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# **The Downfall of Uber in Turkey: A Case Study on Tourism in Istanbul, Turkey**

## **Introduction**

The sharing economy has attracted considerable attention from scholars within the research community, as well as among practitioners in the Hospitality and Tourism field in recent years (Gutiérrez et al., 2017). Technology-led networks, such as peer-to-peer platforms like Airbnb and Uber, offer a wide variety of services to customers, ensuring transactions between producers and consumers and temporary access to goods rather than ownership (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015).

One of the most compelling examples of sharing economy (Arias-Sans & Quaglieri-Domínguez, 2016) in the tourism sector is Uber, a smartphone application that links the user to an online network that connects independent drivers with customers (Min et al., 2019). Established in 2009, Uber has become an essential part of the sharing economy, spreading rapidly around the world. As of June 2017, Uber was operating in more than 600 cities and more than 70 countries worldwide (Mishra & Bathini, 2019). Along with Airbnb, Uber is now considered to be an integral part of the sharing economy, providing mobility and transport services in tourist destinations (Helberger et al., 2018).

Uber has long been a source of hostility among taxi drivers around the world, who argue that the online car-sharing service threatens their business and livelihood (Bal, 2018). The popularity of Uber saw a rapid increase in Istanbul, with users appreciating the smooth payment system, the security and the convenience of hailing a cab via a smartphone app. Like in many other European cities, however, Uber incurred the wrath of official taxi drivers, who opened legal cases in Istanbul in a bid to have the app blocked in Turkey (Özerkan, 2018). The present study assesses tourist perceptions of Uber through an analysis of online narratives posted on the TripAdvisor website, and investigates the insights of stakeholders through an analysis of their YouTube videos.

## Methodology

The study is based on two sources of data: user-generated content (UGC), in the form of the reviews and comments accessed from TripAdvisor of tourists who had used Uber in Istanbul (n=262), and YouTube videos (n=17) including comments of users and news related to Uber in Istanbul. In line with the adopted interpretivism approach – as the research paradigm applied in the present study, based primarily on a triangulation approach – data were garnered from multiple sources (Decrop, 1999). In doing so, it was aimed to provide credibility and validity to the study, and thus to increase the quality of the research (Quinn & Ryan, 2016). The data were collected between 10 and 24 April, 2020, and were analysed using the thematic content analysis software Leximancer, while a discourse analysis was made of the YouTube videos.

The present study has some limitations. First, data were collected only from the TripAdvisor and YouTube portals, rather than from questionnaires and face-to-face qualitative interviews with stakeholders and travellers. Second, the opinions of Uber among residents is under-examined in the present research. Future studies may analyse the impacts and consequences of Uber in tourist locations based on the perspective of residents.

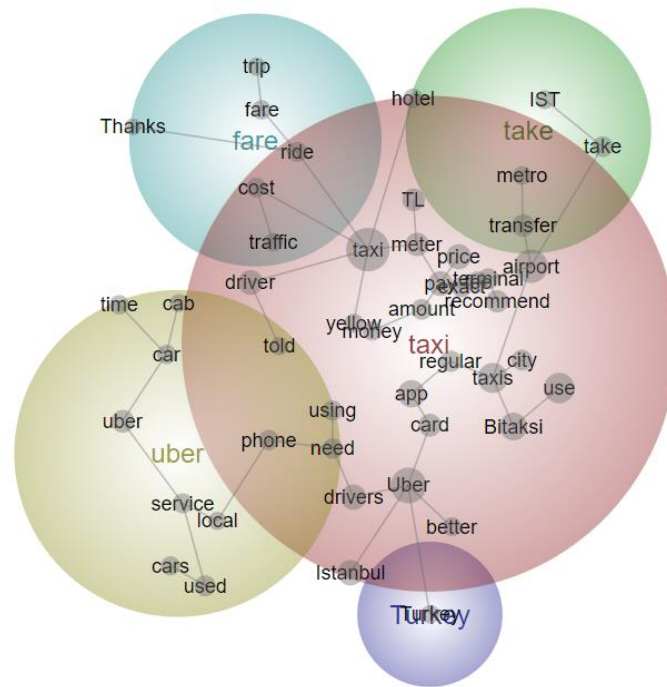
## Results

After analysing the data, the online narratives and media posts produced by travellers related to Uber could be categorised under several themes (Table 1), representing the stakeholders' perspectives and opinions of Uber. The categories reflect the different elements that constitute the integral parts of each theme (Figure 1).

- **Transportation:** The theme of *transportation* originates from the many significant features that can be referred to as the functional components of the Uber application (i.e. fare, security, comfort, smoothness of service, convenience, taxi drivers, online access, etc.) at a destination level.
- **City governance:** Cooperation, collaboration and mobility were found to be crucial among stakeholders under the theme of *city governance*, with an effective governance structure supporting the success of the Uber application.
- **Government:** The categories falling under the theme of *government* underscore the significance of the role of the government in supporting the implementation of the Uber application through efficient regulations, which is seen as the most effective

governance mechanism. The travellers' narratives regarding their choice of Uber indicated their prioritisation of safety and price.

**Figure 1.** Concepts map of travellers' online narratives, created with Leximancer



An analysis of the content of the selected YouTube videos revealed several themes and categories among the motivations compelling travellers to use Uber, as well as comments about Uber, taxi drivers and other stakeholders. These categories showed that one reason people prefer Uber over taxis relates to how they are treated by Uber drivers, who were stated to be more presentable, respectful and polite, and Uber was, on the whole, considered to be easy to use, comfortable and convenient. The video analysis revealed further that Uber, which relies on a smartphone app, had ceased operations in other provinces following Istanbul due to pressure from taxi drivers.

**Table 1.** Summary of the online narratives and media posts of travelers and other stakeholders related to the Uber application

Themes	Categories
Transportation	Fare, security, comfort, smooth, convenience, taxi drivers, Uber, travellers, (online) application
City governance	Stakeholders, co-operation, collaboration, mobility
Government	Regulation, operation of Uber, technology

## **Conclusion**

Some meaningful and key implications can be drawn from the findings of the present study. First, it was found that users tended to prefer Uber over taxis, as they consider them to be both safer and more affordable. They also mentioned the ease of use of Uber, as well as the comfort, convenience and the respect paid by the driver, which make them feel special. Taxi drivers claim that Uber operates illegally, as its drivers are not required to hold an operating licence that entails paying a fee to the government.

Second, the existence of Uber depends on and is regulated by the government, although the majority of the general public and tourists are more inclined to use Uber. This issue can be attributed to the absence of co-operative governance among the stakeholders on the two sides, being the taxi and Uber drivers, which is considered vital for the existence of a sharing economy in the provision of mobility and transport services. It can thus be concluded that the use of shared platforms cannot be efficiently implemented if the sharing engagement is limited to a single central actor (Helberger et al., 2018). Finally, it has been suggested that cultural attributes of a society may strongly influence decisions of whether or not to use Uber within a community.

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