

New Study Finds Ridesharing Services To Be Safer Than Regular Taxis

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Policy makers around the world have been debating the merits and risks with the proliferation of ridesharing and taxi app services like Uber and Lyft. But a new study has found these services to be a safer option compared to regular taxis. The report by taxi data analytics company ZenDrive was published after studying over 1300 miles of rides in San Francisco and measured safety infractions like speeding and driver mobile phone use while driving.

The study found that regular taxis committed nearly 50% more speeding violations compared to ridesharing services. The figure was much higher during peak hours where the violations were 2.6 times higher. When it comes to unsafe speeding (that is, the act of speeding combined with another unsafe behavior like speaking on the cell phone or hard braking), regular taxi drivers were found to engage in such behaviors 25% more than ridesharing services.

The ZenDrive study also found that while regular taxis had good security checks in place pre-hire, rideshare services fared better post-hire. Drivers for regular taxis are vetted and fingerprinted pre-hire. However, rideshare services offer better security measures post-hire thanks to ongoing checks on traffic felonies and infractions.

Safety is not the only metric where app-based taxi services like Uber perform better. A UC Berkeley paper published earlier this year showed that pickups from app-based services like Uber were quicker and more reliable than taxis. Ninety percent of the surveyed ridesourcing customers experienced less than ten minutes of wait time with nearly two-thirds of them picked up in less than five minutes. In comparison, less than 40% of taxi customers were picked up in under 10 minutes.

According to Jay Barnett, the founder of Priority Pickup, a ridesourcing service in Perth, Australia, a primary reason for the faster pickups and higher safety is the better use of technology in monitoring of the fleet. He says that customers are typically concerned about dangers posed by drivers. As a result, his company not only does stringent background checks, but also has the profile of all their drivers made available on the website. "Such a policy provides an assurance to customers that the business they are engaging with is safe", he adds.

Apps like Uber allow customers to round in on a driver who is closest to where they need to be picked up. This helps in quicker pickups. In addition to this, GPS tracking and the availability of driver profiles in the hands of passengers are effective deterrents against potential criminals.

The launch of start-ups like Uber and Lyft have massively disrupted the taxi industry which has been suffering due to monopoly and cartelization of services. While the higher level of competition is a welcome change to customers, safety is absolutely paramount. As the ZenDrive study points out, the arrival of ridesharing services is a welcome addition in this case as well.