

Bicycle as a New Tourism Trend and Transportation in the New Normal

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Abstract

Bicycle tourism is booming in the tourism market and exists as a means of transportation in hundreds of cities around the world. However, in the Philippines, it was only popularized after the COVID-19 pandemic caused a transportation crisis and a massive decline in tourism growth. This qualitative study determines bicyclists' perceptions, identified bicycling problems encountered, and explores bicycling opportunities in the new normal. The study utilized a phenomenological research design with data from virtual interviews with 10 bicyclists in Metro Manila. They were identified using purposive sampling and data saturation. The findings revealed that bicycle tourism is perceived as a sustainable activity that can promote and boost a destination's local tourism. Meanwhile, using the bicycle as means of transportation is perceived as an efficient, affordable, and sustainable mode of active transportation and provides health benefits. It was also found to bring economic opportunities like job employment and became a catalyst for bicycle-related businesses to arise. Researchers concluded that bicycling would increase with these opportunities, This will pave the way for recovery, resulting in more sustainable tourism and transportation industry in the Philippines.

Keywords

bicycle tourism; transportation; pandemic; covid-19

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1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst COVID 19 pandemic and the quarantine being implemented, gradually, the busy streets of Metro Manila have been filled with bicyclists creating a path towards a sustainable development in tourism and transportation

industry. The phenomena had recreated many ways of using our resources wisely for us to face the “new normal”. Since some of us are required to go out, with the state of our public transport system, biking is the new alternative way to avoid crowded commutes. Biking also helps the environment, less carbon, saves money, no gas or commuting expenses, and you get to do your cardio for the day.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines, particularly Metro Manila, was not a bike-friendly destination. The city itself, with its sprawl, terrible traffic, and lack of safe and protected cycling paths, makes exploring on two wheels very dangerous. (Santos, 2020). Moreover, a research conducted by Castro and Josef (2020) argues that the Philippines’ urban cycling has not been as successful compared to the popularity or success of bicycle commuting programs in other countries.

Conversely, during the transition towards the new normal, bicycles become not just a means of alternative transportation but also a tourism trend. Group of bicyclists from different cities and provinces are exploring Metro Manila and nearby provinces. Bicycle shops have reported that there was a boost in demand for bicycles. As more bike lanes and car-free zones are being created, advocates of cycling see the change lasting leading into a sustainable tourism activity. Deloitte (2020) pointed that the important role of bicycles is through the years it eases traffic congestion and enhance the air quality and public health, particularly in the cities as they ended up more intensely populated. Nonetheless, a promising solution can also face problems like lack of infrastructures, facilities, policies, and programs for bicyclists.

According to the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (2020), the number of bicycling related accidents increased by more than 48 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year in Metro Manila. It is easy to argue that as more bicyclists take to the road, the percentage of bike-related accidents will rise. Nevertheless, it is also unacceptable as the percentage of bike-related accidents will significantly reduce if there are protected bike lanes.

Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that Philippine tourism industry was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that, bicycling emerged as a tourism trend as more bicyclists used bicycles to visit different tourist destinations. This brings a new light and hope in the recovery of the tourism industry in the Philippines. According to Larazzabal (2020) bicycle tourism is not limited to riding bicycles going to distant provinces. Bicycle tourism can be as simple as riding a bicycle around an urban area or nearby provinces for a few hours, passing tourist attractions, taking photos, and trying local delicacies along the way. As bicycles developed overtime, a book written by Mapes (2009) highlighted that Amsterdam in the Netherlands, Paris in

France, Copenhagen in Denmark and Davis, Portland, New York, and Chicago in the U.S.A. were the cities that maximize the potential of bicycles as an active transportation. It is evident as these places feature an effective urban bicycling transportation system. A study conducted by Lafaye (2011) claimed that European nations were also found to have thriving bicycle commuting programs. Meanwhile, countries in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia implemented their bicycle commuting programs by integrating the advantages found in Europe's bicycle commuting programs.

Bicycle tourism and transportation exists in hundreds of cities in the world. However, bicycle tourism and transportation in the Philippines was only popularized as the COVID-19 pandemic caused transportation crisis and drop on tourism growth. The researchers found that there are limited research and literature on bicycle tourism and transportation here in the Philippines. Meanwhile, there are no research and literatures found on bicycling perceptions, challenges, and opportunities during a pandemic. Thus, this qualitative study addressed the said research gaps.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study has utilized a phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research design facilitated the study of Metro Manila bicyclists' experiences and perceptions toward bicycles as a tourism activity and as a means of transportation.

The researchers of the study made use of the purposive sampling technique. This non- probability sampling includes the identification and selection of groups or individuals based on certain characteristics such as being particularly knowledgeable or experienced in a phenomenon being studied. The participants are bicyclists from Metro Manila, who are 18 years old and above, bicycling for both tourism and transportation purposes, have been bicycling for over a year, and have an experience of biking outside Metro Manila and stayed there for one or more nights because they can provide substantial and information that is significant to the aims of the study.

The researchers limited the participants into 10 participants or interviewees using the concept of data saturation. The data was identified during the pre-testing of interview questions to thirty bicyclists which were also transcribed and coded. The data coded was achieved upon reaching the 10th participant as during the data gathering on the 11th up to the 30th participant, new themes stopped emerging and new data only yielded redundant information.

The researchers produced eight (8) open-ended questions to be answered for each participant of this research but before that the researchers sent a

briefing and consent form explaining the purpose of the study. Data collection started on the 9th of April 2021 and ended on the 15th of April the same year. Since the research was conducted during a pandemic, the interviews were conducted online using video call applications like Zoom and Messenger. As the instruments for the interview were retrieved, the researchers continued and proceeded to the transcription, coding, interpretation, and analysis of the data gathered.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There were three themes, eight sub-themes, and seven categories that emerged from the data. The findings of the research were summarized according to the three main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data.

3.1 Bicyclist’s Perceptions

3.1.1 Bicycle Tourism Destinations Choices

Table 1. Excerpts on Bicycle Tourism Destinations

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	“Kaybiang Tunnel, Maragondon Cavite. Los Baños, Laguna. San Fernando, Pampanga. Windmill Farm in Rizal.”
Participant Two	“Usually, I just go to places that are near Metro Manila such as Tagaytay, Province of Rizal, Bulacan and Pampanga.”
Participant Four	“The most I go, I choose destinations like Pampanga, sometimes Tagaytay, Antipolo because there is too much to see like nature, trees, high mountains you can see the cities below and pleasure.”
Participant Five	“I went to Angat Rainforest Eco Park in Bulacan, Rotonda Tagaytay in Tagaytay City, Quezon Memorial Circle and UP Diliman in Quezon City.”

Table 1 shows the excerpts of answers from selected participants to the question “Where are the usual bicycle tourism destinations that you have visited?”. Seven out of the ten participants reported that the province of Rizal which includes Antipolo City, Pililla, and Tanay is among their usual bicycle tourism destinations. Five out of ten participants stated that the province of Cavite is also one of their usual bicycle tourism destinations which include Tagaytay City and the municipality of Maragondon. Meanwhile, Participants seven, eight, and nine specified that Metro Manila has bicycle tourism

destinations as well. These include the Intramuros in Manila and Mall of Asia in Pasay City. Participants one, two, and four also identified the provinces of Bulacan and Pampanga among their usual bicycle tourism destinations. Lastly, two participants included Laguna in their usual bicycle tourism destinations. There were no scholarly articles and research conducted about bicycle tourism destinations in the Philippines as bicycle tourism was only popularized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Excerpts on Reasons for choosing Destinations

Participants	Quotations
Participant Two	"I choose those biking destinations because it provides a green scenery, and it is where cyclists usually go to."
Participant Four	"...because there is too much to see like nature, trees, high mountains you can see the cities below and pleasure."
Participant Five	"...I choose these destinations because it's good for beginners. Also, it is an accessible destination where I can bike away from congested city traffic."
Participant Six	"First of many reasons would be that these places or destinations are sought-after by nature lovers, it has the cool climate we definitely need, breathtaking views are unbelievable and it's so easy to visit these places."
Participant Seven	"It is a good location for spontaneous biking. Also, cyclists can enjoy a tour in the mentioned historical place."

Table 2 presents the excerpts of the selected participants to the follow-up question "What are your reasons for choosing such a destination?". The majority of the participants have revealed that the natural environment and scenic views are one of their reasons for choosing bicycle tourism destinations. Meanwhile, participants two, three, five, and six added that the accessibility of the location such as being easy to be visited and having a good beginner trail is among their reasons for choosing bicycle tourism destinations. Lastly, participants also included the enjoyment that a certain destination brings is also a reason for choosing a bicycle tourism destination.

3.1.2 Ideas of Bicyclists on Bicycle Tourism

Table 3. Excerpts on Ideas of Bicyclist in Bicycle Tourism

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	“It is a new trend of tourism where a certain destination is being visited by bikers/cyclists. I think it emerged because of travel bans and limited transportation.”
Participant Five	“Bicycle tourism for me is a kind of activity. It is also a kind of adventure especially for those who love to travel and nature lovers. We can also promote tourism here in the Philippines by this since some cyclists discovered different hidden tourist spots.”
Participant Six	“For me bicycle tourism is an emergent way of understanding an array of economic activities involving the bicycle. It is varied and can take shape in many different forms.”
Participants Seven	“Bicycle tourism is simply traveling by means of riding a bicycle. It is a type of tourism that is eco-friendly and sustainable.”

Table 3 shows the excerpts of answers from selected participants to the question “what is your idea about bicycle tourism?”. Based on the interview with the participants, four out of the ten respondents say that their idea on bicycle tourism is an eco-friendly and sustainable activity which incorporates bicycles in visiting a certain destination. Three out of ten explained that it promotes local tourism since bicyclist post pictures on their social media platform which promotes the local tourism in that area. Moreover, three out of ten say that it is a way to explore and adventure since bicyclists discover new destinations that are not familiar to other tourists. Also, two participants stated that it is an activity that brings joy and pleasure, and one participant says that bicycle tourism involves partnership.

3.1.3 Reasons for Using Bicycle in Tourism Activity

Table 4. Excerpts on Reason for using the bicycle in Tourism Activity

Participants	Quotations
Participant Two	"With the long months of lockdown, I needed to find a new hobby and a way to entertain myself and that's how I started using bicycles for tourism activities."
Participant Three	"... the bike is super eco-friendly it doesn't have any carbon emission plus you become healthy, that's my purpose actually plus bonding with my friends we both enjoy the places."
Participant Four	"First and foremost, I used my bike because I love riding bikes, it's like my hobby and I see happiness in riding bikes plus I see the tourist spots here in the Philippines."
Participant Eight	"First, its economical use can help cyclists. Employing bicycles yields very low-cost materials needed. Second, it has health benefits. I opt to use a bicycle for cardio exercises. Third, making use of bicycles can lower the environmental footprint. Lastly, it is the only mode of travelling that I know. In cycling, you also have your own pace using your own bare abilities."
Participant Nine	"...lessen the expenses and be able to have exercise, and the advantage of this especially now of pandemic is to strengthen the Cardiovascular, Endurance and Resistance."

As stated in the table above presents substantial answers from selected participants to the question "Why do you use your bicycle for tourism activities?". Four out of the ten participants say that among their reasons for using bicycles in tourism activity is due to its health benefits as bicycling makes them physically fit which is indeed beneficial especially with the presence of the pandemic. Three participants say that bicycling is their hobby, or a new-found hobby attributed to finding new activities to entertain themselves during the pandemic. Participants three, eight and nine specified that a bicycle for tourism activity is affordable since a bicycle does not need fuel for it to move. Three participants specified that bicycling is very eco-friendly since bicycles do not contribute to air pollution. Participants one and four stated that bicycling is their happiness.

3.1.4 Pre-Pandemic and Pandemic Bicycling Experience

Table 5. Excerpts on Pre-pandemic bicycling experience

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	"Before the pandemic, it's really hard to do biking because there were a lot of vehicles, and we didn't have that many cycling facilities and bike lanes."
Participant Two	"Before the pandemic, I just went cycling for a workout but now I also use it to go to work every day and to do bike trips."
Participant Three	"Before the pandemic we went to a lot of places, we discovered more places plus a few bikers before..."
Participant Five	"...There are no restrictions, and we are freely allowed to travel anywhere around and outside Metro Manila ..."
Participant Ten	"Yes, there's a change. Before there were few people who used bicycles because we still have Jeeps and Buses ..."

Table 5 shows the excerpts of the selected participants about their pre-pandemic bicycling experiences. During the interview, participants shared their positive and negative experiences in their pre-pandemic bicycling experiences. On one hand, participants reported negative experiences such as large vehicle encounters, the absence of bike lanes, and cycling facilities. On the other hand, participants revealed their positive experiences such as they can travel freely as there are no restrictions and health protocols to follow and there are only a limited number of bicyclists.

Table 6. Excerpts on Pandemic bicycling experience and changes

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	"...But now it's easier because there are now protected bike lanes with concrete barriers and bollards. I also notice that the biking community has become bigger compared to before."
Participant Two	"...Also, during the pandemic, it is easier to travel because of the bicycle lanes. I also notice that the cycling/ biking community became bigger during the pandemic."
Participant Three	"... during the pandemic, it is very limited in what you can go to, you can't go out of what they call NCR plus, Laguna, Rizal, Bulacan, Pampanga."

Participants	Quotations
Participant Four	"Yes, a lot, one is we wear masks and we riders we don't usually use masks for riding bikes because we need more oxygen or air for us to breathe freely and ride the bike easily."
Participant Five	"... during the pandemic there are restrictions, we are not allowed to travel for no reason, but I admit that also during the pandemic biking trends since it became an alternative way of transportation for those who are working."
Participant Seven	"...cycling time due to curfews and the use of masks and face shields. Some police officers require the use of both even if it might cause accidents due to unclear line of sight."

Table 6 presents the excerpts of the selected participants about their bicycling experience during a pandemic. Ten participants revealed positive and negative experiences about their bicycling experience during the pandemic. On one hand, participants reported positive experiences and changes such as the installation of protected bike lanes with concrete barriers and bollards, the increase of the biking community, and the new role of bicycling as a mode of transportation during the pandemic. On the other hand, participants also reported negative experiences such as now there are limited biking destinations due to travel restrictions. Also, during the pandemic, there are restrictions and health protocols to follow such as wearing masks and face shields which bring discomfort and cause possible accidents (face shields) to the bicyclists. Moreover, participants also reported that bicyclists have now limited bicycling time due to curfews.

3.2 Bicycling Problems and Challenges

3.2.1 Encountered Bicycling Problems and Challenges

Table 7. Excerpts on Encountered bicycling problems and challenges

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	"...my tire got flat. Also, there are some riders or drivers that are conceited along the way. I also encounter obstructions on bike lanes where there are parked vehicles, pedicabs and other vehicles that are overflowing."
Participant Two	"... I experience flat tires, bad weather like when it starts to rain and when there are parked vehicles/ obstructions on the bike lanes. Since the cycling community became big during the pandemic."

Participants	Quotations
Participant Four	"I think we are short of bicycle lanes. Not all the places here in the Philippines or the roads have bicycle lanes. That's why it's too dangerous to use a bike here in the Philippines in other places."
Participant Five	"I have encountered a problem while using a bicycle and it is a major problem for me since I'm just a beginner at that time. While traveling back, I encountered neck and back pain."
Participant Six	"...I got caught in bad weather conditions. There was heavy rainfall and a strong wind. Riding in the rain is way more dangerous than riding in dry conditions for obvious reasons: slippery when wet."
Participant Eight	"Usually, my problem revolves when there are big trucks coming on my way."

Table 7 shows the excerpts of the selected participants to the question "Have you encountered any problem while using a bicycle to do a tourism activity and as a mode of transportation?". Five of the participants reported that they have encountered bike parts problems such as flat tires, chain problems, rear derailleur problems and losing breaks while bicycling. Meanwhile three participants stated that they encountered bike lane problems like obstructions and parked vehicles parked in the bike lanes and we still lack enough protected bike lanes. For participant one and two they encountered driver behavioral and vehicle problems such as rude and boastful drivers and large vehicles like container trucks which may cause danger to the bicyclists. Two of the participants encountered weather problems such as unexpected rain which resulted in slippery roads and forcing bicyclists to stop as it may cause accidents or for bicyclists to get sick. Participant five had a physical health problem such as neck and back pain problems.

3.2.2 Handling Bicycling Problems and Challenges

Table 8. Excerpts on Handling Bicycling problems and challenges

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	"...conceited drivers are hard to deal with, so I just stay calm and just ignore them. As for the obstructions on the bike lanes, I just avoid them by changing lanes."
Participant Two	"For flat tires, I always have tools to fix any problems on my bicycle. For bad weather, it is unavoidable, but I make sure to be cautious because the road becomes slippery."
Participant Five	"I handle it by doing shoulder shrugs and neck stretches that help relieve neck tension."
Participant Six	"When rain starts, I usually find a spot to stay dry for a couple of minutes, depending on how long it will rain."
Participant Eight	"Staying calm and following the road safety protocols."

Table 8 shows substantial answers of selected participants to the question "How do you handle those challenges when they occur?" Five of the participants who encountered bike problems reported handling the problem by bringing bike tools and asking for help from other bicyclists. Three participants who encountered bike lane problems revealed that they handled the problem by avoiding park vehicles by changing lanes. Participants one and two stated that they handle their driver and large vehicle encountered problems by being patient, ignoring and understanding the behavior of the driver, staying calm, and following the road rules and regulations. Two of the participants that encountered weather problems reported that they handle their problem by finding shelter to stay dry when raining and the other one tries to be cautious on the road since weather problems are unavoidable. Participant five do stretching and exercise for physical health problems.

3.3 Bicycling Opportunities and Recommendations

3.3.1 Bicycle Tourism Opportunities

Table 9. Excerpts on Environmental Sustainability

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	"...it has potential to become a sustainable tourism activity which is both good for cyclists and the environment."
Participant Two	"... It can also be a great sustainable tourism activity as biking doesn't create air and noise pollution."
Participant Four	"I think there will be less air pollution and healthier people in the Philippines if almost anyone is riding a bike for tourism."
Participant Eight	"...it is easy to use, it is easy to bring with you, and it has minimal harm. You can also experience the environment of the desired destination."
Participant Nine	"Of course, to reduce or to lessen the Carbon Dioxide and air pollution."

Table 9 presents the excerpts of selected participants. The majority of the participants acknowledged the environmental sustainability of bicycles. Participants one, two, four, and nine reported that bicycling is an eco-friendly activity as it does not contribute to air and noise pollution.

Table 10. Economic Opportunities

Participants	Quotations
Participant Three	"...locals will think of putting up a business-like stores, eatery...of course, they will have an income so when they grow, they will hire people, they will have a job, in employment that will be the effect."
Participant Six	"... it makes bicycling relevant to more than just bicyclists, it means involving not just bicycle advocates, but a wide variety of businesses that are invested in creating the identity of a region. This creates a powerful and broad coalition."

Participants three and six reported that bicycling can create a coalition, employment, and business opportunities that may help the economy. Meanwhile, one participant acknowledged that bicycling creates a coalition that can help a certain region through partnerships of bicycle advocates, bicyclists, Local Government Units, destination marketing organizations, and bicycle-related businesses.

3.3.2 Bicyclist's Recommendation

Table 11. Excerpts on Promoting and Boosting Local Tourism

Participants	Quotations
Participant One	"...learn to appreciate their journey. Always be ready for any possible problem they can encounter if they are going to have bicycle tourism. Always make sure that their bike is in condition also."
Participant Two	"Upgrade your bicycle, make sure it is ready to travel anywhere. Always wear proper biking gears. It is tiring to travel by bicycle, but you will enjoy it, it is worth it. Be physically ready."
Participant Three	"...discipline on the road is very important ...plus of course proper gears and of course you must be physically fit once you go for bicycle tourism."
Participant Five	"...be safe, especially this new normal, we have not yet surpassed the pandemic. But after this pandemic, continue to explore this kind of activity since it is good for your health, and appreciate nature. Lastly, stay hydrated."
Participant Seven	"Always be complete when it comes to safety gears when cycling, especially for tourists and beginners... look for face shields that are very clear and can be integrated into helmets for safety and security."

Table 11 presents the excerpts of the selected participants to the question "As a cyclist, do you have any recommendations for future bicycle tourists and other people who are interested in bicycle tourism in the new normal?". The majority of the participants reported recommendations for preparedness to avoid accidents and prioritize the bicyclists' health and safety. These include wearing proper gears, upgrading bicycles, following road rules and safety protocols, checking bike conditions, being hydrated, and being physically fit. Likewise, participants one, two, and three reported that bicyclists need to be mentally prepared and have the heart, willingness, and discipline in bicycling. Moreover, participants four, six, and ten recommended bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation due to limited public transportation and it is affordable. Four out of ten participants reported that bicycling can be a great exercise to be physically fit during this pandemic.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and results on Theme 1: Bicyclists' Perceptions, the identified bicycle tourism destinations, and bicyclists' reasons are concluded to contribute to the success of creating and establishing future bicycle tourism destinations in different provinces. Meanwhile, as the bicyclists view bicycles as an eco-friendly and sustainable activity that can promote and boost local tourism, it is concluded that the bicyclists perceive bicycle tourism as a way to help in the recovery and building of more sustainable tourism activity in the Philippines. Based on the responses on subtheme 1.3, it was concluded that bicycling also became a new, affordable, and healthy hobby to entertain oneself amid the pandemic. Also, as the participant reported their pre-pandemic and pandemic bicycling experiences, it can be implied that different situations influence the bicycling experience resulting in different perceptions.

Moreover, based on Theme 2: Bicycling Problems and Challenges, the problems and challenges experienced and reported by bicyclists implies that there is an immediate need for the improvement of transport bike manuals, effective bicycling policies, and bicycle lanes, and bicycling facilities in the Philippines.

Lastly, the findings on Theme 3: Bicycling Opportunities and Recommendations revealed that aside from being a tourism activity itself, bicycling was found to be a way to promote and boost a local tourism destination. It was also found to bring economic opportunities like job employment and became a catalyst for bicycle-related businesses to arise. With these bicycling opportunities, researchers concluded that bicycling would pave the way towards the recovery and building of a more sustainable tourism and transportation industry in the Philippines.

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