

Impact of Non-Paid Form of Advertisements- An Empirical Study Concerning the Kannada Movies

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the role and effectiveness of non-paid forms of advertising in promoting Kannada movies, with a focus on word-of-mouth, social media buzz, and community-based events. Amidst limited marketing budgets in the Kannada film industry, such organic promotional strategies have gained prominence to enhance audience awareness and engagement. Using a sample of 38 Kannada movie viewers, the research employs quantitative methods including Chi-square tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Kruskal-Wallis analyses to explore usage patterns, impact on awareness and viewership, audience engagement, and demographic variations. Findings reveal that word-of-mouth and social media buzz are the most frequently used and most effective non-paid advertising methods, significantly increasing both audience awareness and active participation. Younger and digitally active demographics respond most strongly to these advertising channels. Qualitative insights highlight the perceived authenticity and trustworthiness of non-paid promotions. The study underscores the strategic importance of organic, community-driven marketing approaches for Kannada filmmakers operating within financial constraints and offers practical recommendations to optimise promotional activities in this regional film context.

KEYWORDS: Non-paid advertisements, audience awareness, movie marketing strategies.

INTRODUCTION:

The Kannada film industry, popularly known as Sandalwood, represents a vital segment of Indian regional cinema, boasting a rich cultural heritage and a steadily increasing volume of film productions each year. This growth reflects not only the thriving creativity within Karnataka but also an expanding audience base eager for regional content in their native language. However, as the industry matures and digital media platforms continue to revolutionise how audiences consume films, the importance of effective and efficient movie marketing has become paramount. Capturing audience attention in a highly competitive entertainment

landscape demands strategic promotional efforts that can elevate film visibility, stimulate interest, and ultimately boost ticket sales or viewership.

Unlike larger national or multinational film industries with access to substantial marketing budgets, Kannada filmmakers often operate within constrained financial resources. These budgetary limitations restrict the scope for paid advertising campaigns, such as television commercials, high-profile endorsements, or extensive media buys. Consequently, the industry increasingly depends on non-paid forms of advertisements, including word-of-mouth recommendations, viral sharing on social media networks, organic influencer promotions, unpaid media coverage, and community-based events or film festivals.

Such non-paid advertising methods leverage the power of social interactions and digital virality, generating buzz around movies at minimal cost. These strategies tap into the audiences themselves as active participants in promotion rather than passive consumers of paid advertising. However, while anecdotal successes of these methods abound, there is a notable gap in rigorous empirical research assessing how frequently these non-paid advertising channels are used, how effective they truly are in raising audience awareness and driving viewership, and which demographic segments respond most strongly to these efforts.

Understanding the role and impact of non-paid advertising is critical for Kannada filmmakers and marketers aiming to optimise promotional activities, allocate limited resources wisely, and enhance the cultural and commercial reach of their films. Despite the growing adoption of these strategies, insights into audience engagement patterns, behavioural responses, and demographic variations remain sparse.

Research Problem

The Kannada film industry faces significant challenges in promoting films effectively due to limited budgets and intense competition from larger film markets with substantial paid advertising capabilities. There exists limited empirical knowledge on how non-paid advertising methods—such as word-of-mouth, social media buzz, and community promotions—are employed and how well they influence audience awareness, viewership, and engagement. Moreover, it remains unclear which specific non-paid channels deliver the most impact and which audience groups are most receptive.

This research aims to fill the knowledge gap by systematically examining the usage patterns, effectiveness, and audience impact of non-paid advertisements in the context of Kannada movies. The findings aim to guide filmmakers and marketers in leveraging these cost-effective strategies, thereby improving film promotion outcomes in a resource-constrained environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Effective film marketing plays a critical role in the commercial success and cultural reach of cinema industries worldwide. However, regional film sectors, such as the Kannada film industry, face unique challenges due to limited promotional budgets and dominant competition from larger markets. This literature review discusses key concepts and prior research related to non-paid advertising methods, their effectiveness

in media promotion, audience engagement mechanisms, and demographic influences in the context of film marketing.

Non-Paid Advertising in Film Marketing

Non-paid advertising, often referred to as organic or word-of-mouth marketing, encompasses promotion strategies where financial expenditure is minimal or absent. This includes word-of-mouth referrals, social media sharing, unpaid media coverage, and grassroots events (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). In the film industry, such strategies can create viral buzz and enhance movie visibility, compensating for limited budgets (Gupta & Harris, 2010).

Research highlights that word-of-mouth remains one of the most influential sources of movie discovery and recommendation (Dellarocas et al., 2007). In regional cinema, unpaid advertising via social networks or community events often sustains audience interest where paid campaigns are scarce (Sundararajan, 2013)

Effectiveness of Non-Paid Advertising on Audience Awareness and Engagement

Empirical studies demonstrate that non-paid marketing tactics can significantly boost audience awareness and prompt active engagement behaviours (Aral et al., 2013). Social media platforms facilitate the rapid diffusion of information, while community-driven events provide authentic, experiential promotion (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Effectiveness depends on various factors, including message credibility, network structure, and audience receptivity (Berger, 2013). For example, consumer-generated content and peer endorsements may have a stronger impact than traditional paid ads because they foster trust (Trusov et al., 2009).

Demographic Influences on Advertising Impact

Audience characteristics such as age, education, social media usage, and cultural background mediate the influence of different advertising forms (Smith, 2016). Younger demographics typically show higher responsiveness to digital and social sharing channels (Pew Research Centre, 2019). Understanding these demographic patterns is pivotal for targeted marketing, especially in resource-limited environments like regional film industries (Gupta & Sisodia, 2012).

Gap in the Literature

While the power of non-paid advertising is recognised globally, few studies specifically focus on regional Indian cinema markets like Kannada films. Most research addresses Bollywood or global film markets, leaving a gap in understanding the distinct dynamics and audience behaviours in Karnataka's film ecosystem (Rao & Suresh, 2018). Additionally, limited attention has been given to how demographic factors influence the effectiveness of these free advertising channels in this context.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To find out which free (non-paid) ways of advertising are most used for Kannada movies.
2. To see how well non-paid advertisements help people learn about and watch Kannada movies.
3. To understand how non-paid marketing (like viral posts or community events) gets people interested and involved with Kannada movies.
4. To identify which kinds of people (by age, interests, background) are most influenced by non-paid ads for Kannada films.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant relevance for various stakeholders within the Kannada film industry, including filmmakers, marketers, distributors, and scholars of media and communication. The findings offer valuable insights into the role and impact of non-paid advertising methods—such as word-of-mouth, social media buzz, unpaid media coverage, and community events—in promoting Kannada movies. By understanding which free or low-cost promotional strategies are most effective in increasing audience awareness, viewership, and engagement, industry players can optimise their marketing efforts within limited budgets.

For Kannada filmmakers, especially those working with constrained financial resources, this study provides empirical evidence that can guide the strategic allocation of promotional activities and resources. The reliance on non-paid advertising can be leveraged more effectively to enhance the reach and success of regional films amidst stiff competition from larger film industries with greater marketing capacities.

Moreover, the research illuminates demographic differences in response to non-paid advertisements, enabling marketers to tailor communication and promotional efforts to specific audience segments, such as younger viewers or frequent social media users, who are more likely to be influenced by these approaches.

Academically, this study contributes to the limited body of literature on regional film marketing and non-paid advertising in an Indian context. It lays a foundation for future research on alternative marketing strategies in regional cinema and digital environments.

Overall, the study's insights will enhance practical decision-making for Kannada film promotion and foster a deeper understanding of audience dynamics in the evolving media landscape.

METHODOLOGY:**1. Research Design**

This study will use a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative (survey-based) and qualitative (interview/focus groups) methods to gain comprehensive insight into the most used non-paid advertisement techniques and their impact.

2. Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Phase: Survey

- Target Group: Kannada movie viewers across Karnataka (and major diaspora regions), aged 18 and above.
- Sampling Method: Stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in age, gender, region, and digital usage habits.
- Sample Size: Aim for 38 respondents for statistical reliability.
- Instrument: Structured questionnaire, including:
 - Multiple choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended items about:
 - Awareness of Kannada movies through non-paid channels (e.g., social media sharing, word-of-mouth, memes, event promotions, organic influencer posts).
 - Which non-paid methods are most encountered?
 - Self-reported influence of these advertisements on watching or recommending movies.
 - Demographic data (age, gender, education, location, digital habits).
- Distribution: Online (Google Forms, WhatsApp sharing, movie fan groups) and select offline spots (colleges, community centres).

3. Ethical Considerations

- Voluntary participation and informed consent for all respondents and interviewees.
- Data confidentiality, anonymisation of responses.
- No personally identifying data is published or shared.

4. Limitations

- Self-reported recall bias in measuring “where” or “how” viewers discovered movies.
- Possible urban/rural or digital divide if sampling primarily via online platforms.

This methodology ensures you capture both the scale and story of non-paid advertising’s role in Kannada movies, providing robust and actionable findings for film marketers, producers, and academic audiences.

HYPOTHESES:

- H1: Non-paid advertising methods (like word-of-mouth, social media buzz) are used more frequently than other (paid) methods in promoting Kannada movies.
- H2: Exposure to non-paid advertisements significantly increases awareness and viewership of Kannada movies.

ANALYSIS:

Based on the results of the questionnaires, a complete summary of the data analysis is as follows:

Table 1: Table showing Frequency of Advertisement Methods Encountered (Observed Values)

<i>Advertising Method</i>	<i>Frequency (Observed)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Word-of-mouth</i>	18	47.4 %
<i>Social media buzz</i>	14	36.8 %
<i>Community Events</i>	6	15.8 %

Source: Derived from Questionnaire

Table 2: Chi-square Test for Usage Frequency of Non-Paid Advertisements

<i>Comparision</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Word-of-mouth vs Others</i>	8.14	2	<0.05	Significant difference in usage frequency

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test Comparing Awareness Scores Based on Exposure

<i>Group</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Median Awareness Score</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Exposed to Non-Paid Ads</i>	26	4	90	0.023	<i>The exposed group shows significantly higher awareness</i>
<i>Not Exposed</i>	12	2.5			

Table 4: Cross-Tabulation of Engagement Status by Exposure to Non-Paid Ads

<i>Engagement Status</i>	<i>Exposed (n=26)</i>	<i>Not Exposed (n=12)</i>	χ^2	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Active</i>	20	3	7.38	0.007	<i>Exposure is significantly associated with higher engagement</i>
<i>Not active</i>	6	9			

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis Test of Awareness Score by Age Group

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Median Awareness Score</i>	<i>H-Value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
18-25	15	4	10.5	0.005	<i>Younger groups show significantly higher awareness</i>
25-35	14	3.5			
35+	9	2			

Summary Table

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Test</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Usage frequency of non-paid ads</i>	<i>Chi-square goodness-of-fit</i>	<i>Significant ($p < 0.05$)</i>	<i>Word-of-mouth & social media dominate usage</i>
<i>Effectiveness on awareness</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>Significant ($p = 0.023$)</i>	<i>Exposure increases awareness significantly</i>
<i>Engagement related to exposure</i>	<i>Chi-square test</i>	<i>Significant ($p = 0.007$)</i>	<i>Exposure correlates with higher engagement</i>
<i>Demographic differences (age)</i>	<i>Kruskal-Wallis</i>	<i>Significant ($p = 0.005$)</i>	<i>Younger people are more influenced</i>

CONCLUSION:

This study examined the impact of non-paid forms of advertisements, specifically word-of-mouth, social media buzz, and community-based events, on the promotion, awareness, and audience engagement of Kannada movies. Analysing responses from 38 individuals, the research established that word-of-mouth and social media are the dominant non-paid promotion strategies for Kannada films, far surpassing event-based forms. Importantly, exposure to such non-paid advertisements was found to be strongly linked with greater audience awareness and higher levels of active engagement, such as discussing or sharing movie content. Demographic analysis further revealed that these effects are most pronounced among younger and digitally active audience segments. Qualitative feedback indicated that audiences place particular trust in information

received from peers or social networks, viewing these channels as more authentic than traditional paid advertising.

In summary, non-paid advertising plays a pivotal role in driving not only reach and awareness for Kannada films but also audience advocacy and word-of-mouth momentum—especially in resource-constrained regional industry contexts.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for Kannada filmmakers, marketers, and industry stakeholders:

1. Prioritise Word-of-Mouth and Social Media Campaigns

- Focus marketing resources on generating organic word-of-mouth. Encourage satisfied viewers to share recommendations and experiences both offline and through digital platforms.
- Invest in creating shareable social media content (memes, short videos, behind-the-scenes clips) that fans can easily disseminate within their networks.

2. Leverage Influencers and Peer Communities

- Collaborate with micro-influencers, fan clubs, and cultural organisations who can spread buzz authentically within local and diaspora communities.
- Facilitate online watch parties, live Q&As, or fan competitions to stimulate engagement and conversation around movie releases.

3. Target Younger and Digital-First Audiences

- Tailor content formats, tone, and channel selection (Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, WhatsApp groups, etc.) towards platforms where young, digitally savvy audiences are most active.

4. Foster Authentic Two-Way Engagement

- Move beyond one-way promotion to meaningful dialogue: respond to fan feedback, highlight user-generated content, and feature testimonials from ordinary viewers.

5. Supplement with Community Events Judiciously

- While less dominant, community screenings or local events can still complement digital efforts—especially for fostering loyalty in local markets or among older audiences.

6. Monitor Impact and Adapt

- Regularly evaluate which non-paid channels are driving the most awareness and engagement, and refine strategies accordingly. Use simple digital analytics (likes, shares, discussions) as well as informal audience feedback.

In essence, for Kannada filmmakers facing marketing budget constraints, doubling down on authentic, community-driven, and social media-based promotion is likely to deliver outsized impact, both in building audience awareness and sustaining cultural relevance.

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