



STATUESQUE MELODIES: THE TALE OF 'THE GOLDEN MAN' AND URBAN BEGGARS

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Street performance, commonly referred to as busking, entails the act of publicly engaging in performances or entertainment within a shared environment with the primary intention of generating voluntary donations from people who happen to be around. Street performers, also referred to as buskers, are individuals who engage in the practice of performing acts in public spaces. Street performance has a rich historical lineage, characterised by the presence of itinerant minstrels, troubadours, mountebanks, comedians, and showmen who engaged in public performances inside street fairs as a means of livelihood. (Ho & Au, 2021)

The origins of busking are murky because street performances have been a part of the culture of virtually every human society. However, ancient Roman agricultural festivals were the first documented performances by buskers, as detailed in the book, *The Buskers: A History of Street Entertainment* (Cohen & Greenwood, 1981). Despite the existence of empirical evidence supporting the overall positive impact of street performance on public spaces, the legitimacy of this form of artistic expression continues to face scrutiny. A significant concern has arisen around the conflation between busking and begging, and because of this, there has been a negative perspective that has been developed by the public equating busking with begging.

TYPES OF BUSKING:

Multiple types of busking exist, with the most prevalent ones being circle shows, walk-by acts, and spotlight artists.

- Circle shows. Busking typically occurs in crowded areas with lots of people walking by, including tourist destinations, major city squares, metro stations, etc. The presence of a distinct beginning and end for the duration of the performance distinguishes circular shows. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this particular presentation is commonly accompanied by the integration of street theatre, puppetry, comedic performances, juggling acts, and musical elements. (Angla-daTort et al., 2019) Circle displays are widely regarded as the most financially lucrative kind of street performances.
- Walk-by acts. Busking typically involves musical performances, living statues or any other act which has no clear beginning or end. Moreover, it is observed that the individuals passing by only allocate a brief period to observe or witness the performance (Broad, 2014c). The profitability of walk-by acts is comparatively lower relative to circle shows.
- Spotlight performance. Buskers showcase their acts to the occupants of vehicles at a crosswalk during a traffic light. The potential activities encompassed within this category may consist of juggling, performing magic tricks, and engaging in a modest form of dance. The duration of the show should be brief and concise in order to accommodate the limited timeframe during which the traffic light is in the 'red' phase. This category of performance enjoys greater popularity in Latin America compared to other regions. (Del Rosario De, 2022)

Figure 1 | Comparison between Beggar & Buskers



DIFFERENTIATING BUSKING AND BEGGING

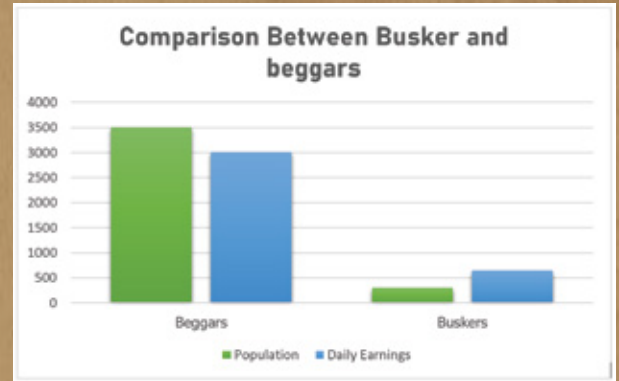
Although there is ample evidence supporting the benefits of street performance, its validity continues to be a subject of controversy. A significant concern lies in the lack of clarity about the differences between busking and begging. The act of begging refers to the action of requesting alms or seeking assistance as a charitable gesture. Street performance has artistic qualities. According to Fisher (1996), the term 'public art' encompasses all types of artistic expression that are displayed in public spaces (p. 43). According to Riggle (2010), street art may be characterised as a kind of art that is primarily transient in nature, often inexpensive to produce, accessible to the public at no cost, and lacking a specific owner or authority figure to manage it (p. 249).

People who attend street performances build a brief imagined community with the help of street performers (Gruzd et al. 2011; McNeill 2002). Street performance art is a kind of art that demonstrates the place or the country culture through its creative ways. Moreover, street performance has the capacity to contribute to the development and growth of urban areas. In contemporary times, urban areas endeavour to cultivate innovation and creativity as a means of promoting their respective identities. This promotional strategy is mostly executed through the cultivation of cultural, artistic, and creative industries, which in turn facilitate the emergence of novel urban spaces and businesses. The ultimate objective of these endeavours is to foster economic growth within these cities. (Krätke, 2011)

Mirjat et al. (2017) examined the phenomenon of begging and highlighted its dual nature as both an unorthodox social evil and a socio-economic component inside societies worldwide. The issue at hand is a pervasive global problem.

The research conducted in the Hyderabad division of Sindh reveals that poverty, unemployment, criminality, and educational background are factors that exhibit a positive correlation with the act of begging.

Figure 2 | Comparison between Beggar & Buskers



ANALYSIS OF EARNINGS

During our investigation of street performers, also known as buskers, in several areas of Islamabad, including F7 and Lake View Park, we saw a notable discrepancy in their income when compared to that of beggars. Despite their creative contributions, buskers receive significantly lower income. Their few numbers also impede their capacity to express their worries to authorities. We saw a clear distinction between buskers who are engaged and safeguarded by the management of Lake View Park, and buskers who operate independently. The latter group frequently encounters heightened attention and menaces from law enforcement, exacerbating their difficulties.

Table 1 | Author's Survey on Buskers

Author's Survey on Buskers				
Sr no.	RESPONDENT	AMOUNT EARNED DAILY	LOCATION	COLOUR
1	RESPONDENT 'A'	600	F7 MARKAZ	GOLDEN
2	RESPONDENT 'B'	700	F7 MARKAZ	SILVER
3	RESPONDENT 'C'	600	LAKE VIEW PARK	SILVER
4	RESPONDENT 'D'	650	LAKE VIEW PARK	GOLDEN
5	RESPONDENT 'E'	500	F6	GOLDEN
6	RESPONDENT 'F'	550	E8	GOLDEN
7	RESPONDENT 'G'	700	F11	SILVER

THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN MAN

Muhammad Ehsaan is the actual name of Islamabad's famous 'Golden Man'. The individual is located in a highly populated area of Islamabad, close to the renowned Jinnah Super Market. His appearance bears resemblance that of a golden statue, owing to the application of metallic gold paint that envelops his entire body. Living statues are a regular sight in numerous European towns, although they remain relatively rare in Asian cities. However, it is noteworthy that the 'Golden Man' asserts himself as Pakistan's first street performer of this nature. (Correspondent, 2022)

In a filmed video conversation, according to Golden Man, the existence of talent in Pakistan is thought to hold no significance. This has led him to contemplate permanently leaving his chosen occupation, a lot of which has to do with the maltreatment he has endured from city dwellers. He claimed that he has experienced physical assault at the hands of individuals often referred to as 'thugs' in public settings. Subsequently, when visiting the local police station to formally report the incident, the individual was subjected to more physical aggression at the hands of law enforcement personnel. Moreover, the Golden Man of Islamabad has recently encountered a potential threat in the form of Steel Man, an individual with a similar performing style who has made attempts to operate within the same neighbourhood. (DailyTimes.Pk & Jamil, 2022)

The case of the Golden Man of Islamabad, a street artist, exemplifies a notable illustration. Despite the distinct nature of his performance and the commendation bestowed upon him by the former Deputy Commissioner of Islamabad, the individual in question encountered instances of harassment from both law enforcement personnel and other members of society. This implies a lack of adequate provisions and recognition of rights for street performers within the country. (Correspondent, 2022)

In contrast, Pakistan has a significant population of individuals involved in the act of begging, with estimates ranging from 2 million to 25 million. (Nation, 2021) The existence of a considerable number of individuals involved in begging, some of whom may not be genuinely facing financial hardship, might provide notable challenges for street artists.

WAY FORWARD WITH BUSKINGS:

The impact of buskers have is crucial to the society as a whole, specifically in their ability to foster a certain 'branding' of the cityscape with their vibrant performances, which function to enhance the diversity of the urban life, bring joy, provoke thought, and enable a sense of community. By supporting them, we can create a more inclusive and culturally rich environment.

Awareness about the positive impacts of buskers can be built by:

1. **Busking Festivals.** Facilitate the arrangement of busking festivals, providing a platform for street performers to exhibit their artistic abilities. This platform not only serves as a means for buskers to display their talents, but also plays a significant role in the promotion of local culture and arts.
2. **Collaboration with Local Businesses.** Engage in partnerships with nearby businesses to establish dedicated venues for buskers to showcase their performances. This has the potential to foster a dynamic urban ambiance and enhance the appeal of businesses, thereby drawing a larger client base.
3. **Supporting Buskers.** Collaborate with municipal authorities in order to establish regulatory measures related to busking activities, whilst simultaneously offering assistance and resources to the buskers themselves. This may encompass the allocation of defined performance areas, and potentially even the provision of financial support.

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