

The Impact of Outdoor Advertising

Outdoor advertising may have a variety of impacts some of which may be quite unsuspected...

1. ENVIRONMENTAL OVERSTIMULATION AND INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Outdoor Advertising may contribute to environmental overstimulation and information overload which may play an important role with regard to diverse aspects such as psychological health and the effectiveness of outdoor advertising messages.

Psychological health: Environmental overstimulation may lead to various forms of behaviour breakdown, such as confusion, disorientation, distortion of reality, fatigue, anxiety, tenseness and extreme irritability. This may lead to social problems such as the use of drugs, outbreaks of violence and vandalism and crime. Environmental overstimulation may also lead to a lowering in human productivity, which will have certain economic implications.



Information overload leads to a decrease in awareness and therefore a decrease in the **effectiveness of outdoor advertising messages**. This principle has relevance to both an excess of information on individual signs and an excessive clutter of outdoor advertising signs.

2. DESTRUCTION OF A SENSE OF PLACE OR PLACENESS



Placeness refers to the distinctive character of cities, towns, neighbourhoods, rural landscapes or regions on account of which it can be differentiated from other urban or rural landscapes and on account of which visitors are attracted. Placeness can be seen as the *innate ability* of a place or setting to form vivid images in the mind of the observer, to effect major changes in the observer's emotional state, and to be remembered by him/her over extended periods of time.

If not managed adequately the proliferation of outdoor advertising may very easily result in the destruction of sense of place. As will be seen the loss of placeness have many negative consequences.

3. IMPACT ON TOURISM RESOURCES AND CREATING UNFRIENDLY TOURIST AND RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS



Impacting on tourism resources

Today the tourism industry is one of the most important contributors to economic development. It is also one of the world's biggest and fastest growing creators of employment.

The proliferation of advertisements and signs may have a very negative impact on visual resources such as scenic landscapes and cultural streetscapes, which constitute major tourist attractions.

However, the impact of outdoor information transfer is not limited to such outstanding attractions since the visual environment also forms a backdrop to most other tourist activities such as game watching, touring, entertainment, shopping and sport. The visual environment can be seen as the fabric that gives meaning and substance to any tourism experience. Each country, area, city or town has its own unique visual character and atmosphere, which plays an important role in the quality of any tourist experience. This is especially true of South Africa which can offer the tourist much in terms of its diversity of landscapes and cultural heritage. Thus by destroying sense of place or placeness outdoor advertising may destroy the heart of tourism.

The proliferation of advertisements and signs may have a very negative impact on retail business by creating unattractive environments not conducive to shopping. It is the character of the total streetscape, shopping mall or precinct that attracts shoppers and not the appearance of individual shops or the prominence of individual shop signs. The proliferation of signs and advertisements may also contribute to the run-down appearance of retail districts such as city centres and create a feeling of insecurity, which is not conducive to tourism and retail spending. In South Africa with its high crime rate this is a very important factor.



Impacting on a scenic view

4. IMPACT ON TRAFFIC SAFETY AND TRAFFIC FLOW



Distraction at intersection

Distracting the attention of the motorist has been the main focus of the controversy surrounding traffic safety and outdoor advertising. Up till now no study could inconclusively prove that outdoor advertising is either detrimental or not detrimental to traffic safety. However, as a matter of common logic it may be assumed that outdoor advertising may have a negative impact on traffic safety when poorly managed. By their very nature outdoor advertisements are designed to pull the

eyes of the motorist off the road and onto roadside displays. In order to achieve maximum exposure, outdoor advertisements are often placed in locations that are highly perceivable, but which also require special attention from the driver and are critical from a traffic safety point of view, such as bends in the road and at intersections.



Confusing the driver

The number and size, written messages, images or colours of advertisements may be of such an eye-catching nature that they **confuse** or simply **overawe** drivers and override the messages conveyed by traffic signs and signals. Such advertisements may even physically conceal traffic signs and signals.

Posters, advertising signs, trailers or other mobile displays may also **obstruct the view of the motorist** with regard to other vehicular traffic, the roadway, cyclists or pedestrians.

Posters, advertising trailers and other advertisements, such as estate agents' boards, displayed on sidewalks and cycle paths **force** cyclists and pedestrians **onto the roadway** and pose a serious hazard to joggers after dark.

Although not of common occurrence, inadequate structures and fixtures may lead to billboards and signs coming down and **injuring passers-by**.

Outdoor advertising may also **impair traffic flow** by distracting the attention of the driver. Traffic congestion may cause an escalation in air pollution, loss of production time and a lowering in productivity and quality of life through irritation and frustration.

5. IMPACTING ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE

By destroying the attractiveness of aesthetic environments outdoor advertising lowers the quality of human life.

6. DEVALUATION OF PROPERTY VALUES AND URBAN DECAY

The proliferation of billboards and other signs may result in the devaluation of property values in both residential and commercial areas. Such billboards and signs can be seen as both a symptom and a **cause** of urban blight.



Urban decay



Devaluation of property value



Vandalism of billboards causing untidy places

7. CRIME AND VANDALISM

The proliferation of advertisements and signs will in most cases contribute to creating untidy places and unsafe environments. In New York it has been shown through the *Broken Window Theory* that placelessness and untidy environments may result in psychological environments conducive to crime and vandalism since an impression of a lack of control by and involvement of authorities and communities is created in the mind of the criminal. Even in cases where the crime rate might actually not be too high, placelessness could still result in psychologically unhealthy places by contributing to a feeling of insecurity and stress among people making use of such places.

8. DEVALUATION OF PLACE AND COMMERCIALISATION OF PLACENESS



Degrading a sanctified atmosphere

By entering and dominating places such as schools and churchyards outdoor advertisements may devalue and even degrade the integrity of such places. Educational institutions with a prestigious image and status may thus be devaluated to mere places of consumerism and commercialism, while the sanctified atmosphere of churches and graveyards may be destroyed in the process.

9. POOR COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND A UNIFORM WORLD CULTURE



Uniform world culture advertised

By contributing to the creation of homogeneous visual environments through uniform structures and advertisements and thereby contributing to a global economy and uniform world culture, outdoor advertising may play a role in the destruction of sense of place. This may lead to the weakening of the identity of groups or communities, which may result in an identity crisis and uncertainty. A lack of community identity will also lead to a lack of

community involvement and therefore to a lack of environmental care and the prevention of crime at community level.

10. DESTRUCTION OF A SENSE OF PERMANENCE

As one of the most rapidly changing elements in the modern urban landscape, outdoor advertisements and signs have the inherent capability of destroying a sense of permanence and belonging.

11. SOUND POLLUTION

Modern sound technology has brought about an increase in sound pollution through outdoor advertising. Rock music resounding from enormous loudspeakers in front of the clothing or furniture store trying to draw the passer-by's attention to a promotion or sale has become a reality in South Africa.



Sound pollution

12. LIGHT POLLUTION

Outdoor advertising contributes to light pollution or sky glow when properties and enterprises such as filling stations and convenience stores are illuminated at extremely high levels in order to attract attention. In this case the illumination per se is seen as the advertising mechanism instead of a billboard or sign. Light pollution may have various detrimental effects such as impacting on the aesthetic appreciation of the night skies; interfering with astronomical observations; creating psychological and physiological health problems by interfering with the human body's biological rhythms; ecological impact by interfering with the orientation mechanism of certain wildlife species; an economical and environmental impact through energy wastage; and a road safety impact through uncontrolled and unshielded lighting which creates glare, diminishes visibility and contributes to accidents at night by blinding or confusing drivers and pedestrians. Outdoor advertising by means of intense illumination may also contribute to *ratcheting* which refers to the snow ball or ripple effect following the bright illumination of the original enterprise or billboard when enterprises in a neighbourhood are trying to outdo one another in attracting attention by illuminating their premises.



13. DIRECT ECOLOGICAL IMPACT



Although the direct ecological impact of outdoor advertising seems insignificant compared to its impact on visual resources, such ecological impact cannot be ignored completely. Sensitive environments such as wetlands are sometimes disturbed and vegetation may be damaged in the process of erecting billboard structures. In other cases trees are cut down or poisoned on purpose in both urban and rural areas in order to improve the visibility of billboards. This may contribute to habitat destruction, loss of bio-diversity, soil erosion and chemical pollution.

14. LITTERING

Handing out flyers may create a serious litter problem.

15. ETHICAL OR MORAL IMPACT



Ethical or moral impact on society

Ethical impact occurs when the content of outdoor advertising is objectionable, indecent or prejudicial to the public morals and values. Outdoor advertising has a larger inherent potential to impact on public morals than the other advertising media due to fact that it cannot be avoided, ignored, covered or switched off, which also means that children cannot be protected sufficiently

from such advertisements. By revealing the objectionable, indecent and prejudicial in public such effects are amplified. It will therefore give offence, become degrading and evoke public reaction much sooner than advertisements with similar contents displayed in most other media, where the objectionable, indecent and prejudicial are cloaked to a certain extent by the privacy of the home.

16. UNSUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Advertising may lead to unsustainable consumption patterns, which impacts at the social, economic and ecological levels by promoting a lifestyle based on material wealth and a growing consumption of products and services. The promotion of products such as tobacco and alcohol has a more serious social and economic impact owing to their hazardous effects on human health. Outdoor advertising may play an important role in this regard by means of its confrontational nature – the fact that it cannot be avoided by the motorist.



Promotion of products impacting on human health



Promotion of alcohol

For **more information** on the above-mentioned impacts contact:

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