

## The Jeepney as a Microcosm of Philippine Society: The Commuters Perspectives



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**ABSTRACT:** By investigating the jeepney as a microcosm of Philippine society through the viewpoint of commuters, we gained a deeper understanding of the social and cultural fabric that influences Filipino life. In this qualitative research, purposive sampling was used to choose the three (3) jeepney commuters as participants. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data, which was then thematically analyzed. The research showed that the jeepney serves as a venue for cultural expression and social interactions, offering important insights into the struggles and experiences that Filipino commuters face every day. A deeper understanding of the jeepney's significance within the larger context of Philippine society is made possible by acknowledging it as more than just a mode of transportation.

**KEYWORDS:** Commuters, Jeepney, Microcosm.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Public transportation is regarded as the lifeblood of any community, and in the Philippines, particularly in Metro Manila, according to the Move as One Coalition, only 30% of Filipinos rely on private vehicles, leaving 70% of Filipinos to rely on public transportation. Along with this, Dr. Montalbo Jr.'s paper states that 8,959,000 people use public utility jeepneys (PUJ) and 1,865,000 people ride public utility buses (PUB), making Jeepneys the primary mode of transportation among Filipinos. There are currently around 179,000, with 90% being fifteen years or older (Mateo-Babiano et al., 2020).

The Philippine jeepney can be traced back to the immediate aftermath of World War II (Antonio, 1982). The United States military left a surplus of military jeeps in the Philippines at the end of the war. These jeeps were originally intended for military use, transporting troops during the war. However, after the military left, the jeeps were repurposed and transformed into public utility vehicles to address the Filipino people's post-war transportation needs.

The term "jeepney" is thought to be a combination of "jeep" and "jitney" (Braganza, Liwanag, and Palines, 2007). "Jeep" refers to the original military vehicle, while "jitney" is a term used in the United States to describe small buses or vans used for public transportation. The fusion of these two terms reflects the transformation of military jeeps into public utility vehicles.

The jeepney has been an integral part of the Philippine transportation system since its inception, particularly in urban and rural areas where it serves as the primary mode of public transportation (Andalecio et al., 2020). Because of its affordability, accessibility, and ability to pass through narrow streets, the jeepney is a popular mode of transportation among commuters, particularly those with limited financial resources.

The jeepney represents Philippine culture (Meñez, 1988), and identity (Cerio, 2017). It serves as a reminder of our history to visitors from other countries. The vibrant and colorful exterior design of the jeepney is one of its distinguishing features. Owners and drivers of Jeepneys took pride in customizing and decorating their vehicles with bright paint, ornate chrome decorations, and personalized artwork. The jeepney was transformed into a moving work of art by these artistic embellishments, which frequently featured religious symbols, national icons, and local cultural motifs (Cerio, 2017).

While studies on Jeepney drivers are abundant (Coz et al., 2015; Ranis et al., 2021; Bathan et al., 2018; and Malasique and Rosete, 2022), little sociological research on commuters has been conducted. Understanding someone's point of view requires understanding their experiences and interactions during the ride. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate jeepney as a microcosm of Philippine society from the perspective of commuters. We can gain insights into the social and cultural aspects of Filipino life that are reflected in this vehicle by examining the experiences, interactions, and observations of those who regularly utilize jeepneys. To generate meaning and achieve a sense of understanding, the emphasis is on illuminating details and seemingly Trivial components of the experience that we may take for granted in our lives (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

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1. What are the experiences of commuters in taking Philippine Jeepneys?
2. In what way does Jeepney represent Filipino society?
3. How are Filipino values and culture reflected in riding a Jeepney?

### **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **A. Research Locale**

The study was conducted in the city of Tacloban. The researchers chose the location for implementation because it is the most convenient and most accessible for data gathering considering that this city has many operating traditional jeepneys. The interview took place in any location that is more convenient and comfortable for the participants.

#### **B. Participants**

The participants of this study were all commuters who utilized jeepneys as their primary mode of public transportation. The researchers used non-probability sampling, specifically the purposive sampling technique. The sample selection criteria were set as follows: (a) a person from Calbiga that currently residing in Tacloban, and (b) regularly utilizes Jeepney.

#### **C. Data Collection Method**

In terms of research methodology, the term "data collection method" describes the steps used to gather data and information, as well as the distribution of information on the instruments and methods employed to do so. Since the study considered the use of qualitative research methods to directly get information from the participants about the study's purpose, the researchers utilized the survey as the data collection method, with interviews serving as the research instrument. To better understand the commuter's perspective, semi-structured interviews which contains the components of both, structured and unstructured interviews was used. The researchers prepared a set of ten (10) open-ended questions to be answered by all interviewees. At the same time, additional questions were asked during interviews to clarify and/or further expand certain issues until the interview reaches its saturation point. To avoid limiting the participants, interviews were open-ended and delivered in the language that the participant feels most comfortable using. To record the participants responses, the researchers used a cellphone recorder.

#### **D. Ethical Consideration**

Commuters participating in the study will get written informed consent forms before the interview. All research procedures will guarantee the participant's anonymity and confidentiality of the data acquired. Additionally, a participant's decision to disclose their participation in this research to others is their choice, and the participants have the freedom to withdraw at any time if they feel uncomfortable with the research questions. The researchers will transcribe the recorded material and save it in a secure location. The research supervisor is permitted to access some portions of the transcription to facilitate interpretation and discussion.

#### **E. Research Reflexivity**

According to Roulston (2010), reflexivity in research is "the researcher's ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him or herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research topic". The researchers have an ethical obligation to disclose any conflicts of interest to the subject. In keeping with this, the researchers will think about methods so their face-to-face interactions with the study participant won't be influenced by their background, experiences, and presumptions. Additionally, the researchers are aware of the need to retain a minimal level of closeness to her participant and data, to maintain objectivity. Therefore, the researcher's stance and interpretation won't vary in any research procedure, especially in the analysis process.

#### **F. Data Analysis Method**

Thematic Analysis is used in the study to analyze the data collected from selected participants. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves searching across a data collection to identify, analyze, and report on repeating patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). Certain steps were taken by the researchers for thematic analysis.

- The initial step is to become familiar with the complete data set by reading it repeatedly and actively in order to gain important orientation to the raw data. This is the foundation for all the following steps.
- Following familiarization, researchers will start making notes on probable data items of interest, queries, linkages between data items, and other basic ideas, also known as initial codes, to define the content.
- The researchers will then look for patterns in the initial codes and begin to develop themes.
- The researchers will then go over the identified themes to determine which are the most helpful and accurate representations of the data and create the final list of themes.
- Finally, the data analysis will be written up by the researchers.

### **III. RESULTS**

#### **A. The Jeepney Experiences**

The first theme that emerged from the participants' responses describes their Jeepney experiences. It is divided into three sub-themes: learning from others relating with people and improving well-being. Commuters in the Jeepney may have the opportunity to observe

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or interact with various types of people. This situation offers chances to acquire and re-learn some of life's most important lessons and to experience them in a more personal way.

### A.1 Learning from Others

The first sub-theme narrated the lesson that commuters learned from their fellow passengers while riding in a Jeepney. According to the data gathered, participants are constantly confronted with various types of people and scenarios that they find most helpful in remaining open-minded and considerate of others.

#### Waray Language

P1: "Ahh nga may kanya kanya kita struggles ngan difficulties in life. Kay pag nakacommute ngani ako maski man dire ha Jeep, ha tanan ba na transportation, makikita motalaga nga mga pasahero na mayda gihap hira inaabat na kakurian."

P2: "Siguro kun mayda man leksyon nahibaruan ko han nak pagbyahe, kanya kanya nagad kitat kinabuhi ngan may kanya kanya liwat kita kakurian."

P3: "Kada birik hit manibela may pamilya nga naghuhulat ha ira. Like ha kada kada usa nga driber mayda hira kalugaringon ngan istorya. It iba may kag-anak o kapamilyana masakit, it iba may ginpapa-eskwela ha college, it iba naman mayda baby o burod na asawa."

#### English

"We have our own struggles and difficulties in life. Because when I commute even if it's not in a Jeep, in all transportation, you can really see in every passenger that they also experience hardship."

"Maybe if there is a lesson I learned from commuting, we all have our lives and we also have our own hardship."

"At every turn of the wheel there is a family waiting for them. Like every single driver they have their own family and story. Others have parents or family member who are sick, others are supporting someone in college, others have babies or pregnant wives."

### A.2. Relating with People

The second sub-theme highlights the shared experiences they heard and saw from their fellow commuters which results in relating with them. Riding a Jeepney helped participants feel understood and find a single person who truly understands their situation. The data collected shows that commuting validates what they are experiencing, and they felt heard and less alone as a result.

#### Waray Language

P1: "Gin-iisip ko nala na normal la siguro ine ma feel hit mga college student. Bagan maski ba guti nacocomfort ako hit thought na dire la ako it nakya- nakakafeel hine, nga mayda pa mas worst it ira situation."

P2: "Imbes nga buhi pa kita direktso la gihap it laban hit at kinabuhi kay di man kita pwede umundang."

P3: "Umm that time kasi bagan super lain nak day, bad vibes ba, tapos han pagsakay ko nakasapit ko hira ngan iya mama tas sige't iya pagpinaki smile haak amo bagan nahahawaan nala liwat ako."

#### English

"I'm just thinking that maybe it's normal for college students to feel this way. I feel at least a little comforted by the thought that I'm not the only one who feels this way, that there are others whose situation is even worse."

"As long as we are alive, the battle of our life continues because we cannot stop."

"Because that time I was having a super bad day, it was abad vibe, then when I got on board, I was sitting next to her and her mom, and she was always smiling at me so it was like I was infected too."

## B. Jeepney as a symbol of Filipino Society

The second theme depicts the jeepney as an iconic symbol in the Philippines. It is divided into three sub-themes: spontaneous humor, religious expression, and artistic expression. Commuters recognize Jeepneys for bringing Filipino culture to life. These are represented by pieces of artwork and/or text that communicate the richness of Filipino humor and witticisms, creative minds, and unwavering faith in God.

### B.1. Spontaneous Humor

The first sub-theme is about the spontaneous Filipino humor that is reflected in Jeepney. The participants stated that regardless of the situation, commuters are capable of finding something to laugh at and make jokes about, particularly a group of friends who will make fun of anything and anyone.

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### Waray Language

P1: *“Kadak-an mga pasahero it mahilig magjoke labi na kun upod nira’t ira mga sangkay. Iton maski guti la butang nahihimuan pa nira hin joke.*”

P2: *“Siguro magsarangkay tapos halimbawa nag iiruintrimisay’t sakob hit sasakyan amo ito nga nagkatatawa.”*

### B.2. Religious Expression

The second sub-theme features the inside and outside of a Jeepney as a venue for religious expression. As stated by participants, religious icons, rosary beads, and daily prayer were among the specific ways of expressing faith observed during the rides. Based on the data collected, the dashboard is frequently used as a miniature altar space.

### Waray Language

P1: *“Ha design ngan signage utro. Kay kadak-an o haros ngani tanan na Jeep mayda Rosary ngan Mama Mary ha front tapos mayda gihap ako nababasa na mga Bible verse.”*

P2: *“Ah sugad hito, mayda hira rosaryohan nga sano mabyahe nangungudos anay... naaro hin ka hin pakimaluoy hit Ginoo nga ngadat katapos hit ira byahe, waray mahihinabo nga maraot hit ha kalsada.”*

P3: *“Sugad nala han mga sacramental ngan images, umm bible verse nga nakasurat ngadat sakob hit jeep. Tapos mayda liwat driver ngan mga manarakay nga bago lumarga nangungudos anay. Mayda liwat pag naagi ha mga simbahan o di kaya sementeryo nangungudos gihap. Danay pag may emergency o ambulance nga naagi nangungudos gihap.”*

### B.3. Artistic Expression

The third sub-theme focuses on the Jeepney, which serves as a canvas for Filipino artistic expression. Based on the data gathered, these have been illustrated with different artworks, including paintings and slogans. Furthermore, according to the participants, some Jeepney ornamentals are made from reinvented scrap and transformed into something new and useful.

### Waray Language

P1: *“Nagamit hira hin mga recycled materials sugad hit mga burutangan pasahe, danay nakita ako nga di ngani kahoy, plastic bottle nga gin designan it ira gingagamit. Tasit exterior design gihap hit jeep kadak-an colorful. It iba ngan may mga paintings pa danay.”*

P3: *“Pinaagi hit visual arts. Umm jeepneys may mga funny nga caricature tapos han iba na mga anime o di kaya disney ginhaloan nira hin iba nga design nga maghahatag hin kalipay ha mga manarakay.”*

## C. Filipino Value and Culture

The third theme depicts the Filipino values and culture reflected within the Jeepney. The two sub-themes covered under the main theme are caring for the elderly and the bayanihan culture. Based on the data gathered Jeepney revealed to others the identity of Filipino as a nation. Each participant has a similar set of values but may see and understand each value differently.

### C.1. Caring for the Elderly

The first sub-theme focuses on caring for the elderly as a Filipino value demonstrated during a Jeepney ride. From the

### English

*“Passengers are usually the ones who like to joke especially if they are with their friends. They still can make jokes even with the smallest things.”*

*“Maybe they are friends, then for example, they joke around inside the vehicle that’s why they’re laughing.”*

### English

*“Maybe in design and signage again. Because usually or almost all Jeeps have a rosary and Mama Mary on the front and then I can also read Bible verses.”*

*“Ah like this, they have a rosary that before they travel, they sign of the cross first... asking the Lord for mercy that until the end of their trip, nothing bad will happen on the road.”*

*“Just like the sacramental and images, umm bible verses written inside the Jeep. Then there is also a driver and passenger who sign of the cross before disembarking. When passing by churches or cemeteries they also sign of the cross. Sometimes when there is an emergency or ambulance passing by, they also sign of the cross.”*

### English

*“They use recycled materials such as fare containers, sometimes I saw that if it’s not wood, they use plastic bottles with designs. Then the exterior design of the Jeep is also usually colorful. Others sometimes have paintings.”*

*“Through the visual arts. Umm jeepneys have funny caricature then in other anime or maybe disney they mix it with a different design that will give pleasure to the passenger.”*

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gathered data, the care for the elderly is performed through assistance by younger commuters and by giving up seats for those in need.

### Waray Language

P1: *“Siguro sugad pag may lagas or burod nga nasakay, kumbaga ginpaprioritize nira tapos gin-- pagpunan it iba ginhahatag it ira pwesto ngan nasabit nala.”*

P3: *“Mayda adto senior an iya pamasaha kulang tapos an ginbuhat han iya sapit na estudyante hiya nala an nagbayad bisan na insist an lolo nga karawton an iya gutiay nga natirok.”*

### English

*“Maybe when there is an elderly or pregnant person riding, it's like they prioritize them and then when the vehicle is overloaded, they give their seat and then they just hang on.”*

*“There was a senior whose fare was insufficient, then what the student next to him did, he was the one who paid even though the grandfather insisted that he accept the little he had saved.”*

### C.2. Bayanihan Culture

The second sub-theme describes Jeepney's bayanihan culture. According to the participants, there is no hesitation in assisting a passenger to load or unload a large bag and in passing on the fare from the farthest point of the cabin to the driver in front. Furthermore, there is always someone who will respond to a passenger's question.

### Waray Language

P1: *“Pagnasaka or nalosad it pasahero nga damo it dara nagbuburublig it iba igpasa pasa an mga gamit ngadan iya pwesto. It iba naman nahawas talaga para bumulig pagbuhat labi na kun tihawas na... It pagpasa pasa gihap hit pamasaha bagan bayanihan man gihap iton kay nagbuburublig gihap it mga pasahero para ig-abot it pamasahi han mga nalingkod ha hirayo. Pagnayakan it usa nga “alayon o paabot” so ginduduhol nira it kwarta ngada hiabot hit driver.”*

P2: *“Mabuligon gihap hit bisan dire naton kakilala”*

P3: *“An duhol duhol han pasahe. pati an umm pagbuburublig para han sukli ahh para ikadto han tag-ada. Tapos usually nag-aadjust para han may damo nga dara, ginkakadto han pinaka sapit na han driver para di mahulog an iya gamit or di maruba sugad han karton.”*

### English

*“When the passenger is getting on or off with a lot of things, the others help in passing the things to his place. Some actually go down to help with lifting, especially if it's getting off. Passing the fare is also “bayanihan” because the passengers also work together to pass the fare of those sitting far away. When the other one says “alayon or paabot” they hand out the money until it reaches the driver.”*

*“We also help even those we don't know.”*

*“The passing of the fare. Also, the umm collaboration for the change ahh to pass to the owner. Then they usually adjust for those with a lot of luggage, placing it next to the driver so that his stuff doesn't fall or get damage like the box.”*

## IV. DISCUSSION

The various themes are illustrated to answer the three Statements of the Problem (SOP). The first SOP is answered by theme one, the second by theme two, and the third by theme three.

The responses of participants in the first theme depict commuter experiences obtained during the Jeepney journey. When commuters board a jeepney, they enter a microcosm of social interactions, interacting with people from all walks of life. The shared space within the jeepney facilitates encounters and exchanges between people from various walks of life, fostering social connections and moments of shared humanity. According to the data gathered, the participants' primary Jeepney experience is learning from others. Mondal and Samanta (2021) stated that there are infinite lessons that commuters can learn from their surroundings during their commute journey. According to McMahan (2013), everyone has gone through experiences in life that can help the lives of others.

According to Moskaliuk, Bokhorst, and Cress (2016), learning from others is dependent on people's ability to integrate their own and other people's experiences. This not only allows them to sympathize with others but also to empathize and connect with them. Riding in a Jeepney made participants feel understood and helped them find a single person who truly understands their situation.

Regarding the third sub-theme, the participants' responses indicated an improvement in their well-being as a result of their Jeepney experiences. It was discovered that what participants see, hear, and experience during a commute affects not only their overall mood but also their outlook on life (Wilhoit, 2017).

The second theme revealed Jeepney as a symbol of Filipino society. According to the responses of the participants, the jeepney exemplifies the qualities that Filipinos are known for being humorous, religious, and artistic. About the first sub-theme,

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most participants stated that commuters make fun of a variety of things, turning even the most innocuous joke into a source of endless entertainment. De Leon (2013) mentioned the humor inside the Jeepney includes witty, humorous, and occasionally offensive jokes and quotations. It simply implies that no matter what the situation, Filipinos can find something to laugh about. De Los Santos, Labrague, and Milla (2020) also stated that Filipinos have a sanguine temperament and a sunny disposition. This suggests that Filipinos know how to deal with setbacks positively.

The second sub-theme suggests that Filipino society has a strong religious faith (Canete, 2021). According to the responses of the participants, Jeepney demonstrates that Filipinos still believe in superstition and have a strong faith in God. Based on the findings of Güss and Tuason's (2008) study, the Manila Jeepney had more religious decorations and accessories. According to the 2020 census of population and housing, 78.8% of Filipinos are Roman Catholics, which explains why most designs and arts reflected in Jeepneys are Catholic symbols and names. Mercado (1994) revealed that the front of the driver typically has a small altar with a rosary, a small statue/picture of the Blessed Virgin, Santo Niño, Sacred Heart, or a crucifix. This is a sort of roadside protection, as well as a daily prayer for a dream or the success of the family. Thus, according to Blanton (2015), the Jeepney is an important representation vehicle in the religious life of the country.

The third sub-theme described how Jeepneys serve as canvases for Filipino artistic expression. Owners customize their vehicles with graffiti, line art, anime, and portraits. Some even incorporate K-pop culture celebrities, political personalities, or religious themes. According to Mercado (1994), the owner might reflect his feelings, worth, and overall personality onto them. Some Jeepney ornaments were made of recycled materials, according to participants. This means that Filipinos may improvise and reuse scraps and abandoned resources to create new and valuable products (Su and Tanyag, 2020).

The third theme explains the Filipino values and culture portrayed in the Jeepney. According to the responses of the participants, the primary Filipino value that was evident in jeepney rides was care for the elderly. According to Oropilla and Guadana (2021), the elderly or "senior citizens" are treated with the utmost respect in Philippine culture. Senior citizens and elders have the closest seats to the entrance, allowing them to easily sit and go. The DOTR issued Department Order No. 2014-013 directing senior citizens, pregnant women, and people with disabilities to be given priority seating in public transportation, particularly jeepneys and buses. Younger passengers assist the elderly in boarding or bear heavy loads. This suggests that Filipinos place a high cultural value on age and the elderly (Teng et al., 2021).

The second sub-theme discusses the bayanihan culture found in jeepney rides. An act of bayanihan in the jeepney is the distinct gesture of payments inside jeepneys where one helps pass payments and change down the aisle to and from the driver and passenger. Blanton (2015) emphasized the practice of always lending a helping hand to commuters when a specific passenger is out of reach to pay his fare to the driver. In relation to this, commuters assist their fellow passengers by carrying their heavy loads and baggage, as well as assisting them to get on and off the Jeep when the passenger is elderly or has a child. According to Sirauno's (2021) study, Filipinos strongly believe in assisting their fellow countrymen in any way they can.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The results underscore the fact that Jeepney is always a relevant aspect in Filipino society. For many commuters, the Jeepney is more than a mode of transportation; it is a cultural icon that reflects the Filipino way of life. Based on the narratives of Jeepney commuters from Tacloban City, this study established that Jeepney has become an icon that showcases the various characteristics that Filipino people are known for. The commuters' jeepney experiences provide opportunities to learn and rediscover some of life's valuable lessons in a more personal manner. Additionally, Filipino society can be seen in the Jeepney through the humor of the passengers and the jeepney's colorful decorations and ornamentations that display the passengers' and drivers' devotion to their respective religions. Finally, by helping senior citizens with their bags, giving them a seat, and lending a helping hand to those in need, the culture of bayanihan and caring for the elderly are demonstrated.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the results and conclusion, the following are recommended.

- 1) To discuss the cultural significance of Jeepneys in the Philippines, seminars for commuters and drivers should be held.
- 2) To better promote Filipino culture and society, the DOTR should allocate funds for Public Utility Jeepney (PUJ) decoration and ornamentation.
- 3) To widen the body of knowledge on the subject and better comprehend the viewpoint of Jeepney commuters, future researchers should use other methods, variables, and larger sample size.

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