

Environmental Issues in Billboard Dynamics: Some Reflections on Location

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Abstract

One of the new dynamics that have emerged in landscape urbanization in Lagos State include increasing manifestation of aesthetic ornamentation of public places through commercial billboards. As much as one may think that the billboard advertisement are thriving, given the multifarious presences of bills and signs of the telecommunications, beverages, and other multi-national companies all over the open spaces of Lagos, there are environmental problems attendant upon the billboards business. The study investigates these problems through survey. Research instrument used for this study was a questionnaire titled 'Graphic Design Concept and Product Promotion Questionnaire' (GDCPPQ). It was structured in the likeness of the Likert scale model, and was directed to elicit response from the product advertisers in Lagos State. The two objectives stated were to investigate the environmental problems confronting billboard advertisement and to find out if the location of billboards, which is the thrust of this paper, always influences sales of products. The two objectives were translated into one research question and one hypothesis. Method of data analysis involved percentage ranking and chi square statistics respectively. The study revealed that these environmental problems affect billboard business at varying degrees and that, location has little or nothing to do with the sales of products. The advertisers only have to increase the intensity of their design concepts and product integrity as ways of commanding maximum viewing and selling frequencies from their customers.

Key words: Billboard, public, urban aesthetics, commercial messages, sustainable economy.

1. Introduction

The use of billboards to create awareness for products, service or at times, ideas is spreading astonishingly in Nigerian's foremost cities. Earlier than now, Hodgson and Berman (1997) had foreseen and foretold that billboards are an efficient and effective way to convey advertising messages to the public and will be best suited for the structure of our cities and our transportation networks. Lagos is not exempted from this prediction model and the reason is obvious. It is considered as the commercial nerve centre of the nation. The United Nations-Habitat (2008), more to that, reported that there is a concentration of residential, industrial, commercial and educational facilities high enough to attract people to Lagos. The mental image of people for Lagos State and notional mindsets that Lagos is *no man's land* and the interests of many to live and work in Lagos have always created a rising interest for the heterogeneous mix of investors to carry out numerous business concerns. For instance, the 2006 population headcount in Nigeria put Lagos at 9,013,534 and it is projected to be 24 million by 2020 (Adebola, 2006). Creating awareness that indeed enhances the advertiser's credibility implies a distinct implication for conjuring customer loyalty and admitting potential ones. By establishing perceptions that influence strategic and creative choices many hearts and minds are won. Interestingly, very germane to this discourse is the perpetual street life index and the static posture that seem to help significantly in defining the quantum of viewership and readership of billboard advertising messages per day in Lagos. The impression that billboard roles shape the perception of its beholders' thoughts and actions is exacerbated in Erdogan (2002). In that study there was a perfect alignment with the school of thought that described billboard advertisements as an adoption of persuasive measures in visual and typographic form to communicate specific commercial messages to a broad spectrum of passers-by in public places. However, finding the inter-relationship standards and synergy between people, billboards and the urban environment is of essential importance to all stakeholders connected with urban renewal initiatives in Lagos. Indeed, our rapidly changing post-modern society, in the words of Barrett (2001) presents to us a staggering array of information channels. The outdoor billboard information channel is one of them, though, constantly exposed to amplified objections and prejudices in the public domain (Kayode, 2015). Billboard advertising still remains an engine room and driving force of economic boom and sustainable economic development. It grows sustainable economy for nations while economies based on outdoor advertising scan help in promoting greater sales turnover and spur economic competitiveness. The business world will need to embark on a journey of economic emancipation for better creative and productive economies through this proliferated communication means.

An inter-dependency investigation is a strong anchor for understanding billboard missions in public places. It accounts for the reason man; products and the environment have bearing. The assertion of Berry and Wilson (2004) that nearly everybody in the world is subjected to advertising impresses on this study the reason why advertisers' messages need to match their strategy. Strategies directed towards the goal of meeting the product or service needs of man in a particular environment. So it is a fair bet that such tremendous needs will

not stop soon for more and more people but wax stronger as long as products and product design are about our lives or about our being-in-the world. Fundamental to this also, is the sensing of the business world and participating in it as an interactive activity in which experiencing what is going on in the world is primary to any thinking (Gibson, 1986, Marleau-Ponty, 2002, Hummels and Overbeek, 2010). Whether business organizations like it or not they will devise strategies in this stiff and austere marketing competition to publicize what they have if they must remain in business. What separates companies from one another is not about the quantum of what they carry; of more importance is the premium they place on advertising what they carry to the marketplace. To further hit the market big, companies need to carry out advertising research as a way of testing or improving the efficacy of the strategy they have used or about to adopt (Lake, 2009). Some react to advertising along the conservative and miserly line, painfully dillydallying advertising only to see their close competitors take the centre stage. The challenge is obvious; we are in an expansionary period consciously predicated by man in term of technological advancement but seriously affected by the impending dangers of a retrogressing national economy.

1.1 Statement of the problem

A study, Godin (2004) mentioned that an average person is exposed to over 2,500 outdoor advertisements per day. This submission may provide a fair justification for the sentiments of critics concerning the damaging effects of the mushrooming multiplicity and proliferation of outdoor advertisements in public places. There are many unsightly billboard structures which need reactivation or complete removal, and which are still in place at public locations. Every billboard structure mounted has its own potential consequence to impact either positive or negative attitude on the viewing audience. For one reason, messages passed across to the brain through the sensory organs at repeated times or places have high absorption tendency. Messages are there on the same spot not switched off like other forms of electronic advertising and repeated contacts cannot be avoided. Information communicated in this type of circumstance brings about a lasting impression in human memory. The position corroborates Christian and Buyer (2010) and Kobliski (2006) which remark that location where a product is advertised yields a lot of marketing returns no matter the amount spent on acquiring the location or the initial permitting obstacles encountered. Do the mushrooming presences of advertisements in outdoor places imply that all is well for it? Are there no confrontational challenges for outdoor advertisement? Certainly there are. People say that the public are made to pay more for products advertised on billboards than products not advertised at all. And if billboard advertisements are truly mushrooming in public locations, what influence does location have on products and services patronage?

1.2 Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to:

1. investigate into the problems confronting billboard structures in Lagos, Nigeria and;
2. find out if placing a billboard in a location can influence sales of product.

1.3 Research question

What are the problems confronting billboard advertising in Lagos State?

1.4 Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the location of outdoor billboards and sales of consumer products.

1.5 Area of the study

Lagos has been chosen as the study area given the volume of economic activities which far exceed that of all other towns in the country. It is the hub of business and economic development in Nigeria, housing around 70 per cent of all industrial establishments (Adelekan, 2010). It also houses more than 65 per cent of all commercial activities including Nigeria's non-oil economy (Adelekan, op cit). Lagos is a mega city that hosts a major sea and an international air port which generate a strong centripetal force which perpetually draw migrants to the city and consolidate an increasing tempo of concentration of industrial and commercial activities. It was postulated in Adebola (2006) that over 70 per cent of total industries in Nigeria are based in Lagos State alone. This attracts influx of people from rural and less developed parts of Nigeria, West Africa and other African sub-regions. The city is highly urbanized with a population growth rate of 8% as against the national rate of 2.9 per cent. Her population constitutes about 24.7 per cent of the national population (United Nation-Habitat Report, 2008), growing ten times faster than New York and Los Angeles in the United States of America. It has been estimated that 606 people enter Lagos every minute but no one seems to know the number that leaves (Adebola, 2006). As small as it may seem to be in size and with a land area of 3,600 square kilometer, Lagos has an approximation of 15 million people. According to UN approximation, by the end of 2015, going by 6 per cent growth rate Lagos will be third largest mega city in the world.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Principles of Visual Concept Presentation and Structural Medium of Display

In a study on structural display medium and visual material presentation in outdoor advertisement (adapted from Banks, 2006) convenience sample method which comprised of 63 Colorado State University students were used. In the study, a 2x2 factorial between-subjects experiment was part of a larger study addressing personality factors' effects on response to visual/verbal incongruence in wordmarks. Responses were measured via a paper-based questionnaire which composed of 96 items, which were a combination of published and unpublished scales.

Empirically, the results were such that participants were nearly evenly distributed in terms of gender: 30 (48.4%) were male and 32 (51.6%) were female. Females indicated a higher average product-category involvement level for soft drinks ($M = 3.177$, $SD = 1.470$) than did males ($M = 2.806$, $SD = 1.274$). Regarding the randomly assigned experimental conditions, 12 males (19.4%) and 21 females (33.8%) viewed the incongruent stimulus while 18 males (29.0%) and 11 females (17.8%) viewed the congruent stimulus. The empirical results were further corroborated in which it is noted that of all display structures and exhibition techniques, the metal frames are massively in use in most cities of the world – all for its strength and tensile properties available for withstanding tough weather conditions and other artificial shocks in public places. The results further separately show that consumers process visual material differently than they process verbal material (Houston, Childers, & Heckler 1987). As this processing difference was tested in terms of memory tasks, the pictorial component is remembered more clearly than the word component, and semantics levels (Childers, Houston, & Heckler, 1985). Lewis and Walker (1989) asserted that the visual and verbal components are coded and retained, and each type of information can serve as the focus of elaborative processing.

“There is no substitute for a solid outdoor structure has been a statement upheld by both Arueyingho (2001) and Osho (2001). The two submissions note that, by imposition it attracts viewer's eye and convey the required information more clearly and quickly than can be done with other physical structures such as wood, plastics, tarpaulin and all the likes. It accommodates the display of messages in pictorial form. Every one loves the concept when it tells a story and visual stories can both instruct and convey a message. Visual concept presentation is the key in modifying and optimizing the chances of making a product acceptable to the public. It is one of the advertising skills which designers must acquire. Most graphic designers who work in advertising agencies adopt visual concept reinforcement for every outdoor advertisement being delivered. The objective is to make the message understood and remembered. Advertising is the art of getting products or services known to the target audience.

Advertising with visual design concept is a fast and potentially effective method of getting products known and sold to other people. According to Blair (2009) visual concept presentation puts product on display, analyses the merit and solicits total, continuous adherence. But it is useful to understand that the audience, if not alphabetically literate will be visually literate and the impression one makes on them is the one they will remember. Presentation of concepts may be through persuasion, fear, appeal or anxiety. Musgrave (2001) averred that visual design presentation of the metal (more often than any other) medium are playing increasingly important role in exhibit, themed and architectural environments. The environmental environment referred to here by Musgrave (op cit) is interactive – it is interactive displays such as commercial billboards and art and design forms presented on metal structures in outdoor situations.

Advertisers would always try to talk people into the most profitable options rather than the best options as far as product advertising are concerned. Jefkins (1983) says that persuasion has always been an attempt designed by advertising agencies and the public relation professionals to change people's attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behaviour and action. Jefkins (op cit) has however not clarified whether the change would be positive or negative but Terpstra (1983), Semenik and Bamossy (1993) and Osunbiyi (2002) make it clear that advertising is neither moral or immoral, it is the purpose for which it is used that can make it good or bad, positive or negative.

2.2 Product Advertising and the Outdoor Audience selection

With all of the great new methods of advertising that have become available, there has been a real slow down in the number of companies that are utilizing traditional methods such as billboards (<http://www.everymanbusiness.com/track/script/redirect.php>). However, this does not mean that they are not as effective as they once were. The fact is, according to EverymanBusiness.com (2009) that many companies have just lost sight of how effective they are among all of the hype surrounding internet marketing and advertising. However this has driven the price for advertising with billboards down in most city of the world and has created great opportunities for businesses looking for a cost effective and highly successful form of advertising. Ability to identify the target group is an essential work of a marketer or an advertiser. A skilled marketer gets his audience respond to him by communicating with them. A serious understanding of the marketer's message by both the existing and the anticipated audience opens a promising channel for good sales. In the first instance both

the current and the anticipated buyers form the target group and in reaching out to them, certain crucial considerations are necessary.

The target group may be defined as those to whom the product is useful or applicable. They may further be classified and considered by their age, gender, income, marital status, or occupation. Galvis and Soong (1999) are of the opinion that the planning for an advertising campaign begins with the selection of one (or probably several) target group(s) and that selection is by no means obvious step, as there are various considerations. It must also be noted that reason of identifying or defining the target group is simply that the overall population consists of a broad spectrum of people differentiated by likes and dislikes, needs and wants or relevance and irrelevance. It is as well pertinent to say that as the benefits of a particular product cannot be consummately applicable to the entire population, hence the need for a definition and selection exercise. A consumer survey conducted by Soong (1999) reveals that not everybody would buy a given product or service rather, the potential buyers of the product or service may be limited to a segment of the population. Ordinarily, target groups are the potential, presupposed or anticipated consumers of a product or service right from the point of manufacture, advertising and sales marketing. They are the people had in mind by the advertiser and the product marketer's plan. Target groups are important segment of every business activity, they are distinct, though may seem faceless in the midst of the population crowd, they could be fished out by diligent marketing plans and effective advertising strategy and campaign strategy.

For an advertisement to address the supposed audience and yield the right dividend, media selection and planning must be correspondingly right, the message must be articulated through a carefully selected campaign medium. Advertisements that bring result have to be timely selected, composed, the layout designed and the space in the chosen media booked. A carefully selected medium has high chances of riveting attention, developing interest, instilling confidence if it addresses the type of audience relative to the product or service and time and the right location or environment relative to the so targeted group. Naturally, everyone cannot be a buyer or a targeted buyer; many are even indifferent to media advertisement. For example, men do not need to respond in buying to a menstrual pad advertisement or a caterer does not need, for any reason to purchase poster colour as the cooking ingredients, no matter how catchy or imposing a poster colour advertisement may be. So for an advertisement to yield the desired result, it must not only select the right medium, (who are the target group for panadol?) it must also address the issue of need, bearing in mind that not all people buy or even, are prepared to buy at a given time. Therefore while planning to recruit buyers (which are the target group) attention must be drawn to those whom the product or service relevant and beneficial. Suffice it to say therefore that rational human beings do not expend their hard-earned resources on products which are not useful to them but tend to derive maximum enjoyment from their last kobo.

2.3 Outdoor Advertising as Glamour of the Urban Environment

Heyden (2014), Christian and Buyer (2010) and Kobliski (2006) remark that location where a product is advertised yields a lot of marketing returns no matter how big or little the amount spent on acquiring a location. The initial permitting obstacles encountered is not even comparable to the yield. Mourtada (2010) and Heyden (2014) note that everyone has driven by outdoor advertising billboards at one location or the other. Choosing a location for an advertisement means an intersection so people close to that location may divert to nearby product store. White further notes that advertisers choose locations with particular demographics that may need their products or services the most and that, has yielded a lot of dividends in the business world. Interest in outdoor advertising has been steady and growing and with good reason (Outdoor Advertising Association of America, 2003). The Association declares that the outdoor environment today is a vital element in well conceived plans and that this type of advertisement offers outstanding value for the dollar and a myriad of ways to ratchet up exposure. AdSmart Outdoor Advertising (2005) writes to affirm that it has been proven time and time again that outdoor advertising is the most cost-effective way to reach a desired public audience and make the biggest impact possible. Ink Well (2005) corroborates the above affirmation by mentioning that outdoor advertising is a proven way to reach potential customers and increase business. Outdoor advertisements affect the human environment by being able to deliver cost-effective messages all day, every day. Semantically, outdoor design, outdoor graphics and outdoor advertising are the same and can be applied to mean the same thing.

Evidences abound that outdoor designs in whatever functions or capacities add glamour to the environment, especially when they are properly done and maintained. The issue of environmental relevance is also mentioned in William (2005) that presents the outdoor advertising as an appealing option due to its ability to target its audience from various geographical locations, and it is extensively low in cost per person reached. The colour intensive nature of modern day posters, the self-imposing roadside billboards and electronic messaging-boards are features of urban commercial centres. It can also be seen that signposts, road traffic symbols, picture montages, banners, multi-coloured bunting and structural paintings are components that characterize a beautiful urban environment.

3.Methodology

The research instrument used for this study was a questionnaire titled ‘Graphic Design Concept and Product Promotion Questionnaire’ (GDCPPQ). It was structured and fashioned in the likeness of the Likert scale model, and was directed to elicit response from the outdoor advertisers on the environmental issues affecting the thriving of billboards in open locations of Lagos. Apart from the various opinions and criticisms of critics, outdoor billboard advertisements have it own attending problems and the passers-by are aware of them. The seventy-two (72) registered advertisers in Lagos State (*Graphic Printer Directory, 2006*) were contacted and sampled using census. Data collection instrument was questionnaire directed to collect responses from them. Sixty-two (86%) out of seventy-two (100%) questionnaires were returned. Procedure for data collection involved pilot study and validity of the instrument. The study has two objectives in all. Objective one was translated into a research question (interrogative). It is set to guide the study while objective two was translated into the only hypothesis (affirmative) for the study. As a social science research which is qualitative in nature, the objective was analysed using the *Table of Frequency Distribution* while the hypothesis was handled with the use of *chi-square statistics* and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

3.1 Results

The need to investigate into the problems confronting the billboard advertising in Lagos State is one of the issues raised for this study in which case, items 99 to 103 of the questionnaire were scored for each respondent (advertiser) and the frequency count and percentage were computed. The result is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Problems Confronting Billboard Advertising in Lagos State.

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree and I can’t say

S/N	ITEMS	RESPONSES				
		SA	A	D	SD	I can’t say
1.	Lack of good location for outdoor bills in the hinterland.	5 (8.1)	11 (17.7)	34 (54.8)	10 (16.1)	2 (3.2)
2.	Poor maintenance culture for billboards	7 (11.3)	31 (50.0)	7 (11.3)	12 (19.4)	5 (8.1)
3.	Damaging attitude of the public on billboards	1 (1.6)	15 (24.2)	19 (30.6)	26 (41.9)	1 (1.6)
4.	Outdoor management policies and regulations of government	11 (17.7)	36 (58.1)	8 (12.9)	5 (8.1)	2 (3.2)
5.	Cost of production	14 (22.6)	33 (53.2)	5 (8.1)	7 (11.3)	3 (4.8)

Percentage in parenthesis ()

Source: Author’s field work, 2015

In Table 1, it was observed that 61.3% of the respondents agreed that, as for product advertisements, poor maintenance culture was a common problem to outdoor billboard advertising while 75.8% of the respondents also agreed that cost of production and outdoor management policies and regulations of government constituted the common problems of product advertising on billboards in Lagos State as revealed by items 100, 103 and 102 respectively.

3.2 Discussion

Mounting of billboard structures at strategic and enterprising locations is the sole responsibility of the advertisers and that answered why research question one that probed into the problems confronting billboard advertising in Lagos State was directed to them. Meanwhile there are sixty-two (62) advertisers in Lagos. The study clearly showed that almost every open space (motor parks, market squares, gardens, roundabouts, layout setbacks, highways, corner pieces and any other available open space) in Lagos metropolis can be used to mount billboards for effective outcomes. This study also showed that the damaging effects of the public on outdoor bills are minimal. The major problem that billboard advertising is facing in Lagos are more than one - there are problems of poor maintenance culture, outdoor management policies and regulations of government as well as cost of production of outdoor bills. However, the research showed both outdoor management policies and regulations of government of Lagos State and the escalating cost of structural materials (steel, self adhesive vinyl (SAV), flex sheets and printing costs) are serious problems moving at pal to confront the business of outdoor advertising in the state. Even though Alabi (2007) posits that outdoor advertising is growing in Lagos State due to population explosion, industrial development and urban aesthetics, these problems are attendant upon the business and profit margins of the advertisers.

3.3 Hypothesis

Location of billboards has no significant influence on sales of products.

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree and I can't say

Table 2: Chi-square (χ^2) showing Location of Outdoor bills and the sales of products.

S/N	ITEM	SD	D	A	SA	I can't say	χ^2 -cal.	χ^2 -tab.	Decision
1.	Location of bill board is not important when selling a product	4 (6.5)	32 (51.6)	8 (12.9)	18 (29.0)	-	15.5	30.13	N.S
2.	Advertisement on highway billboards yields better patronage than billboards in the inter land	5 (8.1)	4 (6.5)	12 (19.4)	41 (66.1)	-	15.5	58.39	N.S
3.	Sales of products has nothing to do with where a billboard advertisement is placed	1 (1.6)	1 (1.6)	15 (24.2)	44 (71.0)	1 (1.6)	12.4	112.52	N.S
4.	Advertisement in rural areas will not generate sales as expected by the advertiser	3 (4.8)	6 (9.7)	13 (21.0)	37 (59.7)	3 (4.8)	12.4	66.39	N.S
5.	Urban consumers pay more to buy a product than the rural consumers	5 (8.1)	6 (9.7)	39 (62.9)	6 (9.7)	6 (9.7)	12.4	71.39	N.S
6.	Products advertised on outdoor billboards sell faster than any other channel of advertising in Lagos State.	3 (4.8)	4 (6.5)	44 (71.0)	10 (1.6)	1 (1.6)	12.4	104.29	N.S
7.	Location of billboards influences the sales of a product positively.	7 (11.3)	6 (9.7)	35 (56.5)	13 (21.0)	1 (1.6)	12.4	57.36	N.S

N.S. = Not Significant.

P<0.05

Source: Author's field work, 2015

Looking at the percentage responses in Table 2, 41.9% of the respondent said that location of billboard is not important when selling a product while 58.1% disagreed that location of billboards is not important when selling

a product. The result further reveals that there is no significant difference in the influence of location of billboard and sales of products. The χ^2 table values are χ^2 30.129, 58.387, 112.516, 66.387, 71.387, 104.290, 57.36 at $P < 0.05$ while the χ^2 calculated values obtained were 15.5, 15.5, 12.4, 12.4, 12.4. Since the χ^2 – table values are greater than the χ^2 calculated values, then, the null hypothesis is valid and not rejected. This implies that location of billboard will not significantly influence the sales of products.

3.4 Discussion

The hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the location of outdoor bills and sales of consumer products is upheld (not rejected) as pointed out by the result of this study. The location where a billboard is mounted has little or nothing to do with what volume of sales would be made by the advertiser. The advertisers only have to increase the intensity of their design concepts and product integrity as a way of commanding maximum viewing and selling frequencies from their customers. The study is absolutely at variance with the position of The Advertising Association of America (2010). The Advertising Association of America (op cit) maintained that outdoor advertisements are strategically placed in locations to reinforce or remind the target audience of the advertising messages communicated through other media with a view to increasing the level of viewing and selling frequencies. The present result and the one in Taylor and Taylor (1994) are contradicting. It is of the opinion that location issues of billboards have been effective in terms of product patronage. Taylor and Taylor viewed its argument from the content of the billboards, using content analysis of a sample of over 700 Michigan billboards to provide empirical results on issues that are central to assessing the location of outdoor advertising. This seems to account for the difference in results as this current study sampled 62 outdoor advertisers of products rather than sampling mere billboard contents as it is with the study of Taylor and Taylor (Op cit).

4. Conclusion

It has been pointed out that the use of billboard as a formidable medium of product and service advertisement is spreading and yielding amazing results. The medium is nurtured and safeguarded by regulations of government. This explains why big cities in Nigeria play host to multi-national companies who do businesses in telecommunication, petroleum, engineering and beverages among others. Competition has compelled promotion of their activities in the billboard way. Indigenous Small and Medium scale Enterprises (SME) are also active, existing and doing significant business side by side with the multinationals. All have to struggle for the available landscape spaces to erect their billboard structures for recognition. The paper investigated into the problems confronting billboard advertisement and the influence of location on the sales of product. It is observed that mounting of billboard structures at marketable location is a sole responsibility of the advertisers. Besides, where an outdoor advertisement is mounted has little or nothing to do with the volume of sales that will accrue to the advertiser after all.

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