International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management (IJSREM)
Volume: 10 Issue: 02 | Feb - 2026 SJIF Rating: 8.659 ISSN: 2582-3930

The Matka Effect vs. The Blinds-Down Paradox: A Digital Audit of Occupant Resentment Toward Glass Facades in Ahmedabad's Hot-Dry Climate

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Abstract - This study investigates the failure of glass-intensive architecture in Ahmedabad's hot-dry climate through the Blinds-Down Paradox, where occupants nullify promised transparency by permanently closing shades to escape solar stress. I contrast this with the Matka Effect, describing the psychological visual coolth of earthen materials. Using digital ethnography via Google Street View, I measured Occupant Resentment by calculating obscured glazed surfaces. The data reveals a stark performance divide: commercial towers on the SG Highway showed a 78% visual failure rate, whereas institutional buildings like CEPT and IIM Ahmedabad maintained high functional transparency. To validate these findings, a Visual Perception Survey was conducted, in which 82% of respondents associated earthen textures with thermal comfort, while glass was linked to Heat Anxiety. This confirms that glass acts as a psychological stressor in arid regions, whereas terracotta and brick provide a protective skin aligned with local thermal expectations. The research concludes that for architecture in India to be functional and ethical, designers must prioritize breathable earthen skins over high-reflectivity glass to ensure long-term occupant well-being.

Key Words: matka effect, blinds-down paradox, Ahmedabad, terracotta facades, digital ethnography, thermal psychology.

1.INTRODUCTION

In Ahmedabad, where summer temperatures frequently exceed 45°C, corporate architecture on the SG Highway continues to favour floor-to-ceiling glass. While marketed as modern, these glass boxes ignore the desert climate, creating a permanent thermal and visual crisis. This research explores the conflict between transparency and comfort through two core concepts: the Matka Effect and the Blinds-Down Paradox.

The Matka Effect refers to the Visual Coolth and psychological comfort provided by earthen skins, as seen at CEPT University and IIM Ahmedabad. In contrast, the Blinds-Down Paradox highlights the irony of glass buildings being rendered opaque by occupants who use makeshift covers to hide from the sun. By combining a digital facade audit with a human perception survey, this study argues that the glass box is a psychological stressor. To restore urban comfort, we must return to the logic of Breathable Earth, designing skins that protect the occupant rather than punishing them.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to prove that glass facades are a functional failure in India's hot-dry climates by quantifying occupant rejection of these surfaces.
By comparing glass towers with earthen campuses, I aim to show that materials like brick and terracotta are more ethical and practical because they provide Visual Coolth without forcing users to hide behind blinds.

1.3 Scope

Compares SG Highway glass towers with the campuses of CEPT and IIM Ahmedabad.

1.4 Limitations

- Uses Google Street View snapshots
- No direct temperature measurements or occupant interviews were conducted.

2.METHODOLOGY

Since I am conducting this research remotely, I used a method called Digital Ethnography. I choose Ahmedabad because it has a perfect mix of old earthen institutions and new glass towers.

2.1 Data Collection

Sample Selection: I compared ten buildings in total. Five represent the Glass Paradox along the commercial SG Highway, and five represent Earthen Skins at CEPT University, and IIM Ahmedabad.

Fig - 1: Glass-dominated buildings on SG Highway and IIM Ahmedabad and CEPT University

Digital Visual Audit: I used Google Street View to virtually walk past these facades. This allowed me to capture high resolution screenshots of the building envelopes exactly as they appear to the sun and the public.

Temporal Consistency: To ensure the data reflected permanent habits rather than a one-time event, I used the historical timeline tool. I observed the same facades across various years and months to confirm that occupant behaviour was a consistent response to the architecture.

Peak Solar Observation: I specifically pulled data from images taken between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM. This window represents the peak for solar stress and glare, providing the most honest evidence of how occupants cope with the building's thermal performance.

Perception Survey: To validate the digital audit, I conducted a Visual Preference Survey. I presented participants with side-by-side images of the glass towers and the earthen institutional buildings.
Participants were asked a single, focused question: *Which building exterior makes you feel more thermally comfortable and visually relaxed?* This allowed me to map human psychology against physical architecture.

2.2 Analytical Tools

Visual Failure Rate (VFR): This is my primary metric to measure Occupant Resentment. It is the percentage of window panes blocked by internal shading like curtains, blinds, or cardboard. A high VFR indicates the design has failed its purpose of providing a view.

Reflection Analysis: I qualitatively compared specular reflection (harsh glare from glass) against diffuse reflection (soft light scattering from brick/terracotta). This helped interpret why certain materials cause Heat Anxiety while others offer Visual Coolth.

2.3 The Myth of Transparency

Architectural theory often markets glass as a bridge to nature. However, Charles Correa (1982) argued that in tropical climates, transparency is often a liability because views usually bring unbearable heat. This creates the Blinds-Down Paradox: to survive the sun, occupants immediately block their windows with curtains or cardboard, effectively killing the building's intended transparency and turning the glass into a thermal trap.

2.4 The Matka Effect: Thermal Delight

Lisa Heschong (1979) posits that thermal comfort is a sensory experience, not just a number on a thermometer. Earthen materials at IIM Ahmedabad and CEPT University provide high thermal mass and a matte finish. This triggers the Matka Effect, where the brain perceives the rough, earthy textures of brick and terracotta as signs of a cool, stable sanctuary, calming the occupant's nervous system.

2.5 Specular vs. Diffuse Reflection

Facade materials dictate the visual temperature of a city. As Christopher Benninger (2011) suggests, materials like brick and stone create diffuse reflection, scattering light softly to reduce eye strain. In contrast, glass produces specular reflection, bouncing harsh light onto streets and neighbouring buildings. This concentrated glare increases Occupant Resentment and worsens the Urban Heat Island effect.

3.FINDINGS

The data from the digital audit shows a very clear split between the two types of buildings:

Table 1: Comparison of Glass and Earthen Façades in Hot-Dry Climate

Feature	Glass Towers (SG Highway)	Earthen Institutions (CEPT/IIM)
Primary Material	High-reflectivity Glass	Brick, Terracotta, Exposed Concrete
Visual Failure Rate (VFR)	78% (Blinds mostly closed)	5% (Windows mostly clear)
Occupant Behaviour	Hiding from sun (Blinds/Cardboard)	Engaging with light (Open/Active)
Survey Preference	18% (Seen as Hot/Anxiety-inducing)	82% (Seen as Cool/Calming)
Thermal Strategy	Active (Heavy AC reliance)	Passive (Breathable skins/Shaded mass)

This proves that the Matka Effect is not just a theory-it is a measurable human reaction. People instinctively know that a matte, earthen surface will protect them from the heat, while a glass surface will reflect it.

At IIM Ahmedabad and CEPT, the brick fins and deep recesses do the work for the user. People do not feel the need to shut out the world. At the glass towers, the transparency is a lie. These buildings look like a messy patchwork of half-pulled curtains.

3.1 What This Means: The Psychology of Coolth

Human comfort is not just about a thermostat. The Matka Effect proves that if a building looks matte and earthy, our brains feel calmer. Glass, on the other hand, creates Heat Anxiety. Even in a cold room, sitting next to a bright glass wall makes you feel exposed. The Blinds-Down Paradox is the physical proof that people resent their workspace. They reclaim their comfort by taping up the glass.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

We need to stop viewing the building envelope as a decorative wallpaper and start viewing it as a metabolic skin. Based on this study, I recommend three shifts in design priority:

- **Prioritize Depth over Technology**: Instead of spending on expensive, high-performance triple-glazed glass or chemical tints, architects should invest

in physical depth. A simple brick jali or a deep-set window creates a permanent microclimate that no smart glass can replicate. We must move from a 2D Facade to a 3D Envelope.

- **The 12-Month Occupancy Test:** Architecture should be audited one year after completion. If the majority of the blinds are down, the building is a failure, regardless of how good the initial render looked. Designers should be held accountable for the Visual Failure Rate of their projects.

- **Material Selection for Visual Coolth:** We must reintroduce matte, earthen materials into the corporate sector. Using terracotta, lime-wash, or exposed brick doesn't make a building old-fashioned, it makes it thermally intelligent. These materials reduce the Urban Heat Island effect and provide the Matka Effect that calms the human nervous system.

5. CONCLUSION

The glass-box model in Ahmedabad is a failed experiment that prioritizes an imported aesthetic over human comfort. This study shows that glass facades create Heat Anxiety, forcing occupants into a constant battle with glare that results in the Blinds-Down Paradox. When 78% of a building's transparency is covered by makeshift shading, the architecture has failed its primary purpose.

In contrast, the Matka Effect found in Ahmedabad's earthen institutions offers a viable way forward. By using materials that scatter light and breathe, we create Visual Coolth and thermal security. We do not have to choose between being modern and being comfortable; by returning to the logic of Breathable Earth, we can design a future for Ahmedabad that is thermally honest, ethically sound, and truly transparent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this study.

I am deeply grateful to my mentors and professors for their guidance in defining the Matka Effect and the Blinds-Down Paradox. Their insights into India's architectural heritage were essential in shaping the framework of this study.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the architectural legacies of B.V. Doshi, Louis Kahn, and Charles Correa, whose work in Ahmedabad served as the benchmark for climatic honesty. Special thanks go to the survey participants who shared their visual preferences
Finally, I acknowledge Google Street View for enabling this digital audit proving that meaningful architectural observation can transcend physical distance.

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