

Method to Madness? Analysing Advertiser Approach in Unauthorised Advertising in Bengaluru's BMTC Buses

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Abstract

The BMTC (Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation) has a daily ridership of 5.76 crore individuals. This potential viewership marks the insides of BMTC's buses as an attractive medium for advertisers targeting the bus-taking demographic. This paper has analysed the content, themes, and prevalence of these advertisements, and whether these aforementioned topics of this research vary with respect to the bus routes plying to different socio-economical areas of the city. The study was conducted via on-field primary data collection from the BMTC's fleet followed by a content analysis of the collected data and its comparison with data related to the human development indicators of the destination areas of the surveyed routes. The results revealed that certain sectors such as STD healthcare tend to show up more prominently in those regions of the city with higher STD mortality rates. However, the unauthorised advertising sector as a whole tends to be dominated by 'black-magic advertisements' with no regard for socioeconomically facilitating factors, the author posits, due to the medium's offering of an unregulated safe haven.

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Unauthorised Advertising, Public Transit, BMTC, Bengaluru, Content Analysis

Introduction

‘Apna khoya hua pyar vaapis paayein’ (Reclaim your lost love) is a common sight for an undertaker of public transportation in India, primarily public buses, as are other advertisements that fall under the trope of ‘Baba Bangali’ type of advertisements in India which create an image of operation under supernatural black magic around themselves. The extent of these advertisements is so large and so mysteriously interconnected that research led by RBI personnel into Mumbai’s local trains revealed that most of these ‘Baba Bangali’ advertisements ultimately lead to one person operating on different fronts such as, inter alia, Baba Ajmeri, Baba Adil Shah, and Baba Miya Khan (Chaubey, 2013). While advertisements that promote black magic and superstition remain unauthorised under Indian law especially the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 as per the order of the most Hon’ble High Court of Bombay, the order is restricted to TV advertisements and there remains ambiguity over such posters which are also ignored by the public transport administration bodies (Gokhale, 2021).

Public transportation in India serves a massive 67.6% of India’s explosive 140 billion+ population and is thus a great marketing medium, especially for advertisers who want access to India’s lower-income working class (Statista, n.d.). The abysmal regulation of this public transport makes this otherwise untapped advertising space for advertisers who wish to reach this large target audience for negligible input costs by means of illegally covering the surface of these public transports, especially buses (Pucher et al., 2004). Public transportation systems in India have long been utilised as platforms for advertisements, serving as a direct link to a vast audience. With a population exceeding 1.4 billion, and over two-thirds of it dependent on public transportation, these systems become crucial avenues for reaching out to the masses. However, the regulation of advertising on public transport, particularly buses, is lacking, leading to the proliferation of unauthorised advertisements that range from the bizarre to the mundane.

The BMTC buses in Bengaluru, for instance, have become a canvas for various advertisers, both legitimate and otherwise, to showcase their offerings. These advertisements, often plastered on windows and handlebars, range from promises of love problems' solutions to job opportunities and alcohol de-addiction services.

The proposed research aims to conduct a thematic analysis of this unauthorised advertising (as confirmed by BMTC in an author-filed RTI, details of which may be sought via correspondence) on the windows and handlebars of Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) buses and explore how the content, themes, and prevalence of these advertisements vary based on the bus routes plying to different socio-economic areas of the city. The illegal advertisements discussed before are not limited to only black magic solutions to life problems but also provide services such as alcohol deaddiction, job offers, and even marriage proposals! Thus, the BMTC buses are an interesting microcosm of niche advertising, and by employing quantitative content analysis on these advertisements, the research aims to gain further insights into this practice and its variation in the economically diverse city of Bengaluru (Siddaramaiah, 2020).

Review of Literature

Among the litany of troubles associated with research topics of nature hyperspecific, especially geographically, such as this one, is a lack of relevant literature. In all of the researcher's research, nary a literature was found to have explored the exact topics under scrutiny in this research even if geographical limitations were removed. While most available research has focussed on advertising as a stream of revenue for public transport corporations, they exist from the lens of Public Policy, logistics, and administration, and not from that of Media Studies so the content of these advertisements has not been a matter of study. Thus, granting the researcher confidence in the novelty of the approach undertaken herewith. In addition, most of the research on advertisements in public transport has been conducted only in the past decade. Furthermore, no research could be found that studied the variation in advertisement contents across differentially socio-economically developed regions, so it can be argued that this research contributes to a still developing field with hopefully what will be seminal knowledge.

Effectiveness

The first literature under consideration starts nearly 850 kilometers away from the city under study in the city of Mumbai with the research by Dhandyal and Parkash (2021) in their study of the effectiveness of Transit Advertising among the youth of the city. The researchers, in their purview, have covered several forms of public transportation including the city's cabs, local trains, and metros but what remains of interest to our study is their research with the BEST or the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport Undertaking buses. The researchers have identified the following seven places as subject to advertisement:

1. Full Bus Wrap Advertising
2. Bus Back Panel Advertising
3. Bus side Panel Advertising
4. Bus seat Back Panel Advertising
5. Bus Window Top Advertising
6. Bus Shelter Advertising
7. ST Bus Stand Hoarding Advertising

It is unfortunate that the limits of the researcher's work stop here and no insight is given as to the content or the occupation of these advertising regions. However, from the list mentioned above, only entry number 5 comes under our consideration as a place for unauthorised advertisements in BMTC buses for entries 1 and 3 have been outlawed as advertising places and their legal status as such is respected even by unauthorised advertisers (2018). Entries 2 and 4 are out of the purview of our study due to them being legally regulated advertising spaces under BMTC and entries 6 and 7 are out of the scope of this study by the virtue of not being inside a bus.

The research which was conducted against the backdrop of the COVID pandemic found that the subject populace believed transit advertisements were capable of successfully conveying the brand message to the people effectively. However, the reliability of the research is called into question owing to the fact that among the research's sources is only one research paper and a Wikipedia article. More glaringly, the research is published in a journal concerning natural

oils thus casting aspersions on the credibility of the work of Dhandyal and Parkash (2021).

However, while Dhandyal and Parkash (2021) found public sentiment towards transit advertising to be “effective”, a contrarian view arises a year earlier to their research from the mountainous Balkan nation of Slovenia, more specifically, its capital of Ljubljana, some 6000 kilometers north-west to the city of Mumbai. The research from Dujmović and Pušnik (2019) titled ‘Advertising on city buses’ found public feelings towards them being negative and “obstructing the view”. Similar concerns are also shown in the research discussed ahead in this paper. It does, however, at this juncture, become essential to take into account the cultural differences between the samples of the two studies.

Legal and Policy Issues

The oldest research considered in this review, from Transportation Research Board and Silverberg (1998), is from the USA. The research from the American regulatory body looks primarily into the revenue aspect of transit advertising and its legal and policy implications. Among the concerns of the Board are the safety concerns arising out of the visibility obstruction due to these advertisements as also noted by Dujmović and Pušnik (2019). Another issue identified by the Board was the requirement of regulatory bodies to come up with advertising codes to determine what could be permissible and what not. However, the most interesting of concerns by the Board was the restrictions of buses with certain ads to those routes that have specific demographics of interest to an advertiser. The research also noted that advertising dollars only made up a small portion of transporting bodies’ revenue and thus certain bodies had altogether forsaken accepting advertisements deeming them not worth the regulatory trouble. This information raises several questions regarding the BMTC which in its predatory approach to rake in all the advertising money had the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagar Palike) ban all advertisements across non-government public carriers (2018). If the advertising revenue is of such import to the BMTC then why does its strictness not reflect in curbing unauthorised advertising? And more importantly, if the BMTC is having a dependence on advertisers, does this also impact the decisions of route expansions and frequency for the benefit of advertisers? However, as compelling as these questions might be, they are not the subject of this particular research.

Market Research

The next research under consideration is from the polar opposite of the USA, both geographically and politically, by Kovalev (2016) based out of the Russian capital. In the year 2014, the city of Moscow rebranded its public transportation system bringing all public transport modes under one organizing body. Kovalev (2016) has studied the impact of this rebranding on several aspects of public transportation including ridership and transit advertising. The researcher found transit advertising to be among the most effective and flexible forms of OOH advertising (out-of-home), a stance iterated in research from Dhandyal and Parkash (2021). The research noted that better branding brought an influx of middle-class ridership which while being a positive for advertising and carriers, brought trouble for marketers making their targeting decisions more complex. The research notes that “only the biggest advertising agencies or research institutions have the capacity to conduct such researches (for targeting); (as) they require time sources, money, and high-tech equipment.” In light of this observation, it would be interesting to study if the illegal advertisers of Bengaluru with not even a fraction of the resources of Moscow’s agencies are able to distinguish their audiences.

Our final research under consideration circles back home to the city of Bengaluru with research from Baindur and Rao (2016). Their work while hyperfocused in the Srirampura ward, considering it to be the representative of Bengaluru holds merit due to the region’s affinity to the Kempegowda Bus Station. While the research is essentially focused on ticket prices and commuter behavior, a couple of interesting observations are made relevant to our topic of interest. The research notes two socio-economic groups to be among the primary riders of the BMTC. Firstly, the economically weaker sections of the society to whom the BMTC’s services provide access to employment opportunities that would otherwise be out of their affordability. Secondly, women travelers who have been defined as a “captive segment” of travelers due to the dual factors of affordability and safety. It would therefore be interesting to study whether these two prominent ridership groups form the majority of the target audiences for our unauthorised advertisers.

Expanding on the literature review, while there’s a significant gap in research on unauthorised advertising in public transport, particularly in Bengaluru, the exist-

ing literature provides insights into related aspects of transit advertising effectiveness, legal and policy issues, and market research. Despite being geographically distant, these studies contribute to the understanding of various facets of transit advertising, albeit not directly related to unauthorised advertising.

Thus from all the literature so far reviewed it can be concluded that little to no research exists in the study of unauthorised advertising in public transport, (whose legal variant has been considered highly effective) leave alone for public transport in Bengaluru. This research shall aim to rectify that and in addition, also study the themes of the advertisements it comes across and make associations between them and their audiences with the help of cues found from the research of the Muscovites and Baindur and Rao (2016).

Methodology

Statement of Problem

There is an extensive presence of unauthorised advertising on the coach bodies of BMTC buses, with variations observed across different taluks. These advertisements typically manifest in the form of posters and pamphlets, presenting a diverse array of themes. The research aims to gain insights into this phenomenon, conducting a comprehensive analysis of the themes present in these advertisements. Additionally, the study seeks to explore how these themes vary in prevalence and content across different bus routes servicing various areas of the city. By examining the nuanced variations in theme prevalence and content, particularly in relation to the socio-economic characteristics of the areas served by these bus routes, the research intends to shed light on the intricate dynamics of unauthorised advertising practices within Bengaluru's public transportation system.

Scope of the Study

The study oversees BMTC buses and is thus limited to the city of Bengaluru and its regions being serviced by the BMTC.

For the regions considered under the study, the study will take place at a 'Taluk' level. A taluk, also known as a taluka or a tehsil depending on which part of India one is in, is an administrative sub-unit of a district (Dictionary.com, n.d.)

The state of Karnataka, whose capital the city of Bengaluru is, has 31 districts and 240 taluks. The region in and around Bengaluru itself has two districts to its name for administrative purposes. Them being, Bangalore Urban and Bangalore Rural (Government of Karnataka, n.d.).

While a few buses of BMTC do indeed ply to regions under the Bangalore Rural district, they are not the main purpose of the BMTC's fleet which is more directed on intra-city commute (Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation, n.d.). Thus, the district taken under consideration for this research shall only be Bangalore Urban.

Bangalore Urban itself is divided into four taluks. Them being- Bangalore North, Bangalore South, Bangalore East, and Anekal. Therefore, the taluks (whose socio-economic variation is attested by data presented further in this research) shall serve as the "socio-economically varying areas".

Research Objectives

RO1: Determine the themes and sectors engaged in unauthorised advertising across BMTC buses.

RO2: Determine the variation of the aforementioned themes and sectors' prevalence across bus routes plying to differently socio-economically developed areas.

RO3: Determine the possibility of an underlying market awareness behind the psyche of the unauthorised BMTC advertisers.

Research Method

The study shall be applying a quantitative approach where a field research survey will be first used to gather data on the prevalence of unauthorised advertisements across different routes followed by a thematic quantitative content

analysis of the recorded advertisements. The data gathered will then be compared in cohorts against each other and against their regions' socio-economic indicators to obtain results.

Tools Used

The research for attaining its purpose via the aforementioned quantitative way shall rely on two major tools:

Field Study

For the observation of the several buses sampled plying to their respective regions and the unauthorised advertisements inside them.

Archival Research

For the comparison of the different taluks falling under the Bengaluru Urban district on the basis of their socio-economic indicators as recorded by the Government of Karnataka in its various census, surveys, and reports.

Sources of Data

The study will rely on an on-ground primary data collection from 100 BMTC buses selected after a quota sampling in order to give each Taluk a fair representation which is amiss in BMTC's resource allocation. A sample of 100 buses which is 1.47% of the total BMTC fleet of 6798 buses (BMTC Glance - Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation, n.d.) will be used. Follow-up analysis of data for comparison with the socio-economically varying regions of the city will be done via secondary sources of data, primarily, government-provided records.

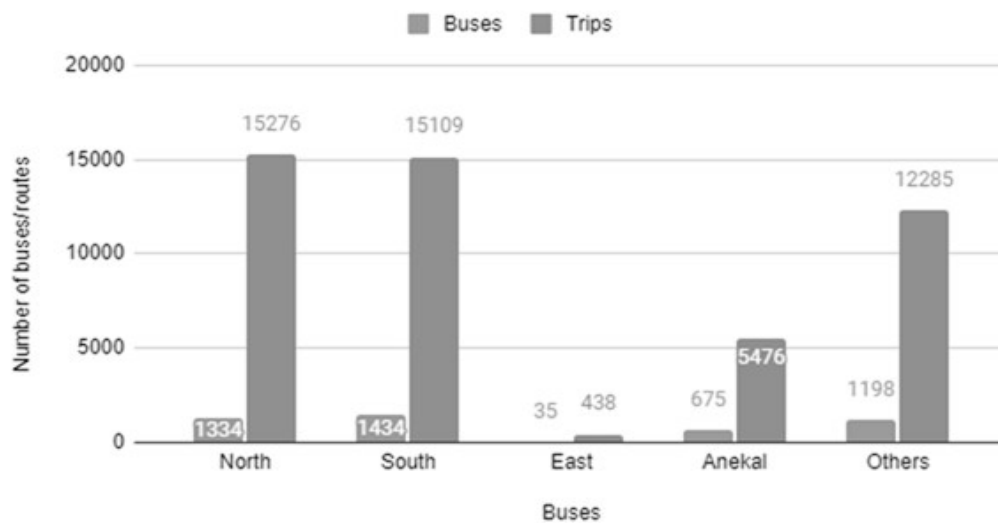
Sampling

The BMTC has precisely 6798 buses in its fleet at the time of the research's conduction. To make the research's field study feasible, a sample of 100 buses (70% CI) will be used.

The Bengaluru Urban district is divided into four taluks- Bangalore North, Bangalore South, Bangalore East, and Anekal. However, analysis of data provided by the BMTC in response to another author-filed RTI revealed glaring inequity in the allocation of buses to these taluks.

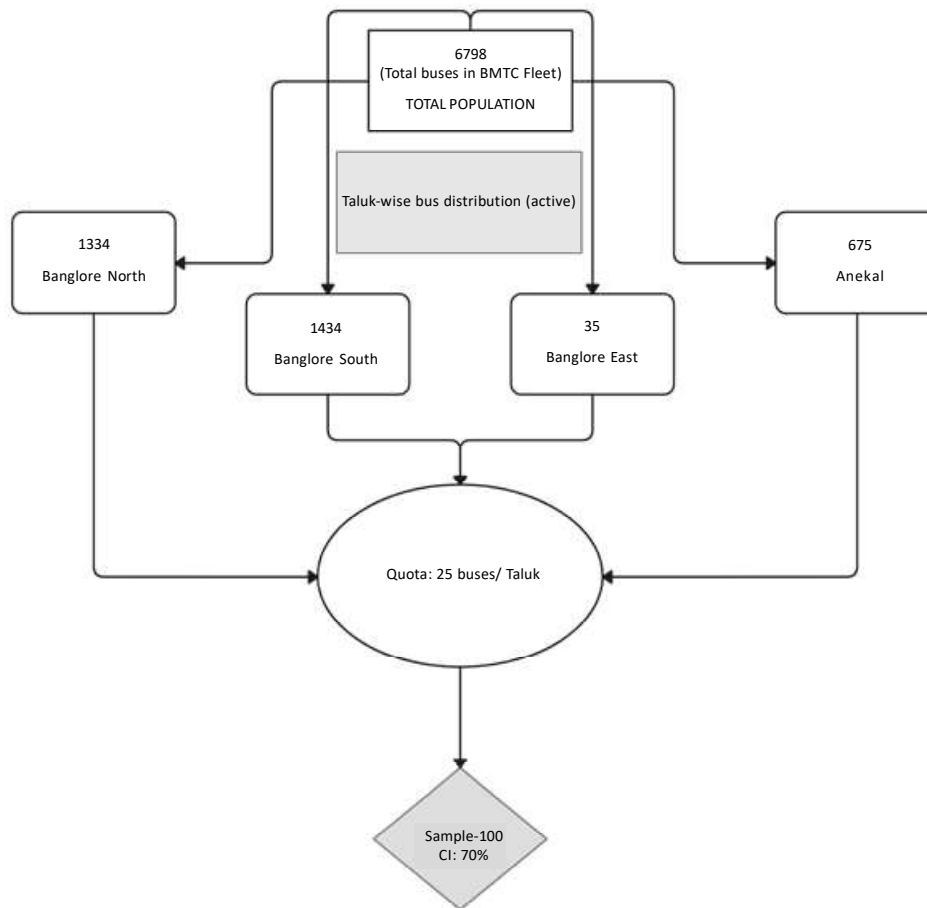
Figure 1

Distribution of BMTC Buses Across Bengaluru Urban Taluks



Note. The North and South taluks appear to have the most resources allocated with Anekal and East following. The title 'Others' here includes areas serviced which fall out of the boundaries of the Bengaluru Urban district.

To make up for this inequity and to provide a chance for all taluks' buses to get fair and representative representation, a quota of 25 buses will be set for each taluk which essentially translates to 25% representation to each taluk in the selected sample. The sampling process is illustrated for clarity as follows.

Figure 2*Sampling Flow***Theoretical Framework**

The research shall be operating within the framework of three major theories, the primary being the Lavidge-Steiner Hierarchy of Effects model of advertisement and communication, supported ancillary by one theory from the field of marketing and advertising while the other belonging to the public policy and administration sphere.

The Lavidge & Steiners Hierarchy-of-effects model proposed by Lavidge & Steiner (1961) is among one the few prominent advertising theories. Proposed during the same time as when the DAGMAR model was doing the rounds in academic circles (Karlsson, 2007), it improved upon it by theorising that viewers of an advertisement do not switch directly from being interested to become convinced buyers but rather go through a six stepped process of:

Awareness > Knowledge > Liking > Preference > Conviction > Purchase

Roux and Suzanne (2022) applied the HoE model to OOH mini-bus advertising in South Africa as did Jacobs et al. (2020). The findings included different sub-groups in the sample demonstrating different cognitive responses to the advertisements. This variation is attributable to the variation in awareness, knowledge, likings, and preferences (the first four steps of the HoE model) of members of the different sub-groups.

The Market Segmentation Theory as proposed by Kotler and Armstrong (1972) suggests that markets are divided into smaller segments that require different marketing strategies or mixes due to their unique needs, traits, or behaviors. The theory primarily proposes segmentations on the basis of demography, geography, and psychography. Since then the theory has become key industrial practice to plan marketing campaigns as also showed by Jones et al. (2005). In our research, we will try to establish a connection between the targeting in unauthorised advertising and the interplay of the abovestated factors in that targeting.

The Spatial Inequality Theory, especially as employed in the work of Camara and Banister (1993) posits that the quality of public transportation is inversely correlated with the distribution of income among the population, meaning that those with higher incomes, who are more likely to reside in the city center, receive better services both quantitatively and qualitatively, while those with lower incomes, who are more likely to reside in outlying areas, receive much worse services. Since then, the Spatial Inequality Theory has been the bedrock of several researches into the distribution of public transit and other utilities (Hernández, 2018; Liu & Duan, 2020; Ruiz et al., 2017). It's in this view that the research may hypothesise that the abundance of unauthorised advertising may be more prominent on certain routes due to institutional apathy.

These theoretical frameworks collectively provide a robust foundation for the research, allowing us to analyse the themes, prevalence, and targeting strategies of unauthorised advertising on BMTC buses in Bengaluru. By integrating insights from advertising, marketing, and public policy's theoretical domains, our study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of unauthorised advertising in the context of public transportation in urban environments.

Justification

The primary reason for pursuing this research lies in its sheer novelty. Despite an extensive literature review, no previous studies have explored the variation in advertisement contents across different socio-economically developed regions, particularly in the context of out-of-home (OOH) advertising, and specifically focusing on unauthorised advertising in public transportation. This gap in the literature underscores the need for our research to fill this critical void.

Moreover, research on public transportation in India remains largely inadequate, even beyond media-focused studies. By undertaking this research, we aim to contribute to a much-needed body of knowledge in this area. Our findings will shed light on the nuances of advertising practices within the public transportation sector, providing insights into the dynamics of unauthorised advertising in different socio-economic contexts.

Additionally, our research will also enhance understanding of the analytical approaches used by small to medium-scale advertisers operating outside the bounds of legality. While big advertising agencies often dominate discussions on advertising strategies, the tactics employed by smaller, unauthorised advertisers remain understudied. Our research will offer valuable insights into their methods, motivations, and impacts, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of advertising practices in urban environments.

Research Questions

The research aims to find out the following:

RQ1: What are the popular themes and sectors in unauthorised advertisements across BMTC buses?

RQ2: How do the prevalence, themes, and sectors of unauthorised advertisements in BMTC buses vary across bus routes plying to different regions of the city?

RQ3: Does there exist an underlying market awareness behind the psyche of the unauthorised BMTC advertisers?

Results and Discussion

The following was found after conducting field research across the four Taluks over a period of four months:

Table 1

Advertisement Distribution Across Buses (All Taluks) Comparison With Standard of Living Index Scores and PCI

Taluk	Number of Buses With Advertisements	Percentage of Buses With Advertisements	Total Number of Advertisements	Standard of Living Index Score*	Per capita Income in ₹ (Current price)**
North	13	52%	43	0.9113	7,48,342
South	14	56%	45	0.9415	9,36,983
East	15	60%	30	0.9472	3,26,297
Anekal	5	20%	27	0.8054	3,10,132

**Table 10 **Table 6*

Table 2*Distribution of Advertisements- North taluk*

Category of Advertisement (Sector Involved)	Numbers Observed
Event Management	10
Black Magic	9
Camera Rental	5
Loan Services	5
Astrology	3
Job Recruitment	2
Furniture	2
Education	1
Electronics	1
Stationery	1
Costumes	1
Home Painting Services	1
Interior Design	1
Political	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>

Table 3*Distribution of Advertisements- South Taluk*

Category of Advertisement (Sector Involved)	Numbers Observed
Black Magic	23
Medical Services	16
Demolition Service	1
Astrology	1
Political	1
Matrimonial Services	1
Religious	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>46</i>

Table 4*Distribution of advertisements- East Taluk*

Category of Advertisement (sector involved)	Numbers Observed
Black Magic	25
Job Recruitment	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>30</i>

Table 5*Distribution of Advertisements- Anekal Taluk*

Category of Advertisement (Sector Involved)	Numbers Observed
Black Magic	11
Job Recruitment	4
Education	2
Event Management	2
Electronics	2
Furniture	2
Home Cleaning Services	2
Industrial Products	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>27</i>

Human Development Indicators:

The following data was sourced upon request from the Government of Karnataka in yet another author-filed RTI. Some indicators, where mentioned, have different sources.

Table 6*Taluk-wise Per Capita Income*

Taluk	Per capita income in ₹ (Current price)
North	7,48,342
South	9,36,983
East	3,26,297
Anekal	3,10,132

Table 7*Taluk-wise Literacy Rate*

Taluk	Literacy Rate (in Percentage)
North	88.15
South	78.38
East	79.36
Anekal	86.65

Table 8*Taluk-wise Worker-participation Rate (in Percentage)*

Taluk	Worker Participation Rate (Male)	Worker Participation Rate (Female)
North	69.3	27.6
South	72.2	32.7
East	70.3	28.3
Anekal	74.8	33.1

Note. Bengaluru Urban Zilla Panchayat & Planning, Programme Monitoring and Statistics Department Government of Karnataka, 2014

Table 9*Taluk-wise Availability of Lending Institutions (Banks + Credit Societies)*

Taluk	Number of Lending Institutions
North	25
South	19
East	3
Anekal	23

Note. Directorate of Census Operations, Karnataka, 2014

Table 10*Taluk-wise HDI Rankings*

Taluk	Health Index Score	Education Index Score	Standard of Living Index Score	HDI Score
North	0.7375	0.4810	0.9113	0.6863
South	0.7526	0.6819	0.9415	0.7847
East	0.7105	0.5018	0.9472	0.6964
Anekal	0.6509	0.6160	0.8054	0.6861

Note. Human Development Division, Planning, Program Monitoring, and Statistics Department, Government of Karnataka, 2022

Among the most primary general observations with the tabulation of the recorded data was a sense of contradiction with the spatial inequality theory. If one were to operate on the assumption that the presence of unauthorised advertisements on the buses is due to institutional neglect, then a strong relationship should have been observed for a taluk's standard of living index score and the presence of unauthorised advertisements on the buses plying to the respective taluk. However, it is observed that East taluk which has the highest percentage of advertisement cover also has the highest standard of living and the Anekal taluk which has the lowest advertisement cover also has the lowest standard of living. Similar trends are observed in the respective rankings of the North and South taluk on both scales. To give support to the Spatial Inequality Theory we would have had to observe the exact opposite trends.

The outcomes that flow contrary to the Spatial Inequality Theory, in turn, give support to the assumption that perhaps the unauthorised advertisers under study do display a sense of the market, advertising only in areas with a high standard of living and thus a high product/service affordability. However, comparing the percentage cover of advertisements with per capita income gives rise to mixed

results with East, a significantly low PCI taluk having the highest cover but followed by South, North, and Anekal following their respective positions.

Delving into the analysis of Taluk-wise advertisement analysis, we shall consider the top three advertising sectors of a Taluk for conveyance. For the North taluk, the most advertised sector was for event-management services, followed by black magic advertisements and loan services respectively. The prominence of event management services could make sense given the taluk having the second-highest PCI in the district and thus a need and affordability of such services. The case of black magic advertising is more interesting as though the taluk has the highest literacy rate, it comes last on the education index. Perhaps it could be indicated that the education index, which takes into account the years of schooling is a better facilitator of scientific thinking than mere literacy. The prominence of loan advertisements corresponds with a high PCI in the taluk, however, the taluk has the lowest worker participation rate. Whether the latter indicates a higher demand for loan or should be interpreted as an incapacity to take a loan will have to be left for further study. On the other hand, the prominence of loan advertisements corresponds with the taluk having the highest number of lending institutions in the district.

The South taluk of the district shows only two prominent advertising sectors, namely black magic advertisements and medical services. Although the South taluk has the highest standard of living score, it scores lowest in both literacy rate and the education index. It is perhaps then as a result that the ~51% of the advertisements in the taluk were for black magic. A unique feature of the taluk was its healthcare advertisements, perhaps a testament to the taluk's credit of being the best-performing on the health index. Most of these advertisements happened to be offering health services and/or screenings for AIDS or other STD patients. This particular niche's logic is corroborated by the taluk having the highest number of AIDS deaths in the district (Office of the District Census Collector, Bangalore City District, 2018).

The East taluk, much like the South, also displays only two prominent advertising sectors- black magic and job recruitment. The taluk which quantitatively has the highest number of black magic advertisements among all others (which also constitutes 83.3% of its total advertisements) scores on the lower end of both literacy rate and education index compared to the North and the South which were contrary on both scales. The second-highest presence of job recruitment

advertisements is not corroborated with the worker participation rate in which the taluk is on the lower end only.

Exactly like the previously discussed taluk, Anekal too has only two prominent advertising sectors- black magic and job recruitment albeit in different proportions. Black magic advertisements make up for ~40% of the taluk's advertisements with the taluk having no extraordinary educational statistics (second in literacy rate, third in education index). However, the taluk does have the highest worker participation rate making job recruitment advertisements a good choice for the taluk. In addition, the taluk is host to an even distribution of advertisements for educational services, industrial products, electronics, furniture, etc.

As a general trend, we can observe black magic advertisements being a prominent presence across all taluks. However, it is the author's belief that their presence has less to do with any market fit in the taluks but rather the conveyance of the particular mode of advertising which allows it to skip the legal scrutiny. As for advertisements in the other sectors, while we were able to witness good examples of advertisement and market-fit in particular taluks, they happened to be the exception than the norm and gives us little confidence in these unauthorised advertisers operating under any assumption of a marketing strategy.

Limitations

The study in the author's view suffers from two major limitations. First, is its sample size. Despite having a statistically considerable sample size of 100 buses, the number was dwarfed due to the gigantic fleet of the BMTC resulting in the population being only ~1.5% of the population and having a CI of 70%. Studies equipped with more human resources at their disposal may rectify this problem encountered by this single-author study.

Second, due to the exploratory-cum-descriptive nature of the study, the inferences about the market fit might be weaker than a better statistically and metrically fine-tuned market-oriented research. Future researchers might build on the current study to achieve those ends and might even compare these trends with other Indian cities inter and intra tier to gain insights into the variation of the phenomenon, if any, on a national scale and their causes. The author himself, aims to take upon these areas in future studies as well.

Conclusion

This study investigated unauthorised advertising within Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTc) buses and aimed to explore the themes, distribution patterns, and potential advertiser awareness of target audiences across socio-economically varying city regions.

Our findings revealed a clear presence of black magic advertisements across all taluks in the Bengaluru Urban district. This prevalence likely stems from the ease of circumventing legal restrictions associated with this type of advertising. However, in some instances, advertiser recognition of market fit was observed. For example, the North taluk, boasting the second-highest per capita income, displayed prominence in event management, loan services, and camera rental advertisements.

The South taluk primarily displayed black magic advertisements. Interestingly, healthcare advertisements targeting AIDS/STD patients were also present, corresponding to the taluk's highest AIDS mortality rate in the district. It turned out difficult to establish a clear link between literacy rates or education index scores and presence of black magic advertisements. Similar to the South, the East taluk showcased black magic and job recruitment ads, with black magic ads dominating despite the taluk's average performance across educational indicators.

Anekal displayed black magic and job recruitment advertisements too, but with a more balanced distribution compared to the East taluk. The presence of job recruitment ads aligns with the taluk's highest worker participation rate. So, while some instances suggested advertisers considering market fit, black magic advertisements seemed to prioritise ease of display over targeting specific demographics. Future research with larger sample sizes and a stronger market research focus could provide more definitive insights into advertiser motives.

This study contributes to the under-researched domain of unauthorised public transport advertising and its variations across socio-economic demographics. It paves the way for further exploration of the unauthorised advertiser decision-making process and the potential impact of such advertising on ridership experiences.

The study highlights the complex dynamics of unauthorised advertising within BMTC buses, demonstrating the prevalence of black magic ads across all taluks and occasional alignment of advertisements with socio-economic indicators. However, it also reveals the limitations in establishing clear links between certain socio-economic factors and advertisement themes. This underscores the need for more nuanced analyses and larger sample sizes in future research to deepen our understanding of advertiser motives and their impact on public transport experiences. Moreover, our study also suggests the importance of considering market fit and demographic targeting in advertising strategies, especially in the context of unauthorized advertising within public transportation systems. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide valuable insights for policymakers, advertisers, and public transport authorities to improve the effectiveness and regulation of advertising practices within the urban transport systems.

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