

Trips in private-hire cars, taxis up for some amid Covid-19: Study

But satisfaction over service dips owing to difficulties in getting ride, lack of discounts

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Some commuters have turned to travelling more by taxi and private-hire cars amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

But this has been accompanied by a slight fall in customer satisfaction with these point-to-point transport services, according to a study conducted by the Institute of Service Excellence (ISE) at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

The results were derived from the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore study that surveyed 2,350 residents through online interviews between April and June

this year.

SMU noted that 61.1 per cent of the respondents said their commuting patterns have changed since the start of the pandemic.

Among commuters surveyed, 24.7 per cent said they have taken fewer trips on MRT trains, while 18.3 per cent said they have taken fewer public bus trips.

Meanwhile, 15.7 per cent of commuters said that they are relying more on point-to-point transport for their commutes.

Ms Neeta Lachmandas, executive director of ISE, said the fall in public transport ridership was likely due to a combination of reasons, including the shift to working from home and people minimising their travel due to concerns

over the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

She added that the increased preference for taxis and private-hire cars was likely owing to commuters thinking that travelling in such vehicles would reduce the risk of exposure to the virus.

But she noted that the decline in satisfaction with point-to-point services suggests that pain points have been developing.

The sector saw a year-on-year decline of 3.6 per cent to 73.1 points in terms of customer satisfaction.

But the MRT system and the public bus sector scored similar points as last year, at 74.2 and 74.4 respectively.

The best possible score is 100 points.

SMU said the top three reasons behind the lower customer satisfaction scores for taxis and ride-hailing services were difficulties in getting a ride, the fares charged,

and a lack of attractive app promotions and discounts.

Ms Lachmandas said: "The poor performance of these pricing and ride acquisition-related attributes was supported by survey respondents' verbatim comments alluding to high prices and poor availability."

"It's understandable that Covid-19 has been disruptive to point-to-point transport services, particularly in relation to driver supply and ride demand, but operators should review customers' travel experience and work to strengthen themselves as the transport option of choice."

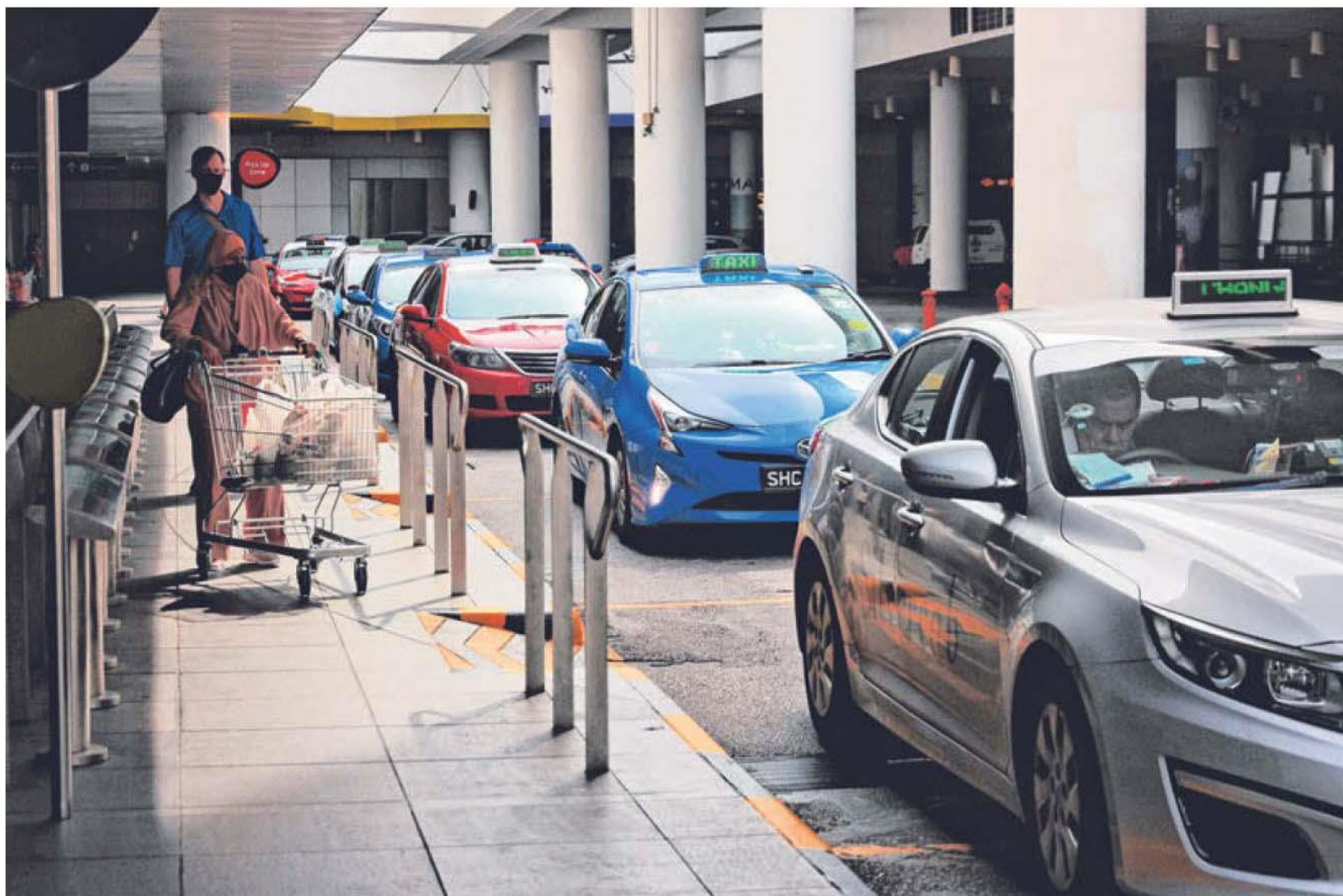
SMU added that the study showed the commuters' tolerance levels for fare increases for the MRT and public buses had fallen from 9.9 per cent last year to 8.2 per cent this year.

ISE head of research and consulting Chen Yongchang said this issue of price sensitivity has been observed in other industries as well, and that it is likely driven by concern over the economic environment.

Transport Minister S. Iswaran had said on Sept 20 that public transport ridership is at about 60 per cent of what it was before the pandemic.

He added then that any fare adjustment will depend on the Public Transport Council's annual fare review exercise, the results of which are usually announced in the third quarter of the year.

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According to Ms Neeta Lachmandas, executive director of the Institute of Service Excellence, the increased preference for taxis and private-hire cars was likely owing to commuters thinking that travelling in such vehicles would reduce the risk of exposure to the Covid-19 virus. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH