Md. Amzad Hossen

INVESTIGATING THE CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR RIDE SHARING COMPANIES IN URBAN AREAS
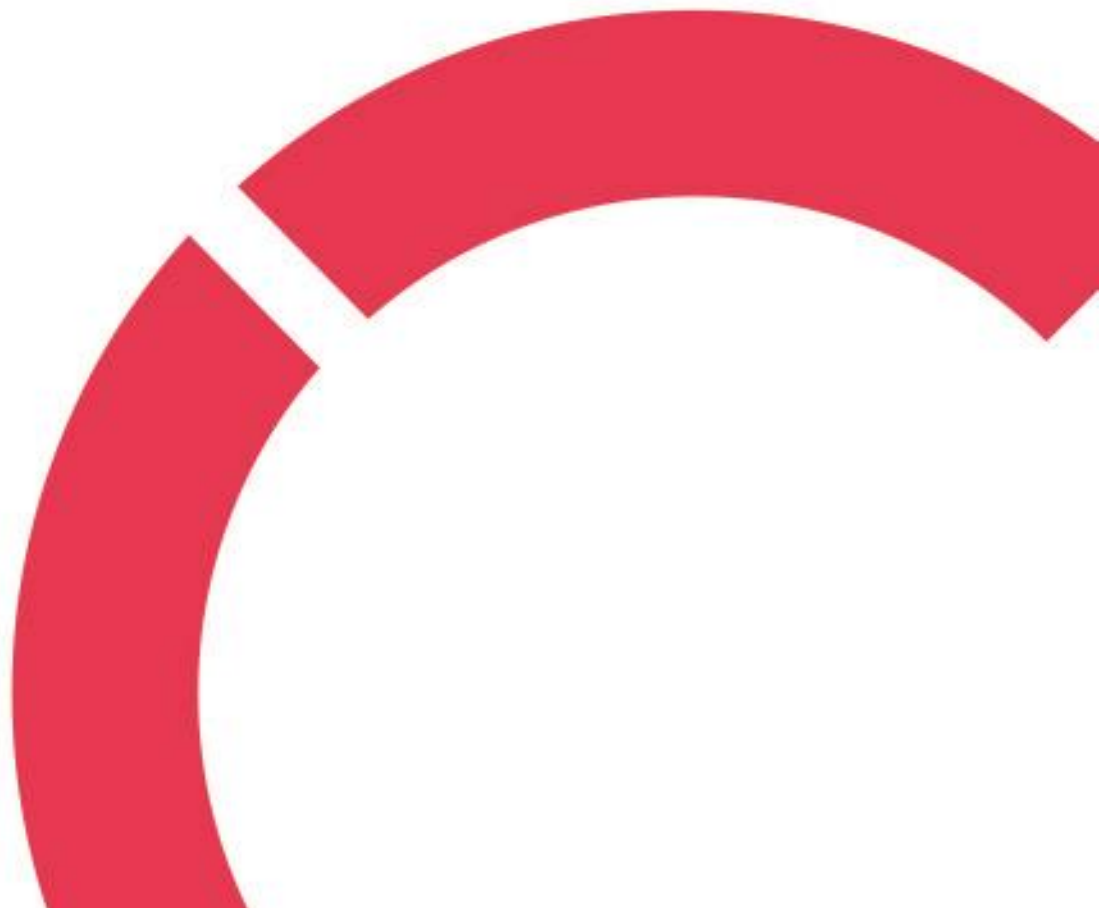
A Study of Pathao

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ABSTRACT

Centria University of Applied Sciences	Date November 2023	Author Md. Amzad Hossen
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The emergence of ride-sharing companies has revolutionized urban transportation. As so many companies have entered this market and are offering the same services, this raises the question of customers' preferences. So, this study aimed to investigate consumer preferences for ride-sharing companies in urban areas, with a focus on Pathao. The study has used quantitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences. Using the survey questionnaire method through random sampling techniques, data has been collected. However, the primary objective of the study was to identify the factors that influence consumer preferences for urban ride-sharing companies and to evaluate how Pathao fulfills these preferences. The findings of the study provided important insights for ride-sharing companies like Pathao to better understand their customers' preferences and needs, which helped them improve their service offerings and ultimately gain a competitive advantage. The result of the study is also useful for customers to understand ride companies' service offerings, which helps them make more informed purchasing decisions. It is also useful for urban policymakers to develop policies to make ride sharing services more efficient and sustainable for customers.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of ride sharing companies like Pathao has changed the landscape of urban transportation as well as how people travel in urban areas like Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Pathao has brought an innovative alternative to traditional transportation services like buses and taxis for city dwellers that is reliable, affordable, and convenient. In recent years, the demand for ride-sharing services has increased exponentially in urban areas like Dhaka. Similarly, companies that offer ride sharing have also become popular in this area, and companies like Pathao have been at the forefront of this trend. According to Hyun, Naz, Cronley & Leat, (2021, 437), convenience and accessibility are key determinants of consumer preference for ride-sharing services, including accessibility of service on time across the urban area, availability of vehicles, and ease of booking rides. All these factors influence customer choice of ride-sharing services.

However, the competition and demand in this industry continue to grow, which enhances the importance of understanding consumer preference for ride sharing services for companies like Pathao to stay competitive. In particular, understanding the customers' preferences and why they choose Pathao over other available options in the market can provide important insights to improve a company's service like Pathao and attract more customers. Previous studies have focused on different factors in this industry, including safety, convenience, and pricing. For example, a study conducted by Jahan (2021, 76), found that customers choose ride-sharing services that are more convenient in terms of pick-up and drop-off experiences and more competitively priced, as well as security is often also a major concern while booking ride-sharing services. On the other hand, Shah & Kubota (2022, 4), highlighted that quality of services such as comfort ride, effective and first complaint resolution, and on-time arrival all contribute to influencing customer preference, which drives consumer loyalty and retention. Conversely, Cynthia, Majumder, Tabassum, Khanom, Amin Tuhin, & Das (2019, 44), raised issues of safety and security regarding ride-sharing services in urban areas. However, there is still a need to understand the factors that drive consumers' preferences for Pathao in particular.

The study aims to investigate consumer preferences for ride-sharing companies in urban areas, with a particular focus on Pathao. The study will evaluate how factors including customer service, price, brand, and security affect customer preferences when choosing ride sharing services. The objectives of the study include:

- To identify the factors that influence customers preferences for ride-sharing services offered by Pathao in urban areas,
- To determine the level of customer satisfaction with the services provided by Pathao
- To provide recommendations and insights for Pathao to improve their services and better meet consumers' needs in urban areas.

Ride-sharing companies like Pathao have disrupted the transport industry in Bangladesh, although they are less than a decade old. Different local and international players have already entered this market. Millions of city dwellers have been using the services of different ride-sharing service providers, including Pathao. Ride-sharing companies have been battling to gain customers and introducing new features to make the ride more convenient and appealing to customers. It is essential for companies like Pathao to understand customer preferences for their ride-sharing services in order to develop more appealing strategies.

The findings of the study on investigating consumer preference for ride sharing companies, specifically for Pathao, will have significant implications for several stakeholders, such as ride sharing companies like Pathao, researchers, the general public who are interested in learning about ride-sharing services, and policymakers. Ride-sharing service providers like Pathao will benefit from the findings of the study, as they will get valuable information about customers preferences regarding ride sharing services, which will help them develop more customer driven strategies to attract more customers and improve their services. The study also contributes to evaluating their services from the customer's perspective, which helps companies like Pathao tailor their services to meet customer demand and foster customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Researchers can use the findings of the study to further their own study in this field, which can contribute to deep insights about customer preferences in the ride-sharing industry. This study will also contribute to existing literature on customers preferences for ride sharing services. Policymakers can utilise the results of the study to develop policies that can support the growth of the ride-sharing industry in urban areas. The findings will help them understand the problems and the factors that drive customers to use ride-sharing services in urban areas. The general public will get benefits for making more informed decisions regarding ride-sharing services. The research questions include

- What factors influence customers' preferences for ride-sharing services offered by Pathao in urban areas?
- What are the key drivers of customer satisfaction with the services provided by Pathao in urban areas?
- What are the recommendations for Pathao to improve their services and better meet consumers' needs in urban areas based on customer preferences and satisfaction levels?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter delves into customer preference regarding ride-sharing services in urban areas to provide a theoretical framework for this study, such as safety and security, convenience and accessibility, service quality, and driver professionalism and behaviour. Each of these preferences holds profound implications for riders, drivers, service providers, and the communities where these services operate. Safety and security are undoubtedly major concerns in ride-sharing services, and they are a top priority for the majority of both riders and drivers (Chaudhry, Yasar, El-Amine & Shakshuki 2018, 1045). Factors including real-time tracking, emergency response, driver background checking, etc. have shaped the safety and security landscape of this industry. Therefore, understanding how ride-sharing providers address and solve this concern is important for both riders and drivers. Ride-sharing services have gained tremendous popularity due to their accessibility and convenience (Nguyen, Tran & Dinh 2021, 142). So, ride-sharing platforms provide a solution for those who prefer flexible and convenient mobility. Service quality is also an important factor that influences user preference for choosing ride-sharing services. Services quality encompasses different aspects, including on-time pickup and drop-off, flexible and hassle-free payment, easy customer service, an efficient route, vehicle quality, a timely update of the ride, etc. Driver professionalism and behaviour also shape customer preferences and reflect companies' service quality. Professional drivers, with their good behaviour, can provide memorable and enjoyable rides to passengers, which attracts them to further use the service.

2.1 Safety and security

According to Leveson (2020, 17), the concepts of security and safety might be subject to varying definitions, although they both hold significant importance in addressing issues associated with safeguarding and preventive measures. In the case of ride-sharing services, Chaudhry, Yasar, El-Amine & Shakshuki (2018, 1046), defined security and safety within the context of ride sharing services pertain to safeguarding the confidentiality of user data and guaranteeing the physical and emotional welfare of both passengers and drivers during the duration of the shared journey.

Loa & Habib (2021, 14), argued that the proliferation of ride-sharing platforms has brought about a paradigm shift in urban mobility while also raising safety and security concerns. The study raised concerns about passenger safety and security, specifically in areas where law enforcement controls are

loose. The study found that the ride-sharing industry is still facing safety concerns like robbing, assaulting, and harassing passengers on rides. The study also highlighted that ride-sharing companies' stringent control over the riders, vehicles, and drivers prevents the implementation of rigorous controls. Therefore, ride-sharing platforms' inadequate feedback system has only worsened the situation. Yang, Hu, Liao & Huangn (2022, 1), emphasised the importance of ensuring strict security measures by the ride-sharing platform from the start of the customer's ride-sharing journey until they reach their destination. In this regard, Hoque & Saumi (2021, 155), proposed that using a watchdog network by both riders and passengers to contract energy purposes to the lawmakers can reduce the concern for safety and security for both riders and drivers. The study also suggested that a distress alarm can be used on the app to report any suspicious behaviours of drivers or any discomfort of riders to the authority, enabling prompt action for any unexpected events during the ride sharing.

Gupta, Buriro & Crispo (2019, 1), argued that the issue of driver reliability has become a significant concern, resulting in the emergence of security and safety difficulties for riders. The study also revealed that lots of misconducts have been created, such as sharing driver registration with others or unauthorised subcontracted ride sharing, due to the absence of comprehensive driver verification methods, which raised the safety and security concerns of riders. Ihinosen, Mhlanga & Lall (2020, 1), examined the safety and security concerns of individuals involved in ride-sharing services, and they suggested that facial recognition in mobile applications can be added as an additional safety measure. In addition, the study addressed how a two-way rating system and GPS tracking can be incorporated to mitigate concerns regarding the security and safety of both riders and drivers. A study conducted by Su, Nguyen-Phuoc & Johnson (2019, chapter "Abstract"), found that perceived safety and service quality were directly linked to customer preferences, which lead to customer satisfaction. The study emphasised developing regulations and policies for ensuring both riders and drivers safety. Savage & Kendi (2021, 1363), argued that when selecting a ride-sharing service, safety and security emerge as crucial considerations, which also impacts customer loyalty and perception towards ride-sharing services and, thus, customer satisfaction.

Rasheed Gaber & Elsamadicy (2021, 2), argued that the assurance of security and safety in ride-sharing services is achieved by employing communication devices that determine the location and monitoring security-related factors. Pal & Ruj (2019, 463), asserted the importance of using blockchain technologies to ensure a fair ride. The study proposed that the BlockV system can use blockchain technology to ensure security and safety within the ride-sharing service. Zhou (2019, 1), examined the con-

cerns pertaining to privacy and safety within the framework of ride-sharing services. It proposes a personalised dynamic ride-sharing model that aims to address these concerns and provide consumers with enhanced security, privacy, and confidence. Goel, Kulik & Ramamohanarao (2017, 2), introduce a method for optimising vehicle occupancy rates in ride sharing by selecting pick-up and drop-off sites from a defined list while simultaneously ensuring privacy and safety. The study employs Voronoi diagrams as a means to establish a k-anonymity model that ensures an adequate number of people are encompassed by each pick-up location. Kumar, Gupta, Parida & Chauhan (2022, 61), assessed the quality of ride-sharing services and found that the feature that has the vital impact on the quality of service in ride-sharing services is reliability, and the feature that holds the greatest influence over ride-sharing services is security. Chen & Lu (2021, 1), examined the safety implications associated with ride-sharing services, specifically focusing on issues such as assault, harassment, and robbery. It proposes potential solutions to address these concerns, such as the implementation of mandated dash cameras and the inclusion of distress alarms.

2.2 Service quality

According to McEwen, Bigby & Douglas (2021, 2), service quality refers to the evaluation of a company's ability to comprehend the demand and needs of the users and effectively satisfy their expectations. In the case of the ride-sharing service industry, Aw, Basha, Ng & Sambasivan (2019,1442), defined the concept of service quality within the ride-sharing sector as the degree of satisfaction and holistic experience that consumers derive from using ride-sharing services such as Lyft, Uber, and similar platforms. However, Shokouhyar & Shokoohyar (2020, 89), argued that service quality is the evaluation of services by customers, which involves comparing their perceived level of service with their initial expectations.

Kumar, Gupta, Parida & Chauhan (2022, 61), highlight in their study that service quality is essential for ride-sharing companies to provide door-to-door connectivity to their customers. The study found that the aspect with the greatest influence on ride-sharing services is reliability. On the other hand, Lim, Gupta, Biswas & Gupta (2021, 1), examined the correlation between service quality and consumer retention in ride-sharing services by considering collaborative consumption and found that customer satisfaction in ride-sharing services is influenced by ride-sharing providers' competence, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability. The study also found that the assurance of ride-sharing platforms

has the least effect on customer satisfaction. The study suggested that service quality leads to customer satisfaction, which ultimately influences their continued use of ride-sharing services.

Shah & Kubota (2022, 8), revealed that the extent to which customers are content with the service quality delivered by app-based ride-sharing companies positively impacts their propensity to utilise these services again in the future. They also suggested that improving the quality of services, such as an easy payment method or user interface, would enhance customer satisfaction. However, Wang, Gu, Wang & Wang (2019, 504), claimed that offering reliable services is a crucial component of ensuring high quality. The study found that reliability and trust develop among customers in the ride-sharing industry when they can rely on ride-sharing services to reach their destination safely, pick them up, and drop them off on time without major hiccups. The study suggests that this reliability contributes to the formation of positive perceptions and ultimately boosts overall satisfaction. Mitropoulos, Kortsari & Ayfantopoulou (2021, 22), argued that higher service quality creates a positive perception because customers can get the services, they expect from the service providers when the company maintains higher service quality. The study highlights that the congruence between customers' expectations and their actual experiences contributes to the enhancement of their satisfaction.

Kuswanto, Sundari, Harmadi & Dwi Asih Hariyanti (2019, 75), examined the various factors that impact consumer loyalty within the ridesharing industry, taking into account both offline and online platforms. The findings indicate a noteworthy and positive association between service quality, which encompasses both online and offline elements, and the degree of satisfaction, trust, and loyalty among users of ride-sharing services. The study also found that online service quality has less influence on customer loyalty than offline service quality, thereby making offline service quality in the ride-sharing industry more influential compared to online. However, the sample size of the study was small, so the findings might not be generalizable to the whole population. Quality factors in the ride-sharing industry evaluated by Bilali, Dandl, Fastenrath & Bogenberger (2019), argue that factors including boarding time, waiting time, and detour time impact the quality of services provided by ride-sharing companies. Zwick & Axhausen (2020, 89), also presented a similar argument that the measure of service quality can be observed through the timeliness and efficiency of a company's service delivery. However, Yee & Salleh (2022, 75), found that passenger satisfaction in ride-hailing services is significantly influenced by both functional and result quality and argued that service quality is multidimensional in ride-sharing services. Therefore, the study suggested that the dimensions of service quality include convenience, internal environment, comfort, system availability, efficiency, mobile safety and security, accurate billing, and customer services.

Nguyen-Phuoc, Vo, Su, Nguyen & Oviedo-Trespalacios (2021, 367), proposed that emerging ride-sharing companies should introduce services and features that align with consumer preferences and enhance service quality through advanced technological advancements, thereby ensuring user satisfaction. Ahmed, Choudhury, Ahmed, Chowdhury & Asheq (2020, 1415), found that in app-based rides-haring services, perceived quality has a beneficial impact on user satisfaction and loyalty. The study emphasised increasing user value perception and service quality to enhance user satisfaction levels. Ruch, Lu, Sieber & Frazzoli (2021, 1), evaluated the significance of service quality to survive in the ride-sharing business and found that the companies that emphasise higher service quality and continuously improve their service offerings are in the driving seat in this industry. The study also revealed that increasing the level of service quality leads to increased customer acceptance and thus higher ride bookings. However, Cetin & Deakin (2019, 9), raised the concern that ride-sharing companies can enhance their online services quality, but enhancing offline services quality, such as on-time rides, vehicle availability and quality, as well as driver behaviours, is challenging for the company due to a lack of control. Jang & Farajallah (2020, 1) disagreed, saying that constantly monitoring and advanced technologies can enable the companies to monitor their offline services.

Alemi, Circella, Mokhtarian & Handy (2019, 234) argued that in the ride-sharing industry, customer acquisition is challenging, thereby improving the service quality providers can positively impact their marketing efforts. The research revealed a significant positive association between enhanced service quality and the phenomenon of word-of-mouth marketing, which means increasing service quality positively impacts customer word-of-mouth marketing, which is significant in the ride-sharing industry. The research also found that service quality can be the prime differentiator in this highly competitive industry where several ride-sharing platforms compete. Therefore, the study suggested that consistently providing superior services can help companies attract and retain users. Jeon & Lee (2020, 2), argued that the influence of service quality extends beyond just consumer satisfaction and involves the overall well-being of drivers as well. The study found that drivers who exhibit satisfaction with the platform and the service they provide are more likely to deliver superior service to passengers.

2.3 Convenience and accessibility

According to Goel & Haldar (2020, 348), ride-sharing services have emerged as a breakthrough solution, offering enhanced convenience to busy individuals and travellers. The study also shows that rather than relying on traditional methods of hailing taxis on the street, customers now have the option to conveniently access transformation services by using ride sharing apps such as Uber or Lyft. Aw & Basha (2019,1458), also added that the advent of ride-sharing services has significantly enhanced the accessibility of urban transformation, particularly for people who do not have personal vehicles or encounter challenges in using public transportation. The study also shows that ride-sharing services provide the convenience of travelling without the hassle of maintenance and parking.

Most ride-sharing companies offer multiple vehicle options, enabling customers to choose their rides as per their demand and preferences (Nguyen, Tran & Dinh 2021, 142). Cheah, Shimul, Liang & Phau (2020), highlighted that most customers in urban areas choose ride-sharing services due to their convenience. The research additionally shown that the utilisation of ride-sharing services can yield cost-effectiveness when employed by many passengers simultaneously, but the study also raised concerns regarding the security and safety of multiple rides. However, Hyun & Naz (2021, 438), opposed the idea that ridesharing services reduce the privacy of customers, especially when many passengers mutually share their ride. Furthermore, in their study, Islam and Huda (2020, p. 72) examined the convenience and accessibility of ride sharing services during periods of high demand. The researchers found that during peak hours, fares for these services experience a surge and it is also difficult to find vehicles, which can be unaffordable and an inconvenience for people who need urgent rides. However, the study also agreed that ridesharing services provide more convenience and accessibility than traditional transportation.

2.4 Driver behaviour and professionalism

According to Wang & Gu (2019), ride-sharing service experiences largely depend on the driver's professionalism and behaviours, as well as riders' safety and security. Therefore, the study suggests that professional and highly skilled drivers can provide better ride-sharing services, which increase customer preference and thus lead to higher customer satisfaction.Thus, the study also highlight that customers prefer more professional and responsible drivers from the ride-sharing service provider who

avoid risky behaviours, prioritise riders' safety, and adhere to traffic rules. However, Ashkrof, Correia, Cats, & van Arem (2020,12), concerned that ride-sharing service providers often failed to monitor all the drivers due to virtual relationships, So, the study suggests that companies need to recruit drivers based on their professionalism and behaviours, along with their driving skills, and need to arrange training sessions periodically to improve drivers' professionalism and behaviours. Shamsudin & Abu Bakar (2022, 39), found that courteous, polite, and professional drivers can create a good environment during the rides, which attracts customers to reuse the services and thus increases their level of satisfaction. Furthermore, Mase, Majid, Mesgarpour, Torres, Figueredo & Chapman (2020, 1), highlight that there is a correlation between driver behaviours, professionalism, and customer complaints, thereby increasing driver professionalism and behaviour can lead to a decrease in customer complaints.

Almoqbel, Likhar & Wohn (2019, 77), found that driver professionalism and riders' safety are closely linked, especially physical safety. The study also highlighted that professional drivers exhibit an increased tendency to adhere to traffic regulations, demonstrate responsible driving behaviour, and place a greater emphasis on ensuring the safety of their passengers, which mitigates the likelihood of accidents and injuries. Thus, Urata, Xu, Ke, Yin, Wu, Yang & Ye (2021, 15), argued that passengers desire a ride that is both comfortable and enjoyable, which is largely dependent on driver professionalism and behaviors. The study also revealed that professional behaviour is characterised by drivers exhibiting politeness, respect, and consideration towards the requirements and preferences of passengers. Cheng & Su (2020, 1), supported the idea that the use of cordial salutations, the use of passengers' preferred appellations, and the demonstration of respect for their personal boundaries collectively help to foster a comfortable and favourable experience, which makes the riders feel valued and respected, hence enhancing their overall customer experiences.

Tripathy, Bai & Heese (2022, 435), examined the professionalism of drivers and argued that passengers exhibit a range of comfort zones with regards to conversational engagement, personal space limits, and social contact. Experienced drivers possess a comprehensive understanding of these limitations and conduct themselves in a manner that mitigates any potential discomfort or intrusion experienced by passengers. Tafreshian, Masoud & Yin (2020, 2), asserted that driver professionalism is also important for ride-sharing platforms because, when faced with conflicts or disputes, experienced drivers possess the ability to handle such circumstances in a composed and responsible manner, averting any potential discomfort or tension for passengers. A survey conducted by Alemi, Circella, Mokhtarian & Handy (2019, 245), showed that riders appreciate comfort and pleasant rides with professional drivers,

which allow them to rely on the ride-sharing service for their transportation needs with confidence. Cetin & Deakin (2019, 9), added that a professional driver possesses the necessary licences and permits, which are not only crucial for adhering to legal regulations but also instill riders with a sense of assurance regarding their safety.

2.5 Pricing of ride sharing service and customer preference

Shamim, Khan, Qureshi, Rafique & Akhunzada (2021, 1), examined the factors that have a significant impact on the acceptance as well as adoption of ride-sharing services among customers. Findings of the study revealed that the perceived price of ride-sharing services exerts a substantial influence on customers' willingness to use such services. Bojković, Jeremić, Petrović & Tica (2019, chapter "Introduction"), added that the pricing of ride-sharing services exerts a substantial impact on consumer preferences, especially for budget-conscious customers. The study also highlights that pricing factors determine how users choose and perceive services. However, Caiati, Rasouli & Timmermans (2020, 2), argued that the cost of ride-sharing services is insignificant to customers seeking convenient transportation options and use them occasionally, but pricing does matter among the regular users of ride-sharing services. Jena & Ghadge (2023, 2), highlighted that ride-sharing services typically exhibit a higher cost in comparison to other modes of transportation, but multiple ride pools can be more affordable. Giorgione, Ciari & Viti (2020, 3), investigated the dynamic pricing of round-trip carsharing services and found that dynamic pricing enhances profits, usage, and attractivity but negatively impacts low-income groups of customers because at pick-up time the price is high, which may be costly for regular users.

Dowling, Manchanda & Spann (2021, 11), found that a consumer who uses ride-sharing services as a means of daily commuting may opt to decrease the frequency of rides in response to a persistent increase in prices, whereas reduced prices could potentially stimulate increased usage. The study suggested that ride-sharing platforms need to set optimal pricing for their services so that customers get value for money. Gurumurthy, Kockelman & Simoni (2019, 6) added that the ride-sharing sector has experienced heightened levels of competition as a result of the presence of several participants., thereby making pricing a strategic factor to attract new consumers. The study highlighted that customers often engage in cost comparisons between ride-sharing services and alternative transportation options such as car ownership, taxi usage, or reliance on public transit. Comparatively speaking, the

availability of discounted prices increases the appeal of ride-sharing. Safdar, Jamal, Al-Ahmadi, Rah-man & Almoshaogeh (2022, 2), argued that ride-sharing companies frequently employ surge pricing during periods of high demand, such as rush hours or severe weather. Customers have the option to re-spond to the increased rates in one of two ways: either by accepting them out of a sense of urgency or by choosing to wait until prices revert back to their regular levels, based on their individual tastes and specific needs. However, Hong & Liu (2022, 1), found that most of the customers value convenience and flexibility compared to the price, but optimal pricing enables the company to sustain itself in the competitive ride-sharing industry.

3 RIDE-SHARING SERVICE AND INDUSTRY

There has been various research conducted to understand the customers' preference on ride sharing services. Most of the studies have shown evidence of the impact of different factors on customer preference on ride sharing services. Therefore, this chapter represents the arguments and different research evidence that help to understand ride sharing services and customer preferences for ride sharing services in urban areas.

3.1 Concept of ride-sharing service

According to Wang & Gu (2019), a ride-sharing service is a transportation modal that facilitates the sharing of rides among passengers who are headed towards the same destination. Sharma (2020, 31), added that ride sharing refers to the service that connects drivers and passengers who need transportation. However, ride-sharing is the service that allows people to rent vehicles such as cars or bikes, for transportation purposes from a pool of divers available by mobile apps. This results in a shared ride that saves both money and time. Kumar & Gupta (2022, 61), argued that the primary factor contributing to the broad acceptance of ride-sharing services is their inherent convenience and affordability. Ride sharing is an innovative alternative to traditional transportation services such as buses and taxis. Users can reserve, pay, and manage their rides all using their mobile devices. Ride-sharing services exhibit variability in their operational characteristics, which are contingent upon the policies implemented by ride-sharing business such as carpooling, peer-to-peer, vanpooling, and dynamic.

According to Zhou (2019, 5), peer-to-peer ride-sharing is the most popular ride-sharing service that allows people to offer rides to other people in exchange for payment. The facilitation of driver-passenger connections is made possible through the utilisation of online services offered by several ride-sharing businesses, like Uber and Pathao. Ashrafi & Alam (2021, 21), argued that Peer-to-peer ride sharing exhibits a higher degree of flexibility in comparison to other services, as it affords drivers the autonomy to establish their own pricing structures and determine their own working hours. The majority of ride-sharing services found in urban areas are commonly referred to as peer-to-peer ride-sharing services. Besides, carpooling is also a popular ride-sharing concept that allows people travelling in the same direction to share rides with other people. Sharma (2020, 42), highlighted that carpooling is not

the usual ride sharing service that ride sharing companies provide; rather, it is arranged through different channels such as word of mouth, an online platform, or social media. Vanpooling is similar to carpooling, which involves generally large vehicles that can accommodate more passengers, and is a cost-effective ride-sharing concept used by organisations to facilitate their employees (Showkat & Choudhury, 2019, 373). Dynamic ride-sharing is widely recognised as the predominant ride-sharing service in urban regions. It involves matching people with similar destinations in real time through apps. Urata, Xu, Ke, Yin, Wu, Yang & Ye (2021, 1), examined the concept of dynamic ride sharing to reduce traffic jams in urban areas. The research revealed that dynamic ride sharing is particularly beneficial for individuals seeking prompt access to ride sharing services, while furthermore resulting in a noteworthy alleviation of traffic jams. They also highlighted that it is generally more flexible and effective than other types of ride-sharing services. However, despite having different types of services, the main purpose is to fulfil people's transportation needs with greater flexibility and in a timely manner.

3.2 Ride-sharing service in urban areas

People are migrating to urban areas for better life and facilities which impact negatively on urban transportation system and lead unbearable traffic congestion. One possible solution for this problem is ride sharing industry. Bilali & Dandl (2019), found that ride sharing industry contribute to reduction in traffic jams through decreasing overall number of cars on road. They also suggested that ride sharing industry can be blessing for solving traffic problems in urban areas. The study also highlighted that ride sharing companies match passengers with drivers and ensure efficient use of resources. Komanduri, Wafa, Proussaloglou & Jacobs (2018, 1), analysed the impact of ride sharing industry on traffic jams in various cities in the USA and found that increasing ride sharing services lead to decrease traffic jams proportionately as well as they estimated that ride sharing services can reduce 20% to 25% of traffic problem of a city.

However, Sharma (2020, 41), argued that the impact on traffic congestion depends on factors including specific ride sharing service used and level of adoption. Ruch, Lu, Sieber & Frazzoli (2021, 1), investigated the role of ride sharing industry to reduce carbon emission and found that ride sharing industry lead cumulative use of cars and reduce vehicle miles travelled by up to 35% which reduce carbon emission. Similar findings were expressed by Morfeldt & Johansson (2022, 1), rides sharing in-

dustry can replace ten individual owned vehicles by one shared car which could reduce carbon foot-print by about 45%. The study also shows that a non-pooled ride sharing trip can produce more that 30% more carbon compared to a private car trip. The study also propose that the real benefit of rides sharing to decrease carbon emission would come by electrifying ride sharing vehicles.

Parking is also one of the major problems in urban area and it can be disaster for a city where space is very limited compared to population. A study conducted by Katzev (2020, 67), parking demand can be reduced up to 50% due to the reduction of car ownership. This finding is also supported by Hjorteset & Böcker (2020, 2), the implementation of ride-sharing services within urban areas has the potential to result in a notable decrease in private vehicle ownership, estimated to be around 15% which led to a significant reduction in demand of car parking. The study also highlighted that ride sharing service help to reduce parking duration and ensure efficient use of vehicles. Ride sharing industry help to effi-cient use of exiting parking space by allowing people sharing their rides. A survey conducted by Cheah, Shimul, Liang & Phau (2020, 142), ride sharing services can help to reduce parking duration up to 60% and need of parking facilities. Ride sharing industry can also be alternative sustainable transportation mode that can be helped country's shared economy. According to Rentizelas & Trivyza (2022, 864), ride sharing industry can reduce demand on public transportation up to 40%. However, ride sharing companies and cities have to work together to maximise the benefits and minimise the negative impact of ride sharing services in urban area.

3.3 Prospects and challenges of ride-sharing industry

Ride sharing can be a smart solution to the transportation problem for the growing population in urban areas. Pang & Shen (2022, 525), found that the ride-sharing industry will grow rapidly in the coming years as well as highlighted that the industry can reach $328 billion by 2030. According to Akshay & Sonia (2021), the market for ride-sharing services will grow by 16.7% per year, and in the post-covid economy, it can double. The cost of car ownership and living costs in urban areas are anticipated to drive the demand for ride-sharing services.

FIGURE 1. Prospects of ride sharing Industry (adapted from Katzev 2020, 68)

Research evidence supports this trend. A study by Zwick & Axhausen (2020, 89), found that There is a growing inclination among individuals to utilise ride-sharing services instead of purchasing their own vehicles because of cost and convenience, which is a prospect for ride sharing companies like Uber and Pathao to expand their services. Ride-sharing companies not only solve transportation problems in cities but also generate employment opportunities for millions of people. Bilali & Dandl (2019), investigated the contribution of the ride-sharing industry to job creation as well as found that the ride-sharing industry has provided economic opportunities for people who want to earn money by driving and prefer flexible work hours. Katzev (2020, 68), supported the idea that ride-sharing companies have made ride-sharing a flexible source of employment and an attractive option for additional income. The study also found that the ride-sharing industry has created indirect employment opportunities such as customer support, marketing, vehicle maintenance and servicing, and other support services. A survey conducted by Ma & Hanrahan (2020, 247:2), found that Uber and Lyft created more than 2 million jobs in the United States. The study suggested that the ride-sharing industry made entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who desired to start their own ride sharing business. Some platforms offer drivers the opportunity to build their own customer base and operate under their own brand, such as the Lyft Driver Entrepreneurship Programme offered by the Lyft platform or ViaPass operated by the Via platform, which allows drivers to do so. However, ride-sharing startups like Shuttle have been bringing more convenient and affordable ride-sharing services, which can open new doors for this industry.

FIGURE 2. Challenges of Ride-sharing Industry (adapted from Wizinsights 2023)

Although The ride-sharing industry has undergone significant changes and expansion in recent years, it has also experienced numerous challenges in the market, as different studies have proven. According to Chen & Wang (2019, 28), evolving and complex regulatory landscape is the key challenge for ride-sharing companies. They also argued that ride-sharing companies, especially global companies like Uber, have faced legal disputes, different regulations, and operational limitations across regions. Komanduri, Wafa, Proussaloglou & Jacobs (2018, 11) found that ride-sharing companies like Uber faced legal challenges and regulatory bans in cities like Barcelona and London, thereby having to make significant adjustments to comply with local regulation, which ultimately impacted their operations. Pang & Shen (2022, 520) examined the ride-sharing industry impact in cities as well as found that safety concerns have been a major challenge for ride-sharing companies. The study shows that ride-sharing companies have been facing challenges regarding driver safety, passenger safety, and incidents involving drivers. This suggests that potential safety risks need to be addressed through improved monitoring, training, and diver screening.

Hou & Guan (2020, 4325) argued that drivers are also trending to provide ride-sharing services without using the apps of ride-sharing companies, which impose safety concerns, and ride-sharing companies have not solved this issue yet. However, the ride-sharing industry has the potential to reduce traffic problems in urban areas, but several studies have mixed results about the actual contribution of the

ride-sharing industry to traffic congestion in urban areas. Pang & Shen (2022, 542) supported that ride sharing services help to enhance vehicle miles travelled, especially during peak hours, which led potential congestion. This indicate that the importance of careful management of ride sharing services and integration of it with mainstream transportation system to maximize their congestion reducing potential. Lloyd (2019, 37) classified ride sharing derivers as independent contractors instead of employees. The study shows that ride sharing companies treat drivers' independent contractors thereby the companies avoid providing protections and benefits to the drivers such as health insurance, minimum wages and workers' rights. Shokoohyar (2020, 96) highlighted issues of low earing of drivers in ride sharing industry. The study found that many drivers earn low wage after deducting all the expanses like fuelling cost, toll and road taxes.

3.4 Factors that influence consumer preferences in the ride sharing industry

According to Jeon & Lee (2020, 2), accessibility and convenience are the key drivers of customer preferences in the ride sharing industry. The study found that ride-sharing companies provide the ability to track rides, quick ride management, and seamless payment processing. Agrawal & Agrawal (2020, 180), added that the features like cashless payment, GPS tracking, and different riding options of ride sharing platforms like Lyft or Uber that enhance accessibility and convenience drive customer preferences. The study suggests that ride-sharing companies necessary to prioritise these features to retain as well as attract more customers.

FIGURE 3. Factors that Influence Consumer Preferences (adapted from Jahan 2021, 74-77)

A study by Rentizelas & Trivyza (2022, 863) found that the cost of car ownership is increasing in urban areas because of rising costs of car insurance, fuel, and taxation, which makes ride-sharing a more attractive option for people. Cost is another factor that influences customer preference in the ride-sharing industry. Uddin (2020, 406) addressed the fact that customers, particularly young customers, prefer ride-sharing services because they are perceived as more cost-effective and convenient. The study also highlighted that customers with higher preferences for flexible transportation options are more likely to use ride-sharing services as opposed to owning a personal vehicle. Shokoohyar (2020, 96) further highlighted that fare transparency, price promotion, and discounts offered by ride-sharing companies also influence customers to use their services over traditional modes of transportation. Similarly, Komanduri, Wafa, Proussaloglou & Jacobs (2018, 2) argued that safety and security are also prime factors that influence customers preferences in the ride-sharing industry. The study found that safety features of ride-sharing platforms, including emergency contact, live tracking, driver identification, and ride assistance, help to develop trust among customers and lead to their preference to use the services. So, the study recommended that ride-sharing companies prioritise safety measures to foster customer loyalty and trust. Social influence and peer recommendations also drive customer preference in this industry.

Dong & Yang (2021, 1) investigated the influence of recommendations on customer preference in the ride-sharing industry and found that referrals and reviews from family, friends, and online communities can significantly impact consumer preference for choosing ride-sharing services. Similar findings were expressed by Chen & Lu (2021, 9), that user experiences online, such as driver reviews and ratings, influence customers' decisions about ride-sharing services. The study also suggested that customers often rely on the opinions and suggestions of others, so ride-sharing companies should focus more on generating positive reviews to attract more customers. Furthermore, demographic factors such as income, employability, lifestyle, and age also impact customers preferences in the ride-sharing industry. For example, Agrawal & Agrawal (2020, 180) showed that younger generations, such as millennials, tend to have higher priorities when using ride-sharing services than older people. They also highlighted that working-class people who prefer more convenience and have a sound level of income prefer more ride-sharing services than those who have a low level of income. However, ride-sharing platforms such as Uber offer features like Uber Assist to meet the requirements of disabled as well as elderly people, which also helps to influence customers preferences in this untapped market.

4 RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to the process and techniques used to carry out research (Snyder 2019, 333). So, this chapter provides a detailed description of the research methods and design used to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. The chapter also outlines the data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. Therefore, this chapter helps to provide a more holistic insights of consumer preferences for ride-sharing companies in urban area.

4.1 Research philosophy

Positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and realism are highly used philosophies in the research arena. However, for this study, positivism research philosophy has been followed because of the highly structured and large sample size. Besides, this philosophy helps with deep analysis and is effective for quantitative analysis. Eisend & Kuss (2019, 211) argued that this philosophical perspective places significant emphasis on the principles of objectivity, quantifiability, and generalisation. Zahle (2021, 202) added that positivism philosophical approach seeks to mitigate biases and subjectivity in study, hence strengthening the objectivity and reliability of its conclusions. Since, quantitative analysis is the main focus in this study, positivism philosophy has been used. On the other hand, mixed method of research is main focus in pragmatism philosophy (Žukauskas & Vveinhardt 2018, 123) but this study used single method such as quantitative. Therefore, this philosophy is unsuitable for this research. Similarly, the view of an objective reality in realism may not fully acknowledge the subjective and situational nature of human experiences (Khatri 2020, 1437) since, this study is based on customer perception of ride sharing company, therefore, this philosophy was inappropriate. According to Scauso (2020, 75), interpretivism philosophy has room for biases or unreliable conclusion due to over dependence of subjective nature. Thereby, this philosophy has been ignored due to the inappropriateness for the subject matter and finally positivism has been used.

4.2 Research approach

Newman and Gough (2021, 6) classify research approaches into three categories, namely inductive, deductive, and abductive, which are distinct procedures and practices used to conduct a study. For this study, the deductive approach has been used as it is based on pre-existing theories because ride sharing concept is not new in research field thereby the popularity of ride sharing services in urban area is already proved by various studies. Since, this study has evaluated this exiting concept to comprehend the customer preference regarding ride sharing services, so, deductive is most suitable for this research. Conversely, according to Oleskeviciene & Sliogeriene (2020, 40), inductive approach focused on subjective interpretation as well as use small sample size which limit it applicability on broad population. It is also inefficient and difficult to draw causal relationship. Singh & Singla (2022, 47) argued that inductive is best to find new context thereby it has lack of theoretical guidance. Therefore, it was not considered necessary since the aim of this study is not to generate new theories. By employing the deductive approach, it is possible to determine causal relationships between the services of ride-sharing companies like Pathao and customer preferences such collecting and analyzing data systematically, and drawing conclusion based on existing research evidence. Therefore, this study has been used deductive research approach.

4.3 Research methods and design

This study employed a monomethod study, which exclusively relied on quantitative data analysis. This approach was selected as it is both simple and effective for case study analysis, making it well-suited for the study. Gama & Alves (2021, 59), emphasized on quantitative analysis to unveil new insights of research context. It is also effective to collect and analyses large sample size as well as best for presenting data in organized and clear manner. Subjectivity of the results can enhance generalizability of the findings using quantitative analysis. Therefore, this method has been used. In contrast, a mixed method approach was deemed unsuitable due to its complexity, time-consuming nature, and the potential for difficult-to-interpret results when compared to a monomethod approach. Qualitative method was not used because this study focused on primary data and assessed the current perception of customer regarding the ride sharing services as ride sharing industry is evolving first due to adoption of new technology.

Descriptive research has been used for this study because it provides a comprehensive description and helps to gain a better understating of consumer preferences of ride-sharing companies by identifying the trend, pattern, and relationship among the variable. It is also useful to analyse the attributes of a population such as customers or phenomena thereby a descriptive research strategy has been chosen for the study.

4.4 Data collection method

Data can include a wide range of factual information, numerical values, and relevant elements that form the fundamental foundation for academic study and critical analysis (Till & Matei 2019, 311). This research collects data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data source used in this study is a structured online survey questionnaire that was sent electronically to the potential respondents using ride-sharing users' groups on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Email. Accordance to research objectives, the questionnaire was designed. It aims to collect precise information and data from consumers. Google Docs Forms employed to design and create the questionnaire. The Likert scale has been used to design a questionnaire to get responses from the potential respondent easily. The responses were stored in a single spreadsheet document for analysis. In the case of secondary data, different external sources have been used such as articles, books, journals, newspapers, websites, and similar survey data conducted past, related to the topic.

Five-point Likert scale has been used for this study. The highest scale point indicates the most favorable such as extremely likely, completely, and strongly agree whereas the lowest scale indicates the least favorable such as Strongly disagree, not at all, or never. Each point on the scale carries a score.

4.5 Population and sampling

The target population for this study is the customers of Pathao. To find the target population different Facebook groups which are communities of ride-sharing service users have been used. In addition, Pathao's own Facebook groups and pages also helped to find a relevant population. Random sampling techniques have been employed to select biased free samples. According to Senaweera & S. Haddela (2021, 29), the likelihood of finding a sample that effectively reflects the inherent features of the whole population are increased by random sampling. It is also help to make valid inference that is important to understand the customer preference regarding the ride sharing services. Conversely, non-random sampling involves subjective judgement which increase the likelihood of biases response. Willmott (2020, 2), argued that non-random sampling may not accurately represent the whole population which is contradict of objectives of this study. Therefore, random sampling has been used. The target sample size is 180 for the study.

4.6 Data analysis and research model

Data analysis refers to the systematic use of statistical and analytical tools to describe, summaries, demonstrate and evaluate data (Jann & Hinz 2020, 105). The collected data has been analyzed in different forms using charts, graphs, and tabular forms to make the study outcome presentable. Descriptive analysis has been performed to gain a proper understating of the data. Excel and SPSS have been used to analyse data.

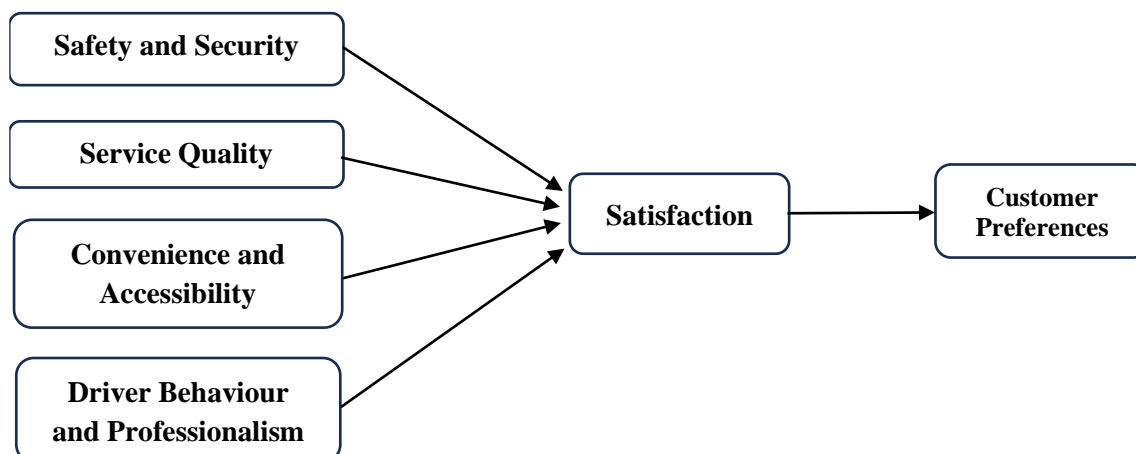The conceptual model of this study is following;

FIGURE 4. Conceptual framework

4.7 Ethical consideration

In order to conduct the survey and carry out this whole study, ethical considerations have been taken into account. The security of the participant's information in the survey is assured, even though there is no confidential information about the participants. Brittain, Ibbett, Lange, Dorward, Hoyte, Marino, Milner-Gulland, Newth, Rakotonarivo, Veríssimo & Lewis (2020, 12), argued that the inclusion of ethical issues in research is of the utmost significance as it serves to protect the rights and uphold the dignity of individuals who participate in research endeavours. In the absence of ethical considerations, participants are susceptible to potential injury, exploitation, and violation upon their privacy. For the purposes of this study, the participants' assent has been obtained before accessing any of their information. In order to adhere to ethical standards, Eisend & Kuss (2019, 211) highlighted that it is imperative to gain informed consent from participants, thereby acknowledging and respecting their autonomy to willingly engage in research activities. This measure guarantees that all parties possess comprehensive knowledge on the potential hazards and advantages involved. There was no pressure put on the participants to disclose information, and they did so spontaneously. In addition, they were given the flexibility to reject the material if they so choose. There is not even a tiny possibility that the participants, society, or nation might be put in danger by this study.

5 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter describes the results of data analysis, including demographic information and research questions. The results have been presented using different graphs and charts to understand customer preferences for ride-sharing companies.

5.1 Demographic information

Male respondents are higher (127) than female respondents (53). The result shows that the ratio of the participants is about 71: 29 which indicates that there are 29% female and 71% male respondents in this study.
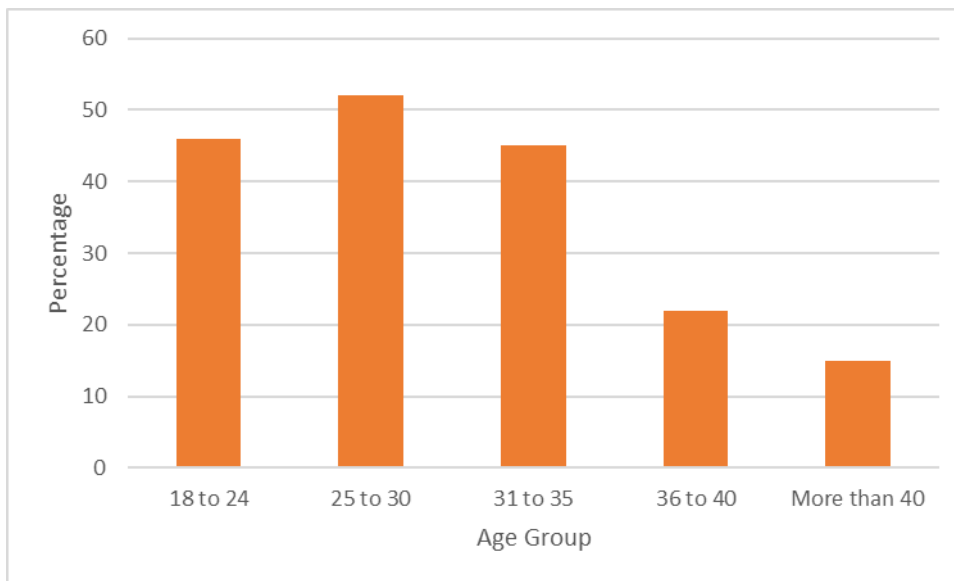

FIGURE 5. Age

Figure 5 presents the percentage and frequency of respondents in different age groups. The result shows that majority fall in the age group of 25 to 30, with the percentage of 29% and the age group more than 40 have lowest percentage while the age group of 18 to 24 and 31 to 35 are 26% and 25% respectively.
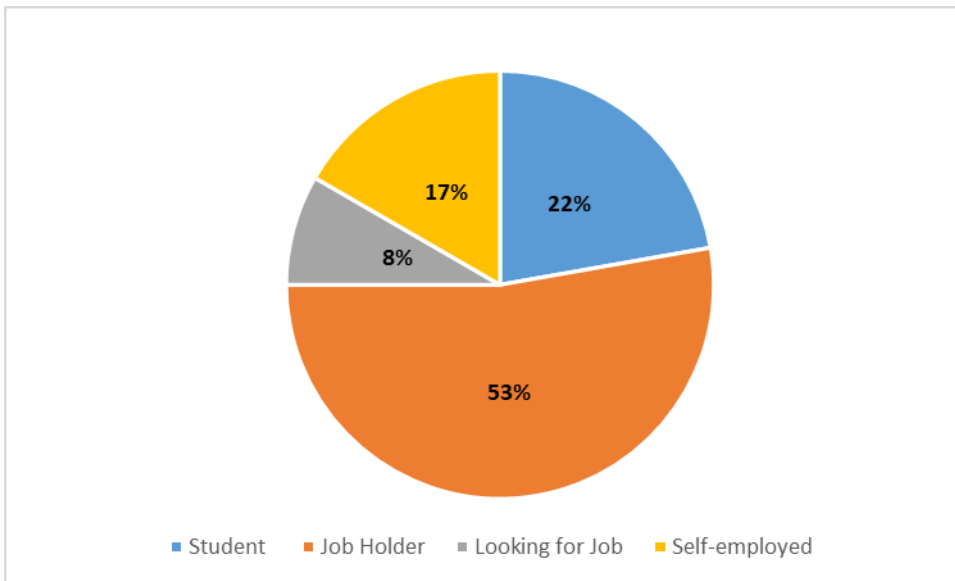
FIGURE 6. Professions

The percentage of professional status of figure 6 shows that most of the respondents are job holders which account for 53% while 22% are students and 17% of them are self-employed. However, respondents who are looking for job are only 8%. The following chart shows the professional status:
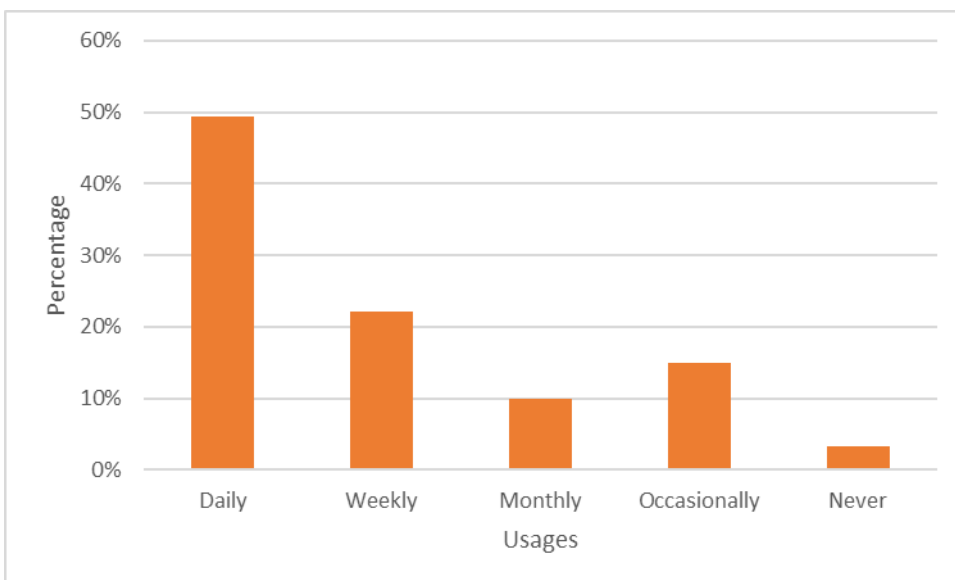

FIGURE 7. Usages of Ride Sharing Service

Figure 7 indicates the frequent use of ride sharing services like Pathao in Dhaka city. The result shows that the highest percentage of the respondents (49%) use ride-sharing services on a daily basis, which

reflects the popularity and demand of ride sharing services in the city. Thus, 22% of them use it on a weekly basis, while a smaller portion of respondents (10%) require ride-sharing services less frequently, such as on a monthly basis, and 15% of them use it occasionally as an alternative mode of transportation. However, only 3% never use the services, and this could be for several reasons, such as having their own car.

5.2 Research questions

The following figure 8 represent the opinion of the respondents on the ease of use of the Pathao's mobile application.
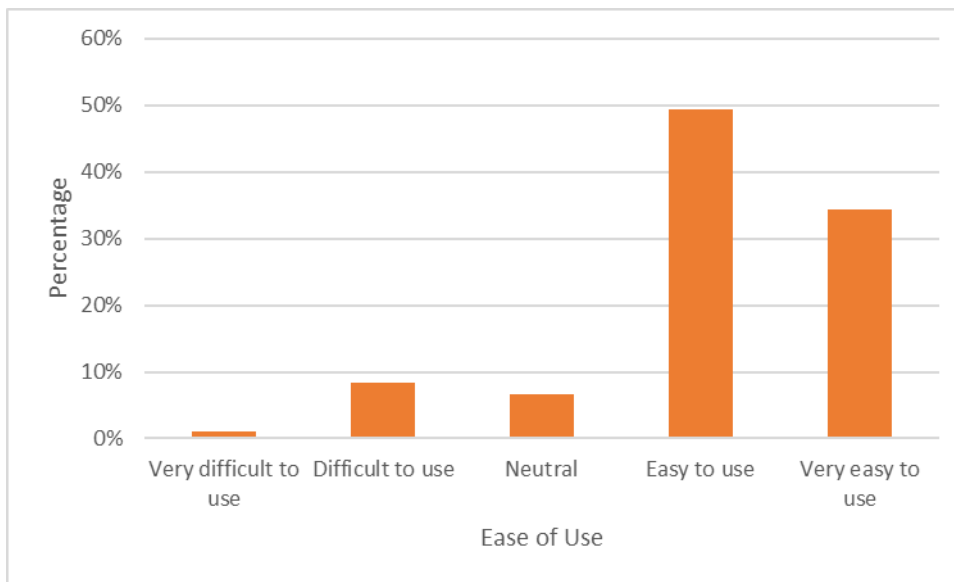

FIGURE 8. The ease of use of the Pathao's mobile application

Figure 8 depicts that majority of the respondents (49%) found the Pathao mobile app easy to use and a significant portion (34%) found it very easy to use. However, only a small portion (8%) expressed difficult to use. This indicates that usability difficulties are not prevalent across the user base.
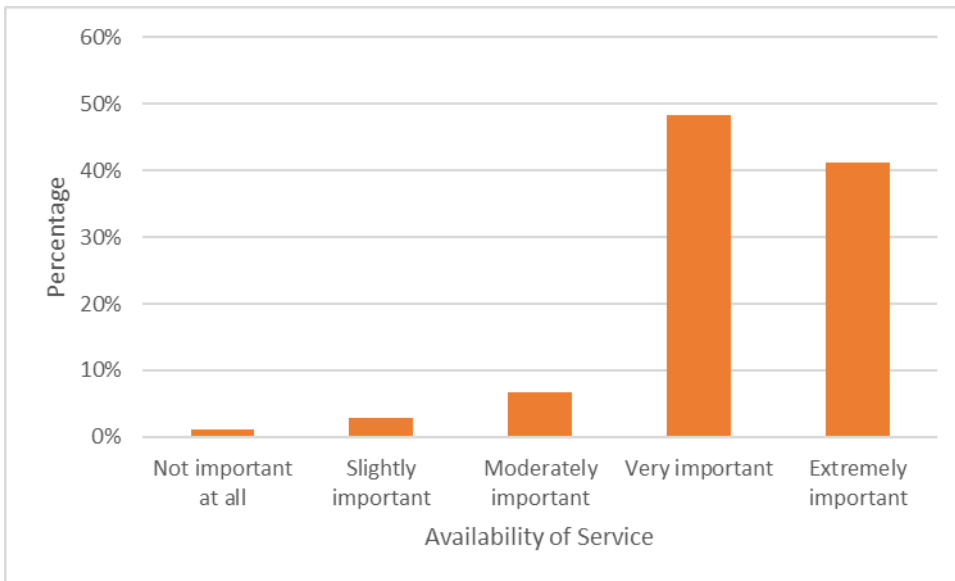
FIGURE 9. The importance of the availability of Pathao's services during peak hours

Figure 9 shows that majority of the respondents (48%) rated the availability of Pathao's services during the peak hours as very important while 41% considered it as extremely important. This suggests high level of dependency and reliance on Pathao's services during the peak hours. Besides, only a small percentage (1%) rated it not important at all.
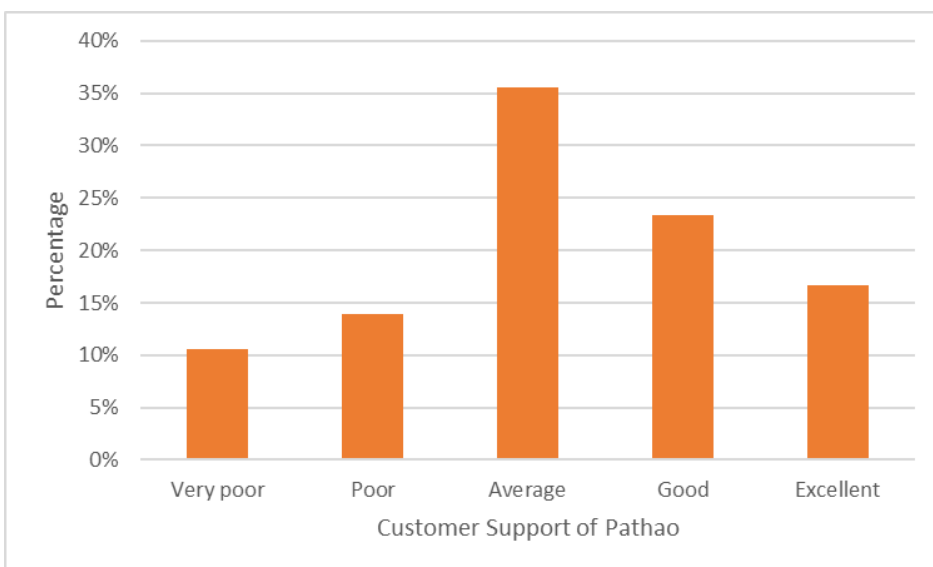

FIGURE 10. Perception of the customer support provided by Pathao

The data in figure 10 shows that majority of respondents (36%) rated the customer support of Pathao as average which indicates the need for improvement of their customer support system. Thus, a significant portion of respondents considered poor and very poor customer support provided by Pathao which indicates the negative perception of customer about their customer support. However, 23% and 17% of the respondents rated good and excellent respectively. That highlight that in some cases customers get good support from Pathao.
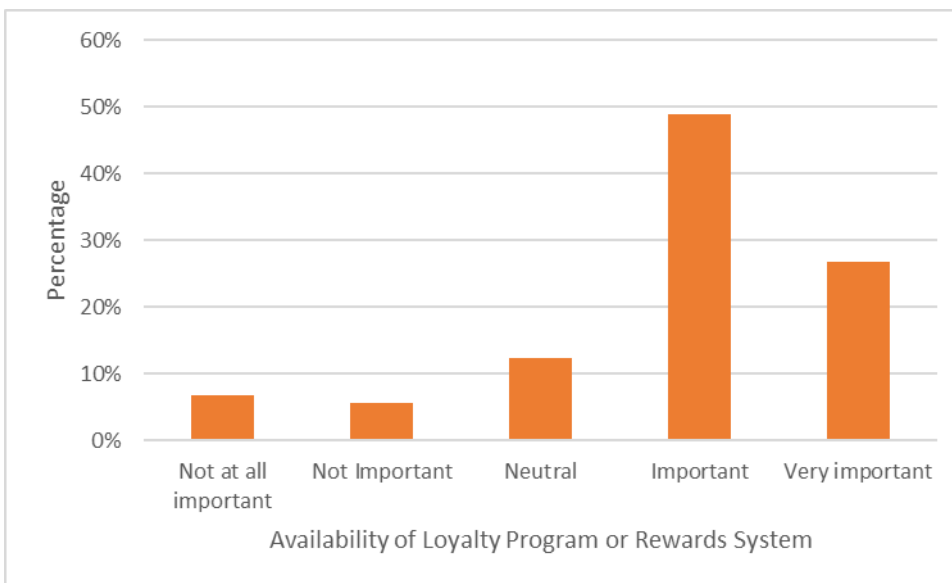
FIGURE 11. The availability of a loyalty program or rewards system for you when choosing a ride-sharing service

Figure 11 indicates that majority of the respondents (49%) find the availability of a loyalty program or rewards system as important when choosing a ride-sharing service, while 27% considered it very important. On the other hand, 13% of them consider rewards or loyalty program not important factor for selecting ride sharing services. However, the data suggest that customers prioritise having rewards or loyalty program.
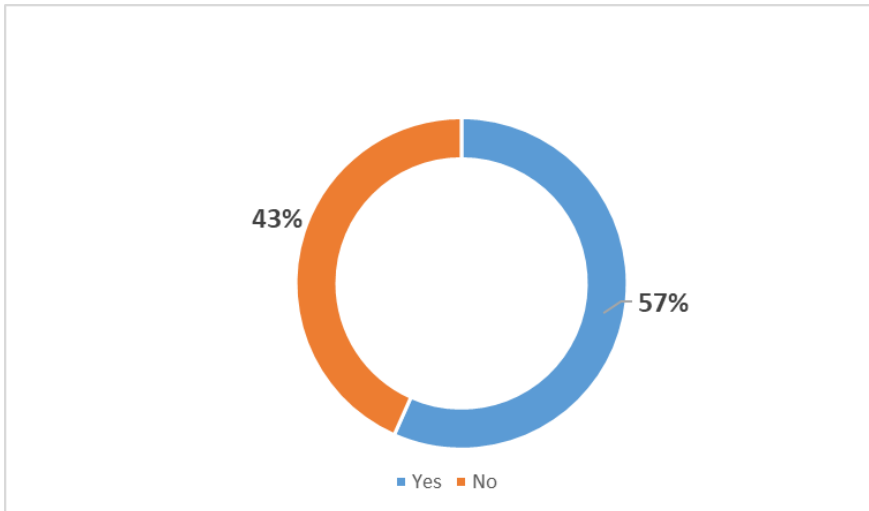
FIGURE 12. Aware of the safety measures implemented by Pathao

Figure 12 shows that 57% were aware of the safety measures implemented by Pathao, such as driver background checks and an SOS button among the respondents while 43% of the respondents were not aware of these safety measures. This indicates that majority of the respondents have knowledge of Pathao's safety initiatives but a significant portion is still unknown about their safety measure.

FIGURE 13. The importance of safety and security considerations when using a ride-sharing service like Pathao

Among the respondents, majority (61%) consider safety and security important for choosing ride sharing services whereas low percentages (3%) were in the moderately important category and no res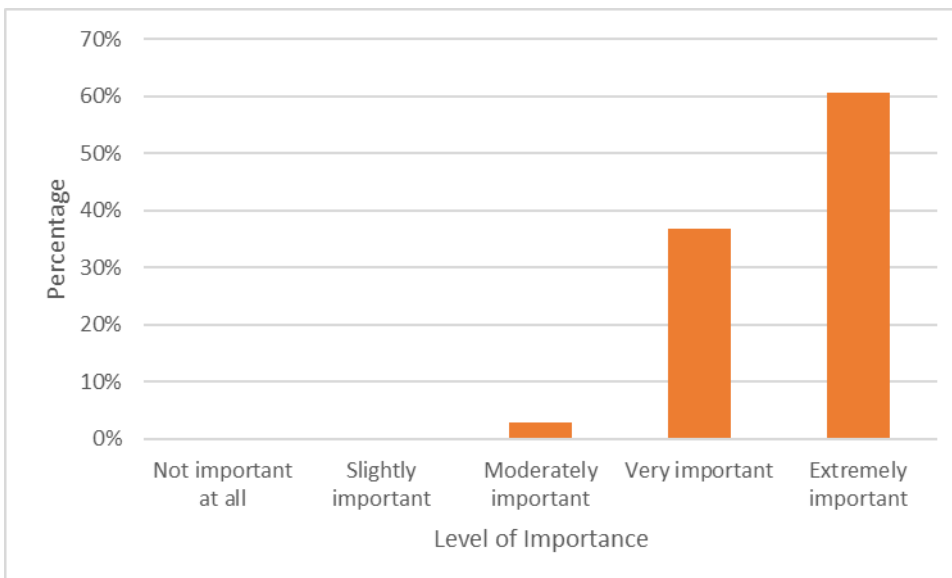pondents consider the safety and security measure not important. This indicates the importance of safety and security measure for ride sharing company like Pathao.
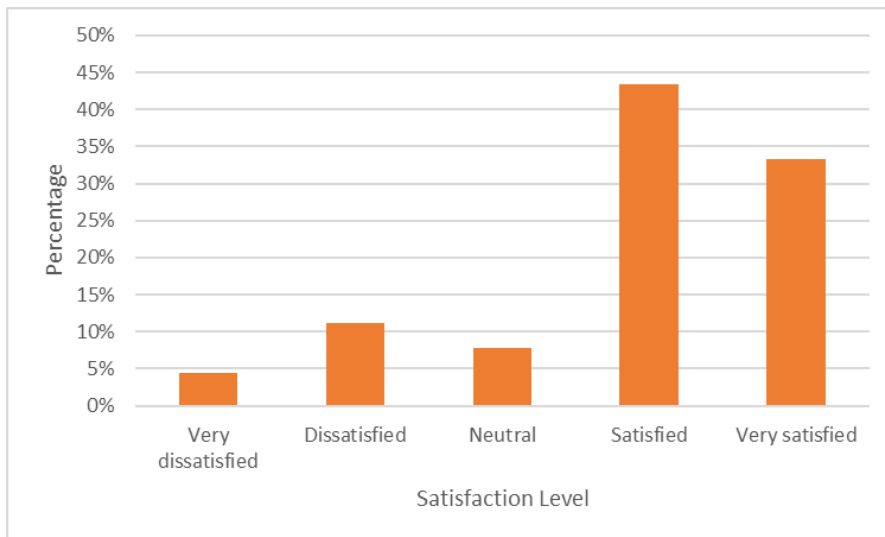
FIGURE 14.Satisfaction with the safety and security measures implemented by Pathao

Data in figure 14 indicate that a majority of respondents (43%) were satisfied with the safety and security measures implemented by Pathao. In addition, 33% of the respondents were very satisfied with Pathao safety and security measures but a significant percentage (11%) expressed their dissatisfaction which suggests the necessity of addressing the concerns and improve the security and safety measures.
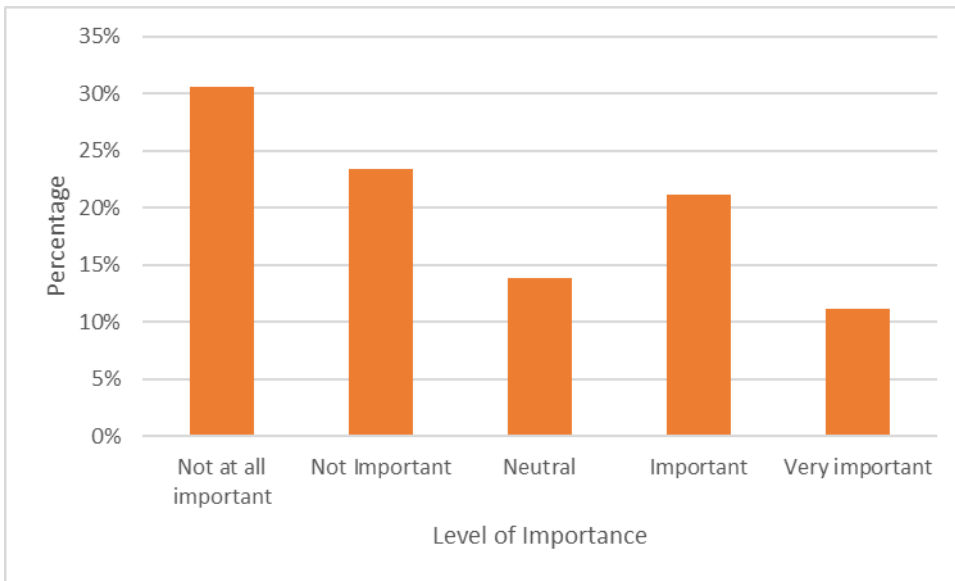
FIGURE 15. Importance of the price factor when choosing a ride-sharing service like Pathao

Figure 15 shows that more than half of the respondents (54%) did not consider the price to be important when choosing a ride-sharing service like Pathao although 14% were in neutral position. However, a significant portion (32%) considered the price factor to be important and 11% rating it as very important which indicate the competitive pricing can help the company to attract certain segments of the market.
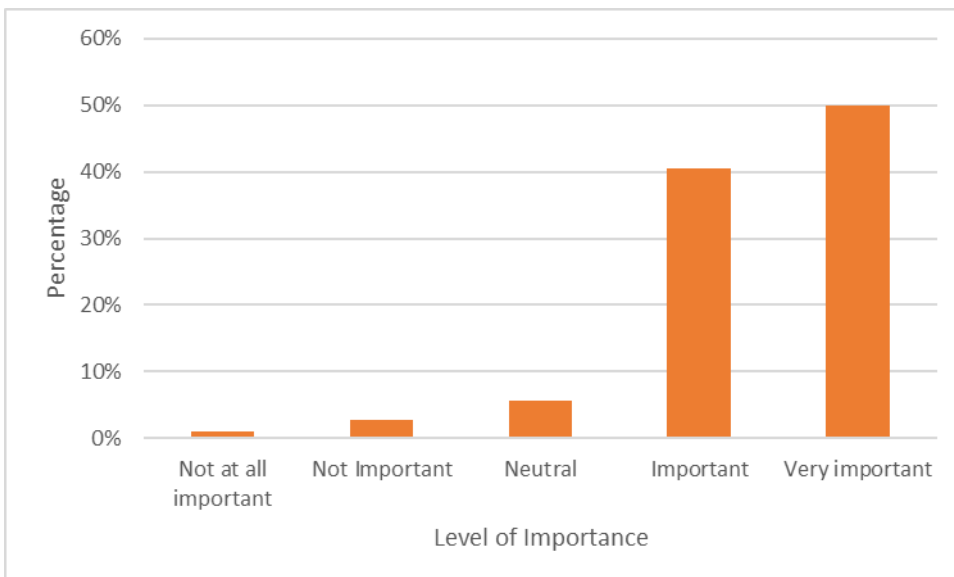
FIGURE 16. The availability of multiple vehicle options

The data in figure 16 indicate that among the respondents, majority (50%) considered the availability of multiple vehicle options very important when choosing a ride-sharing service while 41% considered it important. However, only small percentage of respondents 3% considered it not important. Overall, this suggests that most of the customers prefer for the availability of multiple vehicle options.
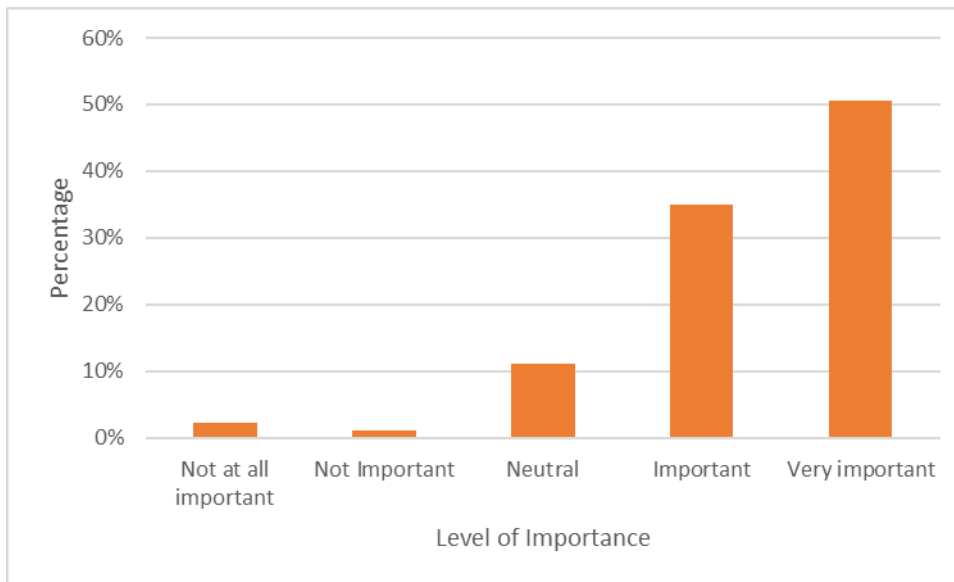
FIGURE 17. The importance of driver behavior and professionalism

Figure 17 reveals that most of the respondents (51%) find driver behavior and professionalism very important when using a ride-sharing service like Pathao and 35% considered it important. However, driver behavior and professionalism are not big deal for some respondents but which is very small portion (3%). The data suggest that customers prioritize a positive and professional interaction with drivers.
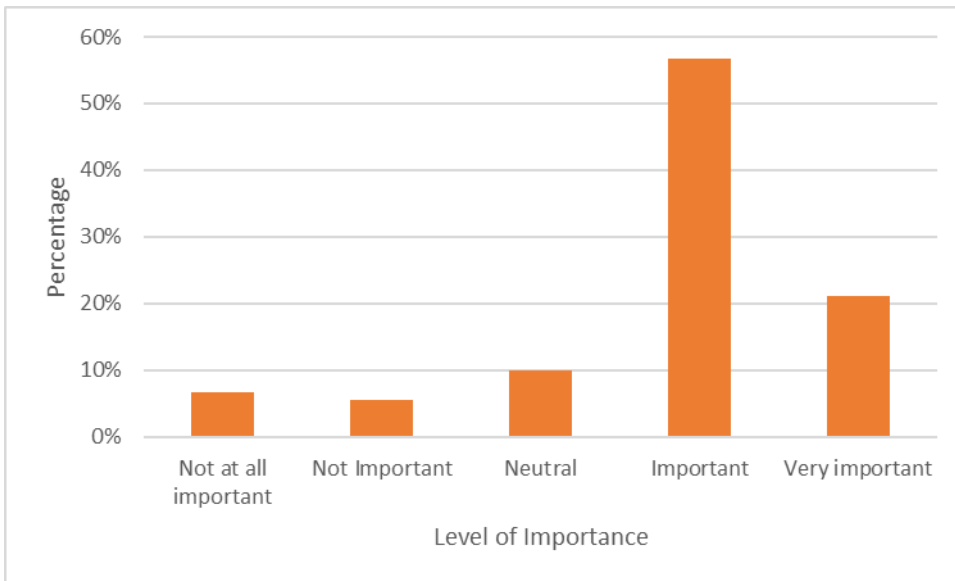
FIGURE 18. The availability of promotional offers and discounts

A significant portion of the respondents (57%) considered the availability of promotional offers and discounts important and influenced them to choose ride-sharing services, and 21% considered it very important, which indicates this portion of customers book rides while getting discounts or offers. However, some respondents (7%) and (6%) considered discounts or offers a not-important or not-very-important factor, respectively, to choose ride-sharing services.
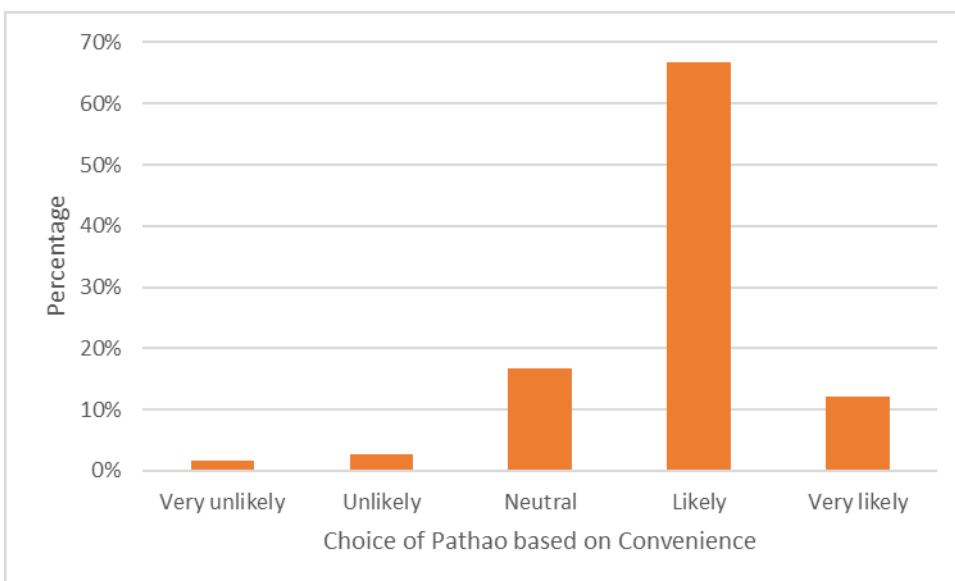
FIGURE 19. Choosing Pathao over other ride-sharing services due to its convenience

The data in figure 19 reveals that the majority of the respondents (67%) expressed that they are likely to choose Pathao over other ride sharing services due to its convenience, while 12% rated themselves as very likely. However, a significant portion of respondents were in a neutral position, and only a small percentage of them (3%) expressed unlikely which indicates some customer dissatisfaction with the convenience of Pathao services.

FIGURE 20. Preference for Pathao based on the promptness of pick-up and drop-off

Figure 20 shows that a significant percentage (44%) of the respondents have no preference based on the promptness of pick-up and drop-off, while 31% expressed a preference, with an additional 11% strongly preferring Pathao. On the other hand, 8% preferred other ride-sharing services, and 6% strongly preferred other ride-sharing services.
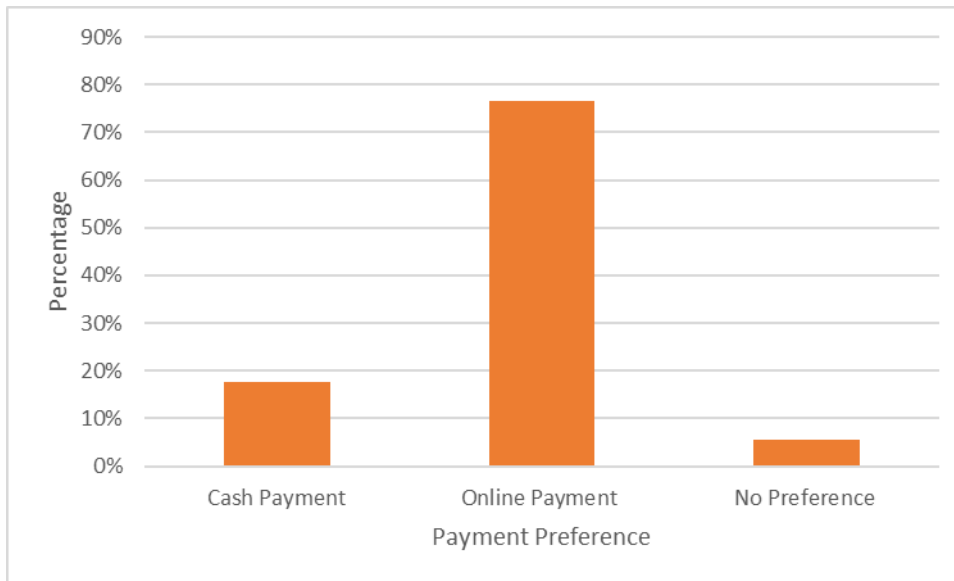
FIGURE 21. Preference for the payment method in using ride-sharing services like Pathao

The majority of the respondents (77%) preferred online payment as their preferred method when using ride-sharing services like Pathao, whereas 18% preferred cash payment, and a smaller proportion of 6% expressed no preference. This suggests that online payment methods are the most preferred option for customers.

FIGURE 22. Based on overall experience, preference for Pathao as a ride-sharing service

Figure 22 indicates that the majority of the respondents (64%) preferred Pathao as a ride-sharing service, with 22% rating it as highly preferred as a ride-sharing service. This shows the positive overall

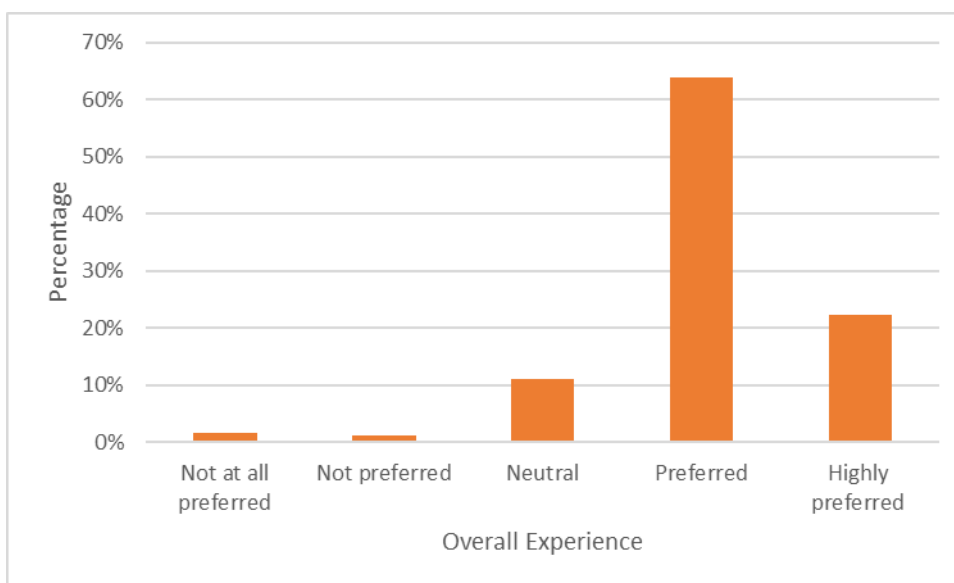satisfaction and experiences with Pathao. The small percentage of respondents (2% and 1%) expressed not being preferred or not at all preferred, which attributes to the individual's specific experiences or preferences.

5.3 Findings

Ride-sharing services have witnessed significant growth and widespread use within urban areas like Dhaka, especially among job holders and students who have to use transportation on a regular basis. The result shows similar findings that students and job holders tend to use more ride sharing services than any other group. This is supported by Hoque & Saumi (2021, 151) that ride-sharing services are popular among job-holders in Dhaka city due to their convenience. The study also found that people who are less than 35 years old tend to use more ride sharing services, which indicates that the younger population is more actively engaged in ride-sharing services. However, it has been found that ride-sharing services like Pathao are largely used as a convenient mode of transportation on a daily basis, especially among job holders and students. Thus, people also use ride-sharing services for their specific purposes occasionally, such as outings, travel, social activities, etc. This suggests that people in Dhaka city rely on ride-sharing services like Pathao for daily commuting and various other transportation needs.

The analysis also shows that the majority of users found it easy to navigate and utilise the mobile application of Pathoa, which indicates the company's focus on user-friendliness, but addressing issues reported by users who found it difficult to use is important. Thus, the finding shows that the availability of Pathao's services during peak hours is crucial for customer satisfaction and increasing the user base, as the majority of customers demand the availability of their services during peak hours. This suggests that Pathao can strengthen their position as a preferred and reliable option for transportation for their users. Similar findings were expressed by Showkat & Choudhury (2019, 373), the availability of ride-sharing services is the main challenge for the company in Dhaka city during the peck time because the demand for services becomes high during the peck hour.

The analysis shows that Pathao's customer support is average and not beyond that of other ride-sharing service providers, which indicates customers are not getting what they expect from the customer support centre of Pathao. Ashrafi & Alam (2021, 23) addressed the same issues and highlighted that customers do not get proper support when they need it from the ride-sharing company in Dhaka city.

Thus, it has been found that the majority of customers value loyalty programs or rewards systems when considering ride sharing services like Pathao. This suggests that rewards or loyalty program can influence customer decision-making. The similar findings highlighted by Pang & Shen (2022,542), show that rewards or loyalty programs such as discounts or reward points help attract customers to use ride sharing services. Furthermore, the result shows that customers highly value safety and security measures when choosing a ride sharing service. Despite their importance, Pathoa cannot make their users aware of their safety and security measures. However, findings show that most customers are satisfied with the security and safety measures implemented by Pathao. Similar findings were highlighted by Islam & Huda (2020, 73), customers choose ride-sharing companies that provide better security, such as live tracking, driver background screening, etc., and Pathoa, as an emerging ride-sharing company, has been doing better than other companies in Dhaka city. However, people usually choose ride-sharing services for convenience, so they are a little bit more expensive than public transportation. Therefore, people usually do not consider the price factor as an important criteria for choosing a ride-sharing service, and a similar finding has been found that the majority of customers seem to think that price is not an important factor for selecting a ride-sharing service; rather, reliability, convenience, security, and availability are more important.

Customers demand flexibility, such as selecting the most suitable vehicle type for their specific circumstance or journey; thereby, they prefer multiple vehicle options from ride-sharing companies. The study also found that the majority of customers prefer multiple vehicle options when choosing ride-sharing services. This suggests that multiple vehicle options can help Pathao cater to the needs of a wide range of customers. The journey can be more enjoyable or memorable due to the driver's professionalism or behaviour. It has been found that customers prefer professionalism and friendly behaviour from the driver. Morfeldt & Johansson (2022, 2), emphasise that convenience is the biggest factor in preferring ride-sharing services. Thus, the study also found similar findings: most customers choose Pathao over other ride-sharing services because of convenience. The analysis shows that customers have no preference for the promptness of pick-up and drop-off when choosing ride-sharing services because the promptness of pick-up and drop-off largely depends on the driver and cars, not the company that provides the service. However, promptness of pick-up and drop-off can be an issue for customer dissatisfaction. Thus, it has been found that online payment is the most preferred payment method for customers, although some customers prefer cash payment. This is mostly because of the issue of overcharging, which may influence customers to use cash payments. However, online payment is the most convenient and widely used method to make payment for ride-sharing services. The finding shows that most of the customers prefer Pathao as a ride sharing service based on their overall

experience. It reflects positively on Pathao's performance in areas such as convenience, safety, efficiency, and the overall user experience. This suggests that Pathao has successfully met the needs and expectations of most of its customers and earned their loyalty and trust as a preferred ride sharing service.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter synthesises the findings along with an explanation of the objectives. In addition, some recommendations have been provided for Pathao to improve their services and better meet consumers' needs in urban areas.

Customers prefer ride-sharing companies that provide their desired service and fulfil their transportation needs when they require it. However, the preference may vary from customer to customer, but there are some common factors that influence most of the customers. The study has evaluated these factors and found that customers prefer convenient, reliable, and safe ride-sharing services from companies like Pathao. The result suggests that the availability of services at the right time, especially during peak hours, is important to retain existing customers and attract new ones. However, it is difficult for ride-sharing companies like Pathao to provide availability during peak hours. The findings suggest that customer support also influences customer preference because exceptional customer support can help companies like Pathoa sustain themselves in the competitive ride-sharing industry, where so many players already hold the maximum market share.

Thus, rewards and loyalty programs also attract customer preference, which is being used by many companies like Uber. Similarly, the study found that security and safety are two of the most important factors that influence customer preference to use ride-sharing services. However, companies like Pathao are taking security measures such as live tracking to ensure passengers' safety and security. Furthermore, driver professionalism and behaviours also impact customer preference for choosing ride-sharing services because the customers get actual services from the driver, not from the company. Therefore, driver professionalism and behaviour reflect the company's service quality. The findings also show that the factor of availability of the multiple vehicle options also influences customer preference for selecting ride sharing services because customers' needs can vary and largely depend on their purpose. By offering multiple vehicle options, Pathao can ensure diverse user preferences and needs. Therefore, this study has demonstrated the factors that influence customers preferences for ride-sharing services offered by Pathao in urban areas, thereby achieving this objective.

The findings demonstrate that Pathao's customers are dissatisfied with its customer support, so most of the respondents rated Pathao's customer support as average. Conversely, customers are satisfied with

the security and safety measures implemented by Pathao because they focus on both driver and passenger security and safety; thereby, they have implemented real-time location sharing features and a live tracking system, as well as offering insurance coverage for both riders and users. The result also shows that most of the users are satisfied with Pathao's services on the basis of convenience. Finally, based on the overall experiences with the Pathao service, most of the customers prefer Pathao as a ride-sharing service, which indicates a higher level of customer satisfaction. Therefore, the objective of determining the level of customer satisfaction with the services provided by Pathao has been achieved.

As a ride-sharing company, Pathao has been performing outstandingly in terms of service offerings, so most of the customers have had a good experience with their services. However, customers' needs and preferences are not constraints and can be changed. Therefore, the result shows that there are various factors that Pathoa needs to address and improve so that customers can get their desired service at the right time. Thus, the study also proposed some recommendations to improve their services. Therefore, the objective of providing recommendations and insights for Pathao to improve their services and better meet consumers' needs in urban areas has been achieved.

The ride-sharing industry is getting more competitive as several players like Suttle have entered with innovative ideas and customer preferences have changed. Therefore, the following recommendations may help companies like Pathao improve their services and achieve more customer preference.

Pathao should focus on improving their customer support, such as prompt response, customer guidance, and solving disputes between riders and users. They can automate their customer support facilities by introducing chatbots to answer common queries of customers, and a dedicated customer support team will deal with special cases.

Pathao needs to ensure service availability during peak hours. To do so, they can encourage riders by offering lower charges, extra discounts, etc. Using the data analytics, Pathao can address peak hours and suggest riders get more rides. They need to focus on introducing loyalty and reward program like special discounts for daily users, discounts for extra rides, etc. to encourage more customers to use their services.

The company needs to place emphasis on the safety and security of both customers and rides. They need to bring all the drivers under the company's continuous surveillance, and before providing rider registration, drivers' backgrounds must be checked.

Although Pathao has multiple vehicle options like bikes, large cars, and small cars, trucks are still untapped for them. Therefore, Pathao needs to add trucks to their vehicle bucket list. Pathao needs to provide training sessions specifically to improve driver professionalism and behaviours.

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Questionnaire

"INVESTIGATING THE CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR RIDE SHARING COMPANIES IN URBAN AREAS – A STUDY OF PATHAO"

1. What is the best way to describe your gender?

   A. Male

   B. Female

   C. Prefer not to say

2. Which age group do you belong to?

   A. 18 to 24

   B. 25 to 30

   C. 31 to 36

   D. 37 to 45

   E. More than
      45

3. Your Professional Status

   A. Student

   B. Job Holder

   C. Looking for Job

   D. Self-employed

   E. Other (please specify)

4. How frequently do you use ride-sharing services like Pathao in urban areas?

   A. Daily

   B. Weekly

   C. Monthly

   D. Occasionally

   E. Never

5. How would you rate the ease of use of the Pathao mobile application?

    A. Very difficult to use

    B. Difficult to use

    C. Neutral

    D. Easy to use

    E. Very easy to use

6. Please rate the importance of the availability of Pathao's services during peak hours?

    A. Not important at all

    B. Slightly important

    C. Moderately important

    D. Very important

    E. Extremely important

7. Please rate your perception of the customer support provided by Pathao:

    A. Very poor

    B. Poor

    C. Average

    D. Good

    E. Excellent

8. How important is the availability of a loyalty program or rewards system for you when choosing a ride-sharing service?

    A. Not at all important

    B. Not Important

    C. Neutral

    D. Important

    E. Very important

9. Are you aware of the safety measures implemented by Pathao? (e.g., driver background checks, SOS button)

    A. Yes

    B. No

10. Please rate the importance of safety and security considerations when using a ride-sharing service like Pathao:

    A. Not important at all

    B. Slightly important

    C. Moderately important

    D. Very important

    E. Extremely important

11. Please rate your satisfaction with the safety and security measures implemented by Pathao:

    A. Very dissatisfied

    B. Dissatisfied

    C. Neutral

    D. Satisfied

    E. Very satisfied

12. How important is the price factor when choosing a ride-sharing service like Pathao?

    A. Not at all important

    B. Not Important

    C. Neutral

    D. Important

    E. Very important

13. How important is the availability of multiple vehicle options (e.g., bike, car) for you when choosing a ride-sharing service?

    A. Not at all important

    B. Not Important

    C. Neutral

    D. Important

    E. Very important

14. Please rate the importance of driver behavior and professionalism when using a ride-sharing service like Pathao:

    A. Not at all important

    B. Not Important

    C. Neutral

    D. Important

    E. Very important

15. How important is the availability of promotional offers and discounts for you when choosing a ride-sharing service?

    A. Not at all important

    B. Not Important

    C. Neutral

    D. Important

    E. Very important

16. How likely are you to choose Pathao over other ride-sharing services due to its convenience?

    A. Very unlikely

    B. Unlikely

    C. Neutral

    D. Likely

    E. Very likely

17. Please rate the importance of convenience when choosing a ride-sharing service like Pathao:

    A. Not important at all

    B. Slightly important

    C. Moderately important

    D. Very important

    E. Extremely important

18. Please rate your preference for Pathao based on the promptness of pick-up and drop-off:

    A. Strongly prefer other ride-sharing services

    B. Prefer other ride-sharing services

    C. No preference

    D. Prefer Pathao

    E. Strongly prefer Pathao

19. Please rate your preference for the payment method in using ride-sharing services like Pathao:

    A. Cash Payment

    B. Online Payment

    C. No Preference

20. Based on your overall experience, how would you rate your preference for Pathao as a ride-sharing service?

    A. Not at all preferred

    B. Not preferred

    C. Neutral

    D. Preferred

    E. Highly preferred