

## **Uber says suspected Michigan gunman was driver for service**

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**San Francisco:** A Michigan mass shooting could raise new headaches for Uber, the fast-growing ride-hailing service that's been dogged by controversy on the road to becoming one of the most valuable, privately funded companies in the world.

Jason Dalton, the man arrested in connection with the Kalamazoo rampage that left six people dead, was a driver for the San Francisco-based Uber, according to a company spokeswoman. Authorities were investigating reports that he may have picked up at least one customer before he was stopped by police.

Uber has been one of the most successful tech industry startups in recent years, as customers have flocked to use its smartphone app for hailing rides in 380 cities around the globe. The company says its drivers are independent contractors who use its app to help find customers and schedule trips.

Since its launch in 2009, Uber has faced criticism for a pricing formula that can send rates skyrocketing at times of high demand, and for side-stepping regulators and licensing requirements in some cities where it's opened for business. That hasn't stopped it from raising more than \$10 billion in financial backing from venture capital firms and other investors, under terms that value the company at more than \$50 billion.

It was unclear Sunday if the fatal shootings in Kalamazoo had any relation to Jason Dalton's employment. But critics have long complained the company should do more to screen drivers and guard passengers' safety.

Some of that criticism has been raised by competitors and regulators who argue that Uber's success has come as the company has expanded while seeking to avoid the strict licensing and permit requirements that traditional taxi companies face.

"I do think this is an outrageous incident that's going to draw more attention to this issue," said Dave Sutton, spokesman for "Who's Driving You," an organization backed by Uber's competitors in the taxi and limousine industry, which has fought the company's expansion.

Authorities said Dalton is a 45-year-old resident of Kalamazoo Township who had no criminal record. They said victims of the shootings in and around the city of Kalamazoo had no apparent connection to him or to each other.

Uber spokeswoman Nairi Hourdajian confirmed Dalton had driven for Uber. Hourdajian wouldn't say whether he was picking up fares for the ride-sharing service Saturday night.

Authorities, however, said they're investigating a Facebook post which indicated the suspect was an Uber driver who was driving erratically around the time of the shootings and indicating he may have taken at least one fare during an ensuing manhunt, according to Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Jeff Getting.

Uber said Sunday that it has offered to assist authorities in their investigation. In a statement, Uber chief security officer Joe Sullivan said the company is "horrified and heartbroken at the senseless violence."

While Uber says it screens drivers and conducts background checks, critics say the ride-hailing company uses private screening services that don't have access to as much information as local police can obtain when they check fingerprint records.

The company said earlier this month that it will pay \$28.5 million to settle two lawsuits that alleged Uber misled customers about safety procedures and fees. It's also facing a separate lawsuit by district attorneys in San Francisco and Los Angeles, who alleged that Uber's checks failed to prevent the company from hiring several felons.

Uber, meanwhile, instituted a policy last year that prohibits driver and passengers from possessing firearms. Anyone found to be in violation of the policy may be prohibited from using or driving for the service.

While there have been several cases in which Uber drivers have been charged with assaulting passengers, there have also been incidents in which the company's drivers have been attacked by passengers.

Uber has also faced complaints that one of its executives in New York used information collected by the Uber app to track a passenger's movements. The company has since said that it has taken steps to protect passenger's privacy, including strict limits on access to the identities of riders.

- AP