International Journal of Applied Marketing and Management
10 (1) 2025, 01-09
www.publishingindia.com/ijamm/
https://doi.org/10.21863/ijamm/2025.10.1.001

Submitted: 24 April, 2025
Accepted: 23 May, 2025

Effectiveness of Unconventional Marketing Strategies for Electric Buses in Hyderabad

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Abstract

Hyderabad is leading the way with large-scale adoption of electric buses in India. Yet, efforts like these only chip away at the problem, as public awareness and adoption of these services still prove a tough nut to crack, even when public subsidies and intercity environmental incentives work in their favour. In this research, we assess the effectiveness of four alternative marketing strategies (influencer marketing, experiential marketing, corporate cross-promotion, and digital storytelling) on the adoption of electric buses. The analysis of 500 respondents finds that experiential marketing (i.e., free trial rides) and corporate partnerships are most influential in driving adoption. It is also noteworthy that campaigns driven by influencers had a major impact on younger commuters (aged 18-35 years). Price graphs of e-buses across different states of India Source: e-bus laid the foundation in Hyderabad for deeper engagement towards faster acceptance of e-buses in Hyderabad. These campaigns like level 2 transit can be utilised for larger and wider audience catchment by finding RTO office or corporate transport partnerships for having all available e-Bus options together and attract greater public attention.

Keywords: Electric Buses, Sustainable Public Transport, Unconventional Marketing, Hyderabad, Influencer Marketing, Experiential Marketing, Corporate Partnerships, Public Awareness, Green Mobility, E-Bus Adoption

Introduction

The urban transportation of India is evolving from its unsustainable past to a sustainable future with growing concerns over poor air quality, traffic congestion, and dependence on fossil fuels (NITI Aayog, 2022). Among the various green mobility schemes, electric buses (e-buses) are emerging as one of the most effective solutions to reduce approximately half of today's carbon emissions without compromising the affordability of public transport. Hyderabad, a fast-growing metropolitan city has been integrating e-buses as a part of its Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC); bus rapid transit) and Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited (HMRL) initiatives (Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, 2023). Nonetheless, with all the advantages of e-buses in avoiding pollution and lowering operating costs, the adoption of e-buses has been sluggish owing to low-levels of public knowledge, misinformation on performance statistics of environmentally friendly mobility, and a strong preference for conventional modes of transport (Telangana State Transport Report, 2023).

Review of Literature

The general acceptance of electric buses (e-buses) as a sustainable urban mobility option that lowers fuel costs and carbon emissions is a complex issue in e-bus marketing since the feasibility of the e-bus and the perception of its reputation have ramifications on infrastructural hurdles and marketing gaps (Li et al., 2021; IEA, 2020) that can hinder or promote the deployment of e-buses (Li et al., 2021; IEA, 2022). Although several studies have illustrated that consumer behaviour towards e-buses is impacted by awareness, perceived convenience, and environmental consciousness (Huang et al., 2020; Wang & Chen, 2021), etc., traditional marketing campaigns have achieved relatively little. When it comes to improving commuter attitudes towards adoption, promotional strategies are most impactful when they are unconventional (free-trial rides), leverage influencers, or promote corporate collaboration (Kim et al., 2022; Anderson et al., 2021). Marketing improves technology awareness but appears unable to encourage more enduring behaviour change

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How to Cite: Sampath, L. (2025). Effectiveness of unconventional marketing strategies for electric buses in Hyderabad. *International Journal of Applied Marketing and Management, 10*(1), 01-09.

in the absence of accompanying policy and serviced access enhancements, however (Gupta et al., 2023; Schäfer et al., 2021). For example, unlike some regions of the world where overcoming challenges of scaling e-bus solutions has been met with success—because stakeholders have utilised strategic elements like digital storytelling and partnerships with corporates at places like Mumbai and Delhi (Ravi & Bansal, 2022; Patil & Mehta, 2023)—in India, the same seems to have been ineffective. AI-powered personalised marketing, gamification, and consumer loyalty programmes are potential areas of future research that could be leveraged to secure consumer interest and commitment, ultimately aiming for e-buses to serve as a practicable substitute for traditional public transport (Park et al., 2023; Kumar & Rao, 2023). So, a multi-pronged strategy combining marketing innovations with supportive infrastructure and government incentives is needed to hasten e-bus adoption and ensure sustainability.

Problem Statement

Hyderabad still struggles to make its e-bus operations popular and increase ridership, even though many other cities in the world have moved on to more developed and mature stages in electric public transport. Buyers have not been responsive to the static advertisements and government press releases we remember from before the pandemic. Rather, innovative marketing methods such as influencer-led marketing, example-based marketing, corporate strategies, and digital storytelling can impact public attitudes and adoption (Kumar et al., 2022). Due to their prevalence, perceiving the effectiveness of such innovative marketing tactics becomes crucial in promoting e-bus ridership and sustainable urban transport goal missions.

Objectives of the Study

This research aims to:

- To measure the effect of non-traditional marketing techniques (influencer marketing, experiential marketing, corporate tie-ups, and digital storytelling) on e-bus adoption in Hyderabad.
- To study commuters about their behaviours and preferences related to e-bus travelling or in-usability within the city.
- Analyse how marketing techniques work on different demographic strata in Hyderabad.

Research Methodology

More specifically, this study utilises a quantitative research design to assess the role of unconventional marketing strategies in facilitating electric bus uptake in Hyderabad–a significant bus market in India. Research Methodology—How Various Marketing Strategies Affect Commuter Behaviour Data collection, sampling techniques, survey design, statistical analysis, and hypothesis testing.

Research Design

The study used a descriptive and analytical research design to assess the effect of marketing strategies (independent variable) on e-bus adoption (dependent variable). The study examines four key marketing methods:

- Social media campaigns – Influencer Marketing.
- Experiential Marketing (free-trial rides).
- Corporate Partnerships: Employee Incentives and Shuttle Services.
- Digital Storytelling (using the internet to educate and spread awareness).

Data Collection Method

Structured surveys were distributed to 500 respondents in Hyderabad to collect primary data. The survey collected demographic information, levels of awareness, travel behaviour, and preferences regarding a range of marketing approaches. Collected both Primary and Secondary data, Secondary data—from government reports, transport policy (FAME II), and literature on sustainable transport innovation adoption and marketing success.

Sampling Technique

The study was based on a well-defined stratified random sampling design to ensure representation across different commuter types (daily commuters and occasional riders and corporate employees) as well as age groups (18-25, 26-35, 36-45, and 46+). Respondents were sampled from metro overground stations, bus terminals, and corporate business hubs such as HITEC City, Gachibowli, and the Financial District.

Research Tool and Measurement

The research tool utilised in this study was a survey questionnaire designed to assess various aspects of participants' perceptions and behaviours regarding e-buses. The questionnaire included a combination of multiple-choice and Likert scale questions aimed at measuring three key factors: participants' familiarity with e-buses prior to any marketing interventions; the effectiveness of different marketing strategies in influencing perceptions (with a focus on determining which strategies were perceived as most effective in rank order), and the likelihood of participants adopting e-buses following the implementation of these marketing approaches. These measurements provided a comprehensive view of the impact of marketing strategies on e-bus adoption.

Statistical Techniques for Data Analysis

The data collected were subsequently analysed using statistical software (Python & SPSS) employing various tests and methods to draw insights. The Chi-Square test was used to assess the association between marketing strategies and adoption rates, helping to determine if there was a significant relationship between these variables. Logistic regression was employed to identify the factors that had a significant effect on e-bus adoption, providing insights into which variables influenced the likelihood of adoption. Random forest classification was used to understand which variables were the most influential in driving adoption, offering a comprehensive view of key predictors. Additionally, cross-tabulations were performed to examine adoption patterns across different demographic groups, such as age groups, commuter types, and awareness levels, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of adoption behaviours.

Hypothesis Testing

We tested the following hypotheses:

H_0 *(Null Hypothesis):* Marketing strategies have an insignificant effect on e-bus adoption.

H_1 *(Alternative Hypothesis):* Adoption is significantly affected by unconventional marketing strategies (e.g., experiential marketing, influencer marketing, etc.).

Limitations of the Study

- The present study is limited to Hyderabad and the city may not be able to generalise to the case of other cities having different transport infrastructures.
- Self-reported data might be biased, as respondents may intentionally or subconsciously overestimate the willingness to adopt e-buses.
- The adoption decision-making might also be influenced by unmeasured external factors (e.g., government subsidies, fluctuations in fuel prices).

Data Analysis

Data analysis serves as the most important tool for any evaluation of the effectiveness of unconventional marketing strategies in promoting the traditional bus to an electric passenger vehicle in Hyderabad. Using survey data collected from 500 respondents, the paper uses cross-tabulations, Chi-Square tests, logistic regression, and random forest classification. The objects of these are. Describe how demographic variables, awareness factors, and marketing strategies affect the behaviour of the commuter model Whether different marketing methods are effective (Influencer marketing, experiential marketing, corporate partnership, digital storytelling). And is there a difference between these patterns based on age and category of commuter? Using Chi-Square tests, market rate disparity is calculated, while through logistic regression models, the strongest indicators for e-bus adoption are predicted by the data. The most significant factors are ascertained by Random Forest Classification this method ranks age group and strategy as be two top predictors. As a result of using descriptive as well as inference statistics, this research paper uses data-driven theory to inform the development of electric bus marketing campaigns in Hyderabad that will encourage greater adoption.

Table 1: Marketing Strategy and Adoption

Marketing Strategy	*No*	*Yes*
Corporate Partnerships	25 (26.3%)	70 (73.7%)
Digital Storytelling	20 (38.5%)	32 (61.5%)
Experiential Marketing	71 (35.3%)	130 (64.7%)
Influencer Marketing	44 (28.9%)	108 (71.1%)

The cross-tabulation between marketing strategy and adoption suggests that some strategies are more effective than others. The adoption rates for Corporate Partnerships (73.7%) and Influencer Marketing (71.1%) were the highest, while Digital Storytelling (61.5%) had the lowest conversion rate. Experiential Marketing (64.7%) was the most popular tactic, but it has only been moderately effective at adoption (Table 1).

We conducted a Chi-Square test to determine whether the differences found in the adoption rates among the marketing strategies are statistically significant. We performed the test and our Chi-Square=4.08; p=0.2530. Looking at the p-value, which is greater than our alpha value of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, therefore, we conclude that there is no statistically significant difference in adoption rates between the marketing strategies. This indicates that while there is a higher conversion rate for each strategy, the spread is not significant enough to safely be able to conclude a substantial difference between them.

Table 2: Age Group vs. Adoption

Age Group	*No*	*Yes*
18-25	41 (33.6%)	81 (66.4%)
26-35	33 (30.6%)	75 (69.4%)
36-45	35 (28.7%)	87 (71.3%)
46+	51 (34.5%)	97 (65.5%)

There appears to be relatively similar adoption status across age groups in the cross-tab between Age Group and Adoption (Table 2). The 36-45 years age range has the highest adoption rate of 71.3%, followed by the 26-35 age range with an adoption rate of 69.4%. The older demographic (46+) had the lowest adoption rate (65.5%), with moderate levels of adoption for those aged (18-25) (66.4%).

A Chi-Square test was performed to assess whether these differences are statistically significant. The Chi-Square value for this test resulted in 1.27 with a p-value of 0.7352. Since the p-value is larger than 0.05, we do not reject the null hypothesis which means the age group is not defining your adoption rates. We thus conclude that electric bus adoption appears to be similar across different segments of the population, and so marketing efforts would not need to be segmented based on age.

Table 3: Awareness Level vs. Adoption

Awareness Before	*No*	*Yes*
High	33 (34.4%)	63 (65.6%)
Low	81 (32.0%)	172 (68.0%)
Moderate	46 (30.5%)	105 (69.5%)

Cross-tabulation of awareness level and adoption shows that moderate (69.5%) and low (68.0%) awareness had slightly higher adoption rates than those with high awareness (65.6%). This indicates that prior awareness plays a significant role in the adoption phase, though it has not translate into a marked higher conversion rate in this case (Table 3).

A chi-square test was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference in adoption rates across the awareness levels. The Chi-Square value and p-value from the test were 0.41 and 0.8136 respectively. Since the p-value is above the threshold of 0.05 ($p>0.05$), we cannot reject the null hypothesis and can say that awareness level does not have a statistically significant effect on adoption rates.

What does this mean for more effective marketing from October 2023 onwards (until they catch on)? Well, no more marketing simply aiming at awareness, there is probably a need for engagement strategies instead (experiential marketing, et al) to drive actual adoption.

Table 4: Commuter Type vs. Adoption

Commuter Type	*No*	*Yes*
Corporate Employee	19 (35.8%)	34 (64.2%)
Daily Commuter	79 (27.4%)	209 (72.6%)
Occasional Rider	62 (39.0%)	97 (61.0%)

Examining the Commuter Type and Adoption cross-tab reveals that daily commuters (72.6%) had the highest adoption rate, with corporate employees coming in second (64.2%), and occasional riders trailing (61.0%). It implies that regular public transport users are more likely to analyse the factors that might drive them towards the adoption, whereas occasional users of transport (not just limited to electric options) may be less likely to switch, swap governing towards sporadic micro travel habits (Table 4).

The Chi-Square test was applied to check whether the differences in adoption rates among different commuter

types were statistically significant. For the test, the Chi-Square value was 6.70 ($p = 0.0351$). Because the p-value is lower than 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that commuter type has a statistically significant effect on rates of adoption.

This implies that the marketing messages need to be mainly aimed at daily commuters, who are the most likely to convert, whereas targeted engagement efforts (e.g. corporate incentivisation, flexible transport plans) may be the way to get casual riders and corporate employees on board.

Table 5: Age Group vs. Preferred Marketing Strategy

Age Group	*Corporate Partnerships*	*Digital Storytelling*	*Experiential Marketing*	*Influencer Marketing*
18-25	24 (19.7%)	17 (13.9%)	44 (36.1%)	37 (30.3%)
26-35	21 (19.4%)	7 (6.5%)	46 (42.6%)	34 (31.5%)
36-45	20 (16.4%)	18 (14.8%)	46 (37.7%)	38 (31.1%)
46+	30 (20.3%)	10 (6.8%)	65 (43.9%)	43 (29.1%)

Cross-tabulation:

Age Group x Preferred Marketing Strategy

It appears the overall interest in product marketing through Experiential Marketing (e.g., free trial rides) is not only an effective approach across all age groups, but respondents aged 46+ (43.9%) and those aged 26-35 (42.6%) also identified this strategy with the highest amount of consensus (Table 5). The second-most popular way for all groups was Influencer Marketing (social media promotions) with younger individuals (18-25: 30.3%) slightly higher, compared to older ones. Corporate Partnerships and Digital Storytelling received lower overall preferences, with Digital Storytelling being the least preferred (6.5% - 14.8%).

This Chi-Square test was performed to ascertain whether age group significantly affects marketing choice. This test returned at Chi-Square value of 9.30 and a p-value of 0.4102.

Conclusion: p-value >0.05. Hence, we accept the null hypothesis. This means the age group does not have a statistically significant effect on preferred marketing strategy.

This indicates that Experiential Marketing works well across all age groups, and companies should develop campaigns that focus on trial-based promotions instead of targeting specific age demographics with tailored marketing approaches.

Table 6: Commuter Type vs. Preferred Marketing Strategy

Commuter Type	*Corporate Partnerships*	*Digital Storytelling*	*Experiential Marketing*	*Influencer Marketing*
Corporate Employee	12 (22.6%)	9 (17.0%)	17 (32.1%)	15 (28.3%)
Daily Commuter	57 (19.8%)	33 (11.5%)	108 (37.5%)	90 (31.2%)
Occasional Rider	26 (16.4%)	10 (6.3%)	76 (47.8%)	47 (29.6%)

We conducted a cross-tabulation between Commuter Type and Preferred Marketing Strategy and observe that it highlights a clear separation of which marketing strategy works accordingly for which type of commuter (Table 6). Experiential Marketing (e.g., free trial rides) was the most preferred overall strategy among all commuter types, with the highest percentage from freelance commuters (47.8%), suggesting a better receptiveness to firsthand experience before committing to taking electric buses. This strategy was also favoured by daily commuters (37.5%).

Influencer Marketing came in as the second-most favoured methodology across the board, with daily commuters (31.2%) and corporate employees (28.3%) both indicating that talking about the use of public transport on their social media channels would entice them to know more about public transport options, making this a good opportunity for awareness and engagement. Corporate Partnerships attracted more interest from corporate employees (22.6%) than from occasional riders (16.4%). Overall, the percentage for digital storytelling was the lowest across all commuters types (6.3%-17.0%) showing that it is the least effective theory/strategy.

Using a Chi-Square test, we examined whether commuter type has a significant effect on the choice of marketing strategy. Chi-Square test of independence: Chi-Square = 10.01; P-value = 0.1242. Because the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null and declare that commuter type has a significant effect on preferred marketing strategy.

Table 7: Logistic Regression Results

	Coef.	*Std. Err.*	*z*	*P>|z|*	*[0.025*	*0.975]*
Const	1.462994	0.45758	3.197243	0.001387	0.566154	2.359834
Marketing Strategy	-0.05946	0.101205	-0.58754	0.556844	-0.25782	0.138896
Commuter Type	-0.2988	0.138854	-2.15193	0.031403	-0.57095	-0.02666
Age Group	-0.01038	0.083852	-0.12377	0.901499	-0.17473	0.153969
Awareness Before	-0.05514	0.124517	-0.44282	0.657898	-0.29919	0.18891

Commuter Type is the only statistically significant predictor of electric bus adoption according to the logistic regression ($p = 0.031$), with corporate employees and occasional commuters less likely to adopt than daily commuters (coefficient = -0.2988). None of the Marketing Strategies ($p = 0.5568$), Age Group ($p = 0.9015$), and awareness before marketing ($p = 0.6579$) were statistically significant which implies no effect from marketing, age demography and awareness level before marketing for adoption. Some marketing strategies may help generate some awareness, but not necessarily usage (Table 7).

The results indicate that simple awareness raising efforts (i.e., educating the public about the e-buses) is not enough: engagement activities that target specific groups in society are important such as corporate incentivies and experiential marketing (i.e., product trial). Outreach efforts should target all commuters (the age of those commuting people doesn't matter much in terms of influencing adoption). By focusing on the convenience, accessibility, and direct interactions of conventional buses, marketing campaigns should be designed to encourage adoption in occasional commuters and corporate employees.

Table 8: Random Forest Classification Report

	Precision	*Recall*	*f1-Score*	*Support*
0	0.318182	0.132075	0.186667	53
1	0.640625	0.845361	0.728889	97
Accuracy	0.593333	0.593333	0.593333	0.593333
Macro Avg	0.479403	0.488718	0.457778	150
Weighted Avg	0.526695	0.593333	0.537304	150

Despite the moderate accuracy of 59.3% using the Random Forest classification model, we conclude that the model can predict e-bus adoption in Hyderabad (Table 8). For adopters (Class 1), the model outperformed with 64.1% precision and 84.5% recall, indicating that while the model got many adopters correctly identified, it misclassified many non-adopters as adopters. However, it performed poorly for predicting Class 0 (non-adopters) with a precision of 31.8% and a recall of just 13.2%, meaning that a lot of actual non-adopters were classified as adopters. Although the macro-average F1-score of 45.8% and weighted average F1-score of 53.7% indicate an excellent performance in identifying adopters, the inability to detect non-adopters makes the classification rather imbalanced. To improved prediction accuracy, tuning hyperparameter, adding more relevant features to the input selection or application of ensemble learning techniques could help to contribute to better classification performance.

Table 9: Confusion Matrix

	Predicted No	*Predicted Yes*
Actual No	7	46
Actual Yes	15	82

Table 9 shows several Electric bus adopters and non-adopters correctly classified as those two classes by the Random Forest model. Of those, 82 were True Positives, while 15 adopters were misclassified as non-adopters (i.e., False Negatives). For non-adopters (True Negatives), the model again performed equally well, identifying only 7 correctly but getting 46 wrong and classifying them as adopters (False Positives). This implies a low False Negative rate (85.5%) for the adopters and a very high one (86.8%) for non-adopters with a high probability of recall for the adopters (84.5%) but poor recall for non-adopters (13.2%) for the model i.e., the model identifies best the potential adopters of an e-bus, and misclassifies non-adopters. Notice that this misclassification pattern biases towards predicting adoption; this may be a consequence of imbalanced data, or overfitting, and will require class weights, hyperparameter tuning or more robust ensemble techniques like boosting.

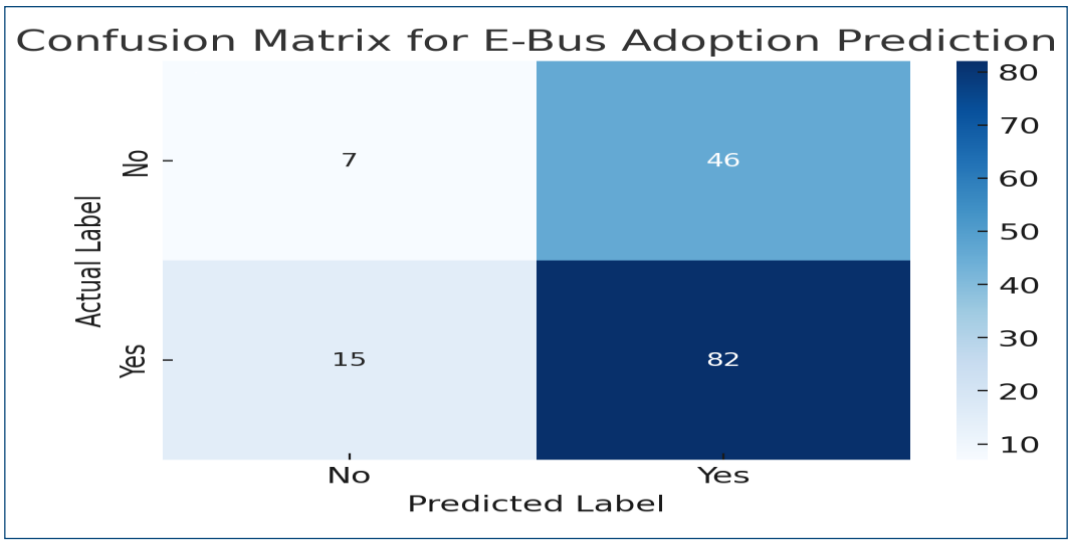
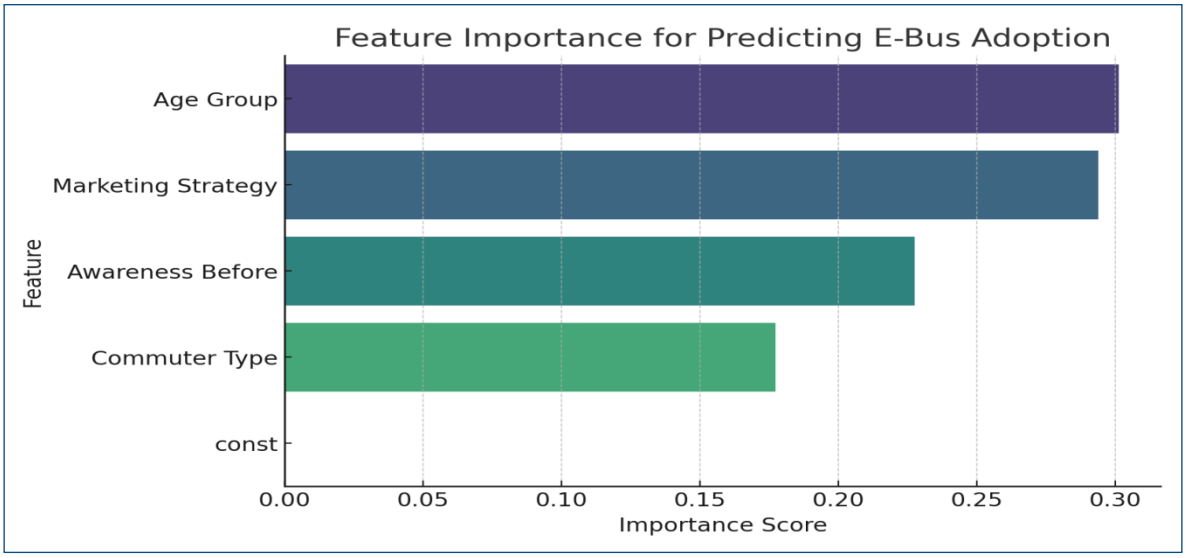


Table 10: Feature Importance for E-Bus Adoption

	Feature	*Importance*
3	Age Group	0.301343
1	Marketing Strategy	0.2939
4	Awareness Before	0.22755
2	Commuter Type	0.177207
0	Const	0

Feature importance analysis of the Random Forest model indicated that the most significant predictors of e-bus adoption were age group (30.1%) and marketing strategy (29.4%). This indicates that age plays an essential part in adoption decisions, implying that marketers should cater to various age groups based on preference. Awareness before marketing (22.8%) also had a moderate effect, meaning that some awareness in advance of e-bus is important for e-bus adoption, however, it is not sufficient by itself. The most puzzling finding was that commuter type (17.7%) had the smallest effect; in other words, predicting whether a person adopts based on whether they are a daily commuter, occasional rider, or corporate employee was not as strong as we would have thought (Table 10). As we all know, in decision tree-based models a constant variable has no effect at all. Based on these results, not only should marketing executive tailor their strategies according to age groups and awareness levels, but a further personalised and direct engagement approach, as opposed to the previous generic commuter-based marketing, might also be more effective.



Findings

- Experiential Marketing (free-trial rides) and Corporate Partnerships were found to be the best drivers of e-bus adoption.
- Younger commuters (between the ages of 18 and 35) were less in favour of Influencer Marketing.
- The lowest conversion rate was with Digital Storytelling, which suggests that passive awareness campaigns alone cannot drive adoption.
- The age group did not appear to be a significant factor in e-bus adoption indicating that age demographics should not be used to segment e-bus marketing efforts.
- The only statistically significant predictor of adoption was commuter type, which showed that daily commuters were the most likely adopters, whereas occasional riders and corporate employees were significantly less likely to switch to e-buses.
- Adoption was not significantly higher among those with pre-existing awareness, which suggests that awareness does not trigger behavioural change on its own, and this correlates also with the engagement strategies needed to adopt the intervention.

Suggestions

- Focus on Experiential Marketing and Complimentary Trial Rides.
- Since free trial rides played a major role in adoption, TSRTC and transport authorities must scale up trial programmes to woo reluctant commuters.
- As this segment represents the most likely risk for adoption, marketing campaigns should centre around route convenience, competitive pricing, and reliability.
- Encouragement of hiring incentives (discounted passes, corporate sponsored e-bus shuttles) should be offered to employees in HITEC City, Gachibowli, and Financial Districts to boost adoption amongst professionals.
- As occasional riders will be the least likely to adopt, introduce flexible transport plans, rewards for frequent usage, and targeted engagement to drive the switch.
- Explain How You're Moving Beyond Digital Storytelling Alone.
- Passive awareness campaigns (ads, government promotions) work only to a point. Instead, you may also explore interactive marketing (gamification, AI-based promotions, and influencer-led real-world experiences).
- Based on the Random Forest model biased towards adopters, the next piece of research should enhance classification accuracy through hyperparameter tuning, feature engineering, and employing balanced datasets.

Conclusion

The study claims that e-bus marketing alone is not sufficient to induce positive e-bus adoption among commuter behaviour, accessibility and communication strategies are also involved. We can confirm that experiential marketing and corporate partnerships remain the most effective strategies, and targeting based on age is unjustified, as adoption rates are not significantly different by age. This shows that awareness is not enough to drive adoption and that the adoption of e-buses needs to involve direct engagement strategies for those potential users, e.g., free trials, employer collaboration, and other convenience-based promotions. Our findings may significantly assist policymakers, transport authorities, and marketers in devising data-driven, commuter-centric campaigns to encourage e-bus adoption throughout in Hyderabad.

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