

## ASSESSMENT OF OKADA RIDERS' PERCEPTION OF THE NIGERIA POLICE ENFORCEMENT OF OKADA BAN IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

The study examined Okada riders' perception of police enforcement of the commercial motorcycle (Okada) ban in Abuja within the context of law enforcement public relations and communication strategies. Guided by the Excellence Theory of Public Relations and the Perception Theory, the research adopted a mixed-method triangulation approach combining a survey of 390 respondents with in-depth interviews involving key union officials. Descriptive and thematic analyses were used to interpret the quantitative and qualitative data respectively. Results indicated that 89% of the respondents perceived police enforcement practices as unprofessional and inconsistent with community-oriented policing, thereby undermining mutual trust and cooperation. Interview insights reinforced these findings, revealing perceptions of procedural unfairness and limited stakeholder engagement. The study concludes that such perceptions reflect deficiencies in police public relations communication and centralised engagement structures. It recommends the decentralisation of police public relations functions and the adoption of participatory communication strategies to enhance public confidence and cooperative law enforcement.

**Keywords:** Perception, Police, Law enforcement, Okada riders, Public relations, Abuja

### Introduction

Among the most persistent challenges confronting the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is the negative perception held by citizens regarding its credibility, fairness, and professionalism. Empirical studies indicate that many Nigerians perceive the NPF as corrupt, coercive and procedurally unjust, which has contributed to an erosion of public trust and cooperation (Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2023; Nwachukwu, Okorie, & Obiora, 2024 and Dauda, 2023). Such negative perceptions compromise the legitimacy of policing and weaken community-police relations, both of which are essential for effective law enforcement.

Bazza, Disa, and Abba (2024) argue that persistent institutional deficiencies, such as poor accountability, low morale, and a lack of transparency in operations, have deepened citizens' skepticism towards the police. This growing distrust has created a gap between law enforcement agents and

the public, manifesting in resistance, low compliance with police directives and a general perception of the NPF as an oppressive rather than protective institution. Within this context, understanding how different publics perceive the police becomes crucial for assessing the effectiveness of enforcement campaigns.

In Abuja, one of such critical publics is the group of commercial motorcycle operators, popularly known as *Okada* riders, who constitute a significant segment of the informal transport economy. Despite the Federal Capital Territory Administration's (FCTA) attempts to regulate their activities, the enforcement of the Okada ban by the police task forces has been met with persistent resistance. Arguably, this resistance can be explained within the context of poor employment statistics in Nigeria which serves as motivating factor to this regards. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2025), while Nigeria's

unemployment rate stood at 5.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, the informal sector accounted for 92.7 per cent of total employment. Consequently, many citizens rely on Okada operations for daily sustenance. The conflict between livelihood and enforcement therefore makes the perception of the police by Okada riders a critical issue in understanding compliance behaviour.

Earlier research has primarily examined public perception of the Nigerian police at a general level (Nyam, 2020; Tiwa, 2024; Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2023), often emphasising issues of corruption and inefficiency. However, these studies rarely address how such perceptions shape specific enforcement contexts, particularly within the informal transport sector in Abuja. Furthermore, few studies employ a mixed-method approach to capture both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of police–citizen relations. This leaves a conceptual and empirical gap regarding how enforcement practices influence public perception among marginalised occupational groups such as Okada riders in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

This study therefore seeks to assess the perception of Okada riders toward police enforcement of the Okada ban in Abuja. It aims to determine how enforcement practices affect levels of trust, cooperation and perceived legitimacy of the police among these riders. By focusing on perception rather than institutional strategy, the study provides empirical insight into how citizens' experiences with law enforcement shape broader attitudes towards state authority and public order.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Commercial motorcycle operation, commonly referred to as *Okada*, forms a major component of Nigeria's informal transport economy, offering affordable mobility and livelihood for thousands of residents. In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), however, recurrent policy measures

have sought to restrict the operation of Okada riders, particularly within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) and other designated security-sensitive zones. The current restriction, implemented by the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) through the Directorate of Road Traffic Services (DRTS) and enforced by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), aims to address concerns of insecurity, traffic violations, and urban disorder (FCTA, 2023). Although the measure is regulatory rather than statutory, its enforcement has been characterised by recurring confrontations between police officers and Okada riders, raising questions about how the riders perceive the legitimacy and fairness of such enforcement operations.

Understanding the characterisation of Okada riders is critical to explaining their perceptions of police enforcement. The majority operate within the informal sector, where economic peculiarity, low education levels and limited access to formal grievance mechanisms shape their experiences with the authority. These social realities influence how they interpret enforcement actions often perceiving them as discriminatory or extortionary rather than corrective. Such perceptions, in turn, determine whether riders comply with or resist police directives, thereby influencing the overall success or failure of enforcement initiatives (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2006).

Despite the growing body of research on public perceptions of policing in Nigeria (Nyam, 2020; Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2023; Nwachukwu et al., 2024), few studies have examined these perceptions within the specific context of sectoral law enforcement policies such as the *Okada* restriction in the FCT. Existing studies tend to generalise police–citizen relations without addressing how livelihood-based enforcement shapes public trust among occupational groups that frequently interact with law enforcement. Consequently, there is limited empirical understanding of how

Okada riders perceive police enforcement actions and how such perceptions affect compliance behaviour.

This study therefore seeks to assess Okada riders' perception of police enforcement of the Okada restriction policy in Abuja. By focusing on perception as a mediating factor between law enforcement and citizen cooperation. The study aims to contribute to evidence-based discussions on police legitimacy, community trust, and participatory enforcement within Nigeria's informal transport sector.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess Okada riders' perception of police enforcement of the *Okada* restriction policy in Abuja.
2. To determine how *Okada* riders' perception of police enforcement influences their willingness to comply with regulatory directives.
3. To examine the attitude of Okada riders towards the perceived fairness, professionalism and legitimacy of police actions during *Okada* enforcement operations in Abuja.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Okada Riders**

Okada has been described as a non-conventional means of public transportation that offers numerous advantages compared to other means of commuting (cars, buses, trucks and tricycles etc.) especially in cities like Abuja with high traffic congestions, and rural areas with bad unmotorable roads and difficult terrains to transit (Okyere, 2020). Some of the comparative advantages of Okada means of transportation according to Okyere are maneuverability, time and cost effective etc. Okyere (2020) argued that Okada business has sprung up new business opportunities for citizens especially youths

who are jobseekers, retirees and seekers of quasi means of extra income by developing solution to address the inadequacies in citizens' daily commuting needs.

Even though fragmented, Okada riders are heavily unionized and internally regulated. Compliance measures include mounting road blocks at strategic locations to confirm compliance, immediate forced compliance, deflation of tyres, confiscation of bike keys or jackets, fist cuffs and even invitation of police to enforce compliance etc. It strongly appears that much emphasis is placed on revenue collection, means of livelihood for some indigenes and an avenue to put to use instrumentalities of control at the detriment of standard in service delivery, decorum in socialisation with members of the society, public sanity, compliance to general traffic and road usage rules as well as riders welfare. These shortfalls are major contributors to the menace associated with the business. Based on this, it suffices to say that despite internal mechanisms and collaboration with the police to enforce laws that serves the interest of the Okada group unions, no significant impact is made in the areas of self-regulating Okada riders social conducts to correct the menace therein.

#### **The Concept of Perception**

Perception is a concept that builds awareness and understanding base on sensory information obtained from our surroundings. Public relations have been described as a deliberate process of evaluating, cultivating and sustaining positive publics' attitudes and acceptance through mutual understanding, goodwill and planned communication between an organisation and its publics about its programmes, personnel, policies, goods and services (Asemah et al., 2021).

Organisational reputation perception both in practice and principle must be seen as being beyond names, buildings, crest, logos, high resolution pictures and TV commercials etc. Essentially, good image

creates lasting impression for organisational success and survival which are premised on truth, performance and confidence. In the case of the Nigerian Police Force, Nwaosu opines that to cultivate and sustain publics' goodwill and positive perception, image must be predicated on factors which hinge on well-established and deliberate corporate strategies which are projected by all elements and workforce within the organisation (as cited in Asemah, 2022).

But beyond advertisement and other corporate communications strategies and actions like speeches, mission and vision statements, press releases, social media posts etc., Offonry (1985) posited that corporate image manifests in the attitudes of gatemen, drivers, front desk, gardeners, secretaries and admin staff etc. towards visitors and complainants including the qualities of their goods and services (as cited in Asemah, 2022). It is obvious that "Public relations is a creator of favourable image, a builder of goodwill between an organisation and its teeming publics" (Asemah, 2022, p.258). One of such publics to the Nigerian Police Force is the operators of motorcycle Okada business in Abuja. They are a critical publics the Nigerian Police Force must be invested in, both as a corporate organisation and as individuals within the agency.

### **Reputation Perception Management**

Reputation management according to Ates et al (2013) as cited in Mtengwa and Muchenje (2023) is a deliberate strategic action undertaken by an organisation in selling goods or rendering services designed to create, shape and sustain positive perception, views and overall impression of the publics of its brand, products, services and activities. Reputation is an overall impression a critical public has over an entity's past actions, behaviours and performance (Widline). Reputation is hinged on experience and time; the better the

experience over the time the higher the trust and confidence level and the weightier the positive perception. In other words, reputation is acquired based on test, trust and confidence. Mtengwa and Muchenje (2023) were conclusive in asserting that a good organisational reputation helps to build trust, confidence and loyalty of its internal and external publics. It improves reputation perception and converts unfriendly or hostile publics into advocates by proxy in favour of the organisation. This is in tandem with one of the significances of this study; which is to establish the significance of deploying PR tools to improve perception and remove impediments to effective regulation of Okada business in Abuja.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Okada Riders' Perception of Police Enforcement of the Okada Restriction Policy in Abuja**

Perception, as a psychological and sociological construct, is central to how individuals interpret authority and social order. It refers to the process by which people make sense of their environment through the interpretation of stimuli based on experience, values and expectations (Qiong, 2017). In policing contexts, perception shapes the way citizens view law enforcement legitimacy and fairness. Ajzen's (2005) *Theory of Planned Behaviour* suggests that perception mediates between cognition and action; in other words, what people believe to be true about the police determines how they respond to enforcement. Therefore, perception is not merely an observation of police behaviour but an interpretive act that reflects the observer's socio-economic, cultural, and political positioning.

In the Nigerian context, public perception of the police has historically been negative, characterised by fear, distrust and alienation. Studies have shown that the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is often perceived as corrupt, coercive and

unaccountable (Tiwa, 2024; Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2023; Nwachukwu et al., 2024). These perceptions arise from both direct experiences and third-party narratives about police brutality, extortion and inefficiency. Dauda (2023) explains that even when citizens have not personally experienced misconduct, social learning and community discourse shape a collective image of the police as an oppressive institution. Consequently, this perception influences how people interpret every enforcement action, including the Okada restriction in Abuja, often viewing it through a lens of exploitation rather than public safety and sanity.

Within Abuja's urban spaces, Okada riders have emerged as one of the police's most visible publics, on account of their daily encounters with the enforcement officers. The Federal Capital Territory Administration restricts Okada operations within designated areas such as city centres, high-security zones and high ways etc. within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (FCTA, 2023). While intended to promote public safety and sanity, this policy has been implemented through frequent police crackdowns that many riders perceive as discriminatory, excessive and economically subjective. Okyere (2020) described the Okada business as a "survival economy," implying that restrictive enforcement directly threatens livelihoods. This socio-economic context means riders' perceptions are largely shaped by lived experiences of harassment, confiscation of motorcycles and arbitrary arrests. Consequently, assessing their perception provides insight into how enforcement practices are received and internalised by a vulnerable occupational group whose trust in law enforcement is next to nothing.

### **Okada Riders' Perception and Willingness to Comply with Regulatory Directives**

The relationship between perception and compliance has been extensively theorised

within socio-psychology and criminology contexts. Procedural justice theorists argue that citizens' compliance with law enforcement is determined more by perceptions of fairness and legitimacy than by fear of punishment (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). In societies where citizens believe that enforcement agents act justly and with respect, compliance is voluntary and sustained. Conversely, when law enforcement is perceived as extortionary or abusive, compliance becomes coerced, superficial, and short-lived (Tyler, 2006). Perception, therefore, is not only a precursor to compliance but also a moral springboard that drives individuals' sense of obligation towards obeying the law and order.

In the case of Abuja, perception significantly influences Okada riders' compliance behaviour. Empirical studies have shown that where enforcement is viewed as hostile or corrupt, citizens respond with avoidance, resistance or confrontation (Adenekan, 2022). Riders who believe that enforcement measures are unjust are less likely to follow traffic or licensing regulations, perceiving the process as a means for revenue extraction rather than public safety. But, when officers communicate the rationale behind enforcement respectfully and transparently, compliance tends to improve (Bazza, Disa, & Abba, 2024). This finding aligns with global research indicating that legitimacy, rather than force, is the primary determinant of compliance (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Beyond institutional inadequacies, socio-economic factors also moderate the link between perception and compliance. Many Okada riders operate within the informal economy and rely on daily earnings for sustenance. When their operations are disrupted by police enforcement, their non-compliance is often a rationalised response to economic pressure rather than deliberate defiance (Okyere, 2020). Thus, understanding how perception influences

compliance requires situating riders' responses within the context of broader job insecurities. This perspective redefines non-compliance not as a criminal behaviour but as a manifestation of distrust and survival exigency – a direct consequence of how enforcement is perceived amongst the Okada group.

### **Perceived Fairness, Professionalism and Legitimacy of Police Actions during Enforcement**

Fairness, professionalism and legitimacy are interrelated constructs that determine effective law enforcement. Fairness refers to the equitable treatment of citizens regardless of socio-economic status, while professionalism embodies the ethical and procedural standards required of officers. Legitimacy, as defined by Sunshine and Tyler (2003), represents the public's belief that the police have the moral right to exercise authority. These principles collectively form the moral foundation of policing and public perception of them determines whether citizens view enforcement as just or oppressive. In countries such as Nigeria, where institutional accountability and transparency are weak, public scrutiny of these tendencies become a crucial indicator of police credibility.

Empirical studies across Africa have shown that perceptions of fairness and professionalism strongly influence the perceived legitimacy of police institutions. Akeem, Zakare, and Akeem (2019) found that citizens' trust in the Nigerian police is inversely proportional to their exposure to unprofessional conduct such as bribery and verbal abuse. Similarly, Tiwa (2024) argues that legitimacy in Nigeria's policing context is undermined not only by corruption but also by the failure of officers to uphold procedural justice during encounters. In Abuja, reports of extortion, harassment and excessive use of force during Okada enforcement (Adenekan, 2022) have amplified public

disillusionment. Each unprofessional act erodes the moral arsenal the police needs to enforce laws effectively. This has fostered a climate of fragility and hostility rather than goodwill and cooperation.

Restoring perceptions of fairness and professionalism requires deliberate communication and behavioural reform within the NPF. Tyler (2006) suggests that legitimacy grows when citizens perceive decision-making processes as transparent and enforcement as consistent with moral norms. In practical terms, this implies that police officers should prioritise dialogue over confrontation and demonstrate procedural justice in their engagements with Okada riders. In Abuja, adopting community-based and participatory enforcement models could help rebuild legitimacy and compliance. By practicing fairness, professionalism and respect in enforcement operations, the police can gradually reshape public perception from antagonism to trust – a transition necessary for sustainable urban governance and effective law enforcement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Perception Theory**

Perception Theory provides a foundational explanation for how individuals interpret, evaluate and respond to their environment. According to Bruner (1957), perception is not merely a passive reception of sensory data but an active process through which individuals assign meaning to external stimuli based on prior experiences, expectations and socio-cultural conditioning. Gibson (1979) further explains that perception is “direct” people do not simply see what exists, but interpret what they see according to their motivations, social roles and environmental cues. In social contexts, particularly law enforcement, individuals' perceptions are shaped by repeated interactions, institutional reputation and community narratives about authority.

In the context of this study, Perception Theory helps explain how Okada riders interpret the actions and attitudes of police officers enforcing the Okada restriction policy in Abuja. Their perceptions are formed through both direct experiences (e.g., arrests, fines or harassments) and indirect influences (e.g., media reports, peer discussions or social learning). These perceptions in turn affect how riders make sense of enforcement as either fair and necessary or unjust and oppressive. As Ajzen (2005) observes, perception mediates behaviour by influencing beliefs, emotions and decisions. Therefore, understanding how Okada riders perceive enforcement offers critical insight into why some riders comply voluntarily while others resist or evade regulation.

This theory directly supports the first objective of this study, which is to assess Okada riders' perception of police enforcement of the Okada restriction policy in Abuja. It provides a conceptual foundation for analysing the cognitive and affective processes through which riders form judgments about police conduct. In doing so, it moves the discussion from abstract opinions to empirically measurable perceptions, grounded in lived experience, cultural context and social meaning.

### **Procedural Justice Theory**

Procedural Justice Theory, developed by Tyler (2006) and earlier articulated by Thibaut and Walker (1975), focuses on how perceptions of fairness in processes shape legitimacy and compliance. The theory posits that citizens are more likely to obey laws voluntarily when they perceive enforcement authorities as fair, transparent and respectful. Legitimacy, according to Sunshine and Tyler (2003), arises not from fear of punishment but from the belief that legal authorities exercise power in a just and accountable way. Thus, public compliance with law enforcement depends more on how decisions are made and

implemented than on the decisions themselves.

Procedural Justice Theory when applied to this study explains how Okada riders' perception of police behaviour influences their willingness to comply with regulatory directives which corresponds with the second objective. When enforcement officers act with professionalism, give riders a voice and explain the rationale for restrictions, riders are more likely to perceive enforcement as fair and legitimate. Conversely, arbitrary arrests, extortion or lack of communication generate perceptions of injustice that weaken trust and promote defiance. This framework therefore bridges the gap between perception and attitude, emphasising fairness as the mediating factor between authority and compliance.

The theory also extends to the third objective, which examines perceived fairness, professionalism and legitimacy of police actions during Okada enforcement operations in Abuja. By emphasising process-based legitimacy, it provides a lens for understanding how perceptions of fairness and respect contribute to or erode the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions. In the Nigerian situation, where the police are frequently criticised for misconduct, the theory underscores the central role of procedural fairness in rebuilding trust and encouraging cooperative compliance.

### **The Excellence Theory of Public Relations**

This theory identifies the significant role played by effective public relations in organisation's reputation and crises management. It also defines ethical principles to be applied in PR strategic planning and communication to achieve organisational goals. According to Asemah et al. (2022), the Excellence Theory of Public Relations provides operational guides for PR managers of an organisation in identifying its critical or sensitive

publics, understand its problems or challenges and design ways of reparation in order to create and maintain long term cordial relationship that is responsive to a mutually beneficial aspirations and actions. According to Grunig (2008), the Excellence theory was used to enhance the understanding of the value of PR in an organisation, and to meet the social responsibility role of management decisions as well as emphasised the significance of building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationship with the publics of an organisation. Grunig considers this as essential in order for organisations to avoid situations where stakeholders pressure the organisation to effect changes or face oppositions that cause risks, liabilities or dissatisfaction and negative perceptions.

The use of Excellence theory in this study is meant to reawaken the PR handlers of the Nigerian Police Force to rise up to the onerous task of redeeming the bad image and negative reputation of the organisation, as well as ensuring that all activities and strategies are put in place to improve public perception.

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from respondents in their natural environment. The mixed approach provided a broader understanding of the perceptions of *Okada* riders toward police enforcement of the *Okada* restriction policy in Abuja. The survey generated numerical data on trends and patterns, while interviews provided deeper contextual insights into respondents' experiences.

The study was conducted in three selected districts of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Kuje, Gwagwalada and Galadimawa/Lugbe/Airport Road areas. These locations were chosen on one hand

because they represent areas where *Okada* operations remain prevalent despite enforcement restrictions and on the other areas where *Okada* riders in the restricted areas relocate to. The target population comprised registered commercial motorcycle operators (*Okada* riders) within these areas. Based on figures obtained from local *Okada* union officials, the total estimated population of *Okada* riders in the three districts was approximately 14,500.

A total of 390 respondents participated in the study. This included 383 questionnaire respondents and 7 key informants who participated in in-depth interviews including the Police Public Relations Officer of the FCT Command. The sample size for the survey was determined using a simplified sample size determination formula, ensuring adequate representation of the study population. The sampling technique combined stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. Stratified sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across the three districts, while purposive sampling was applied in selecting key informants who were union officials and experienced riders with at least five years of practice.

Two main instruments were used for data collection: a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview (IDI) guide. The questionnaire was designed to obtain quantitative data on *Okada* riders' perceptions of police enforcement, compliance behaviour, and views on fairness and professionalism during enforcement operations. It contained both closed- and open-ended questions. The in-depth interview guide was developed to collect qualitative insights from selected respondents, focusing on their personal experiences, perceptions of enforcement practices, and interactions with police officers. Both instruments were pre-tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and internal consistency. To ensure validity, the instruments were subjected to expert review by academics familiar with social

research and policing studies. The feedback obtained was used to refine the wording and structure of items to ensure they accurately measured the research objectives. Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through a pilot test administered to 30 *Okada* riders outside the study area. Responses from the pilot test were analysed to ensure consistency in the measurement of key variables, and necessary adjustments were made before full-scale administration.

Data collection was conducted physically by the researcher and trained field assistants. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents at their various parks and union offices, and assistance was provided for illiterate respondents through oral translation. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with selected informants in the Hausa, Pidgin, and English languages, depending on participants' preferences. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, and responses were recorded with consent for accuracy. Data collection lasted for a period of four weeks.

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequencies and percentages. The results were presented in tables and charts for ease of interpretation. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed thematically to identify recurring themes related to perception, compliance, fairness, and legitimacy. These qualitative findings were used to complement and triangulate the quantitative results to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents and analyses data obtained from *Okada* riders in Kuje, Gwagwalada, and Galadimawa/Lugbe/Airport areas of Abuja. The analysis focuses on three core objectives of the study: The findings are presented using descriptive statistics supported by qualitative responses from key informant interviews.

### **Perception of *Okada* Riders of the Ban Campaign and Enforcement**

**Table 1.** Perception of *Okada* Riders on the Ban Enforcement

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>I have been affected by the ban campaign?</b>		
Always	326	83.8%
Never	0	
Rarely	63	16.2%
<b>Describe your experience with the police</b>		
Mostly professional	18	4.6%
Mostly unprofessional	346	88.9%
Undecided	25	6.4%
<b>Rate Police handling of the ban campaign</b>		
Excellent	22	5.7%
Fair	135	34.7%
Very Poor	232	59.6%

A large majority of respondents indicated that they had been directly affected by the *Okada* restriction campaign in the FCT. Most respondents described their encounters with the police during enforcement as “mostly unprofessional,” while few rated such encounters as professional. This suggests that many riders perceive enforcement activities as poorly executed or overly aggressive.

In the qualitative interviews, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the

FCT Command, SP Josephine Adeh, explained that while the ban is not absolute, frequent violations by *Okada* riders pose safety and security concerns, making enforcement inevitable. Conversely, officials of the *Okada* riders’ union expressed strong disapproval of the restriction policy, arguing that it threatens their livelihoods and fails to address the economic reasons for their operations. These contrasting viewpoints highlight the tension between enforcement imperatives and economic survival concerns.

### Perception of Enforcement and Willingness to Comply with Regulatory Directives

**Table 2.** Perception of Enforcement and Willingness to Comply

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>I Have cordial relationship with the Police on account of fairness in ban enforcement</b>		
Strongly Disagree	269	69.2%
Undecided	7	1.8%
Agree	113	29%
<b>My experience has affected my perception of the Police enforcement</b>		
Definitely	357	91.8%
Possibly	15	3.9%
Definitely Not	16	4.1%
<b>I will trust and comply with enforcement if I perceive it as fair, transparent and well communicated?</b>		
Sometimes	140	36%
Always	0	
Never	249	64%

The data indicate that majority of respondents did not consider enforcement of the *Okada* restriction as fair or has made the relationship between the Police and *Okada* riders cordial, suggesting a general discontent with the process rather than the policy itself. A large majority admitted that their personal experience with the police influenced their perception of enforcement. Notably, however, significant majority of respondents stated that they would be

willing to comply with the restriction if the enforcement process were fair, transparent, and communicated clearly.

This finding implies that willingness to comply is conditional upon perceived fairness and professionalism of enforcement. In interviews, several *Okada* union officials explained that compliance could improve if officers refrained from harassment and provided clear guidance on

permitted routes and operational zones. These findings reinforce the notion that compliance is shaped less by the existence

of the ban and more by how enforcement is perceived and implemented.

### Behavioural Responses of *Okada* Riders to Enforcement Encounters

**Table 3.** Behavioural Responses of *Okada* Riders to Enforcement Encounters

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Typical Reaction upon Sighting Ban Enforcement Taskforce</b>		
Comply immediately	107	27.5%
Evade enforcement through alternate routes	252	64.8%
Undecided	30	7.7%
<b>What would you do if your motorcycle is impounded?</b>		
Change occupation	43	11.1%
Return to <i>Okada</i> riding after recovering or obtaining another motorcycle	309	79.4%
Undecided	37	9.5%

Findings show that majority of the respondents admitted that they would evade enforcement by using alternate routes or avoiding known checkpoints when sighting taskforce officials, while few said they would comply immediately. This behaviour suggests that evasion, rather than confrontation, is the dominant form of non-compliance.

Similarly, significant majority of the respondents indicated that they would return to *Okada* riding even after their motorcycles had been confiscated or fines paid, highlighting the economic dependency of this group on motorcycle transport. Only but a few stated they would consider changing occupations. These findings demonstrate that livelihood pressures play a decisive role in shaping riders' responses to enforcement and underscore the difficulty of sustaining compliance without addressing underlying economic concerns.

### Discussion of Findings

#### *Okada* Riders' Perception of the Ban Campaign and Police Enforcement

Findings from the study revealed that most *Okada* riders in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have been affected by the *Okada* restriction policy, and the majority perceive police enforcement as largely unprofessional. This perception aligns with Ugwuanyi and Formella's (2023) conclusion that many Nigerians consider the police unapproachable due to perceived misconduct, excessive force and corruption. Such perceptions are not only shaped by personal experiences but also by the collective narratives within communities that view enforcement officers as punitive rather than service-oriented. The findings therefore reinforce the argument that public perception of law enforcement in Nigeria is heavily influenced by the perceived quality of engagement between police officers and citizens.

From the lens of Perception Theory, individuals interpret their experiences based on environmental cues, expectations and prior experiences (Bruner, 1957; Gibson, 1979). *Okada* riders' perception of the enforcement process is thus formed through repeated encounters that they

interpret as economically and socially threatening. Their perception of the ban as punitive is partly due to the absence of clear communication, coupled with enforcement actions that appear coercive. The interviews further show that while the police view their enforcement role as a civic responsibility aimed at maintaining order, *Okada* riders interpret it as an assault on their livelihood and dignity. This divergence in interpretation illustrates the central principle of perception theory – that meaning is constructed subjectively, not objectively.

In view of this, the findings underscore that negative perception of enforcement is not necessarily rejection of law but of how it is implemented. When enforcement is carried out without due sensitivity to economic hardship and human dignity, it reinforces negative perceptions that compromise institutional legitimacy. Therefore, improving public understanding and acceptance of the *Okada* restriction policy requires enforcement that is procedurally fair, communicative, and transparent.

#### *Perception and Willingness to Comply with Regulatory Directives*

The study further revealed that most respondents did not view the *Okada* restriction as fair or necessary, yet a significant proportion indicated they would comply if enforcement were carried out transparently and with professionalism. This finding suggests that compliance is conditional upon perceived fairness and legitimacy rather than resistance to regulation itself. According to Procedural Justice Theory, citizens are more likely to comply voluntarily when they perceive authorities as fair, respectful, and just (Tyler, 2006; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Thus, perception functions as a cognitive lens through which legitimacy is evaluated and behavioural decisions are made.

Empirical evidence from this study confirms that enforcement practices perceived as extortionary or aggressive

discourage voluntary compliance, while perceived fairness and open communication promote cooperation. *Okada* riders who felt respected and well informed about the rationale behind enforcement were more likely to express willingness to comply. Conversely, respondents who experienced arbitrary arrest or confiscation of motorcycles reported lower trust in the police. This aligns with Nwachukwu, Okorie and Obiora's (2024) findings that perceived procedural injustice significantly reduces citizens' compliance and cooperation in Nigeria.

These findings demonstrate that for enforcement to achieve sustainable compliance, it must be rooted in procedural fairness rather than coercive control. By integrating procedural justice principles into law enforcement, the police can build moral legitimacy and encourage voluntary compliance. This implies that consistent enforcement guided by fairness, clarity and respect could transform negative perceptions into cooperative behaviour, reducing evasion and confrontation.

#### *Perceived Fairness, Professionalism and Legitimacy of Police Actions during Enforcement*

Analysis of respondents' views revealed that most *Okada* riders consider police enforcement during the ban campaign as unprofessional and lacking fairness. The majority expressed that officers often display high-handedness or demand bribes, leading to widespread distrust. This perception mirrors Tiwa's (2024) argument that legitimacy in Nigerian policing has been eroded by misconduct and lack of accountability. In Abuja, these perceptions are further heightened by the socio-economic vulnerability of *Okada* riders who rely on their motorcycles for daily income. Thus, unprofessional enforcement practices are not perceived merely as regulatory actions but as existential threats to livelihood.

Procedural Justice Theory provides insight into this outcome by emphasising that legitimacy is sustained through fair treatment, neutrality and transparency in decision-making. Citizens who perceive enforcement processes as arbitrary or disrespectful tend to question the moral authority of law enforcement institutions (Tyler, 2006). The data show that over 90% of respondents felt their experiences with police officers shaped their overall perception, suggesting that day-to-day interactions have a greater impact on legitimacy than formal policy statements. The riders' demand for greater access and engagement indicates that legitimacy can be restored when enforcement officers act consistently, communicate clearly and respect procedural norms.

From a socio-economic perspective, the study also found that a large majority of riders would return to *Okada* operations even after losing their motorcycles, citing lack of alternative employment. This demonstrates that economic dependency moderates the relationship between perception and compliance fairness alone cannot guarantee compliance if livelihood insecurity persists. Consequently, a holistic approach that combines fair enforcement with economic alternatives is essential. Promoting fairness and professionalism within enforcement will not only improve compliance but also enhance institutional legitimacy, fostering cooperation rather than conflict between law enforcement agencies and informal-sector workers.

The findings collectively indicate that *Okada* riders' perception of police enforcement is predominantly negative due to experiences of unprofessional conduct and lack of procedural fairness. However, willingness to comply increases when enforcement is seen as fair, transparent, and respectful. Furthermore, livelihood constraints intensify negative perceptions, making compliance more difficult to sustain. Guided by Perception Theory and Procedural Justice Theory, this study

concludes that improving legitimacy and compliance requires transforming enforcement from a punitive exercise into a fair, communicative, and participatory process. Enhancing professionalism, ensuring due process, and addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities can significantly improve public perception and strengthen law enforcement outcomes in Abuja.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined *Okada* riders' perception of police enforcement of the *Okada* restriction policy in Abuja, with a focus on how such perceptions influence compliance and reflect perceived fairness, professionalism and legitimacy of law enforcement practices. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents had been directly affected by the ban campaign and generally perceived police enforcement as unprofessional and unfair. These perceptions were primarily shaped by repeated encounters with enforcement officers, which riders interpreted as coercive and economically threatening rather than as legitimate regulatory measures.

The study further established that willingness to comply with the restriction was conditional upon perceived fairness and transparency in enforcement processes. While most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with current enforcement practices, they also indicated that compliance would improve if enforcement were conducted respectfully and with clearer communication about the policy rationale. This finding supports the core proposition of Procedural Justice Theory, which posits that voluntary compliance is strengthened when citizens perceive enforcement as fair and legitimate.

Additionally, the study found that *Okada* riders' behavioural responses such as evading enforcement or returning to riding after penalties were largely driven by livelihood pressures rather than deliberate defiance. This indicates that perceptions of

fairness and legitimacy are intertwined with economic realities. Hence, enforcement that fails to consider the socioeconomic context of *Okada* operations is unlikely to achieve sustainable compliance.

In conclusion, *Okada* riders' perception of police enforcement in Abuja is shaped by both procedural and livelihood factors. Improving compliance therefore requires law enforcement strategies that prioritise fairness, professionalism, and transparent communication, while addressing the economic vulnerabilities that compel continued operation despite restrictions. The study underscores that building legitimacy in law enforcement is not solely a function of authority but of perceived justice, empathy, and inclusiveness in the enforcement process which is encapsulated within the tenets of the Excellence Theory of Public Relations.

### **Recommendations**

**Enhance Fair and Transparent Enforcement Practices:** The police should prioritise fairness, professionalism, and open communication in enforcing the

*Okada* restriction policy. Transparent engagement with riders will improve compliance and reduce misperception of enforcement as punitive. The onus lies on the NPF public relations managers to steer other personnel and departments within the institution to observe ethical postulations of the Excellence Theory of public Relations in engaging with the *Okada* riders in carrying out ban enforcement campaign.

**Integrate Livelihood Considerations into Enforcement Policy:** Government and security agencies should complement enforcement with livelihood support or alternative employment programmes for displaced *Okada* riders to ensure sustainable compliance and reduce socioeconomic tension.

**Promote Riders' Self-Regulation and Civic Responsibility:** *Okada* unions should enforce self-regulation among members by promoting safety compliance, lawful conduct, and accountability to improve public perception and legitimacy of their operations.

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