, which stated that perceived behavioral control does not affect the intention, was rejected. A positive relationship was observed, with an SMC value of 0.229, indicating a significant effect ($P < 0.05$).

H4: The relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior in using MTB apps.

For Hypothesis 4, the influence of behavioral intention on actual usage was tested using path analysis. The results indicated a significant effect of behavioral intention on the actual adoption of MTB apps at the 95% confidence level ($P < 0.05$). As a result, the null hypothesis suggesting no impact of behavioral intention on actual usage was rejected. The positive relationship between intention and actual behavior was confirmed, with an SMC of 0.251 and a p-value of 0.001.

Conclusion

To establish itself as an emerging sector, the transportation service industry has significantly increased the number of MTB applications, facilitating easier and quicker access to destinations for passengers. This research, therefore, examines consumer behavior and their intentions to utilize mobile applications for taxi services. By incorporating insights from previous research and theoretical frameworks, the study developed a conceptual model grounded in the TPB. Statistical analysis was then conducted to test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

The findings reveal that elements of the TPB significantly influence the adoption of MTB apps in Sri Lanka. Specifically, perceived behavioral control, attitudes, and subjective norms play an important role in shaping consumers' intentions to use these apps. Additionally, the study highlights that the introduction of new technology has a considerable impact on consumers' behavioral intentions. Therefore, companies offering taxi services can expand their market share by encouraging the adoption of MTB apps through targeted strategies.

Among all the variables tested, subjective norms exerted the most significant influence on consumer intentions. This indicates a shift in societal attitudes, with mobile commerce applications being increasingly recognized as an innovative and convenient way to access services. This shift provides a beneficial environment for service providers, as social pressure encourages the adoption of these apps. With this societal change, it becomes easier for service providers to gain users. Moreover, the positive impact of perceived behavioral control signals that consumers find the apps easy to use and user-friendly. The study also observed that consumers generally have a positive outlook toward adopting such applications.

Since all the studied factors influence consumer intentions, service providers can leverage these findings to promote the adoption of MTB apps. By offering promotions and educating customers on the use of electronic services, firms can enhance adoption rates, benefiting from a supportive societal attitude. Additionally, improving consumers' understanding of the technology can help reduce resistance to app usage.

In summary, perceived behavioral control, consumer attitudes, and subjective norms have a significant positive influence on the intention to use MTB apps among Sri Lankan consumers. Therefore, by providing more user-friendly apps and offering value-added promotions, taxi service providers can successfully capture a larger portion of the market.

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