

BILLBOARDS PLACEMENT IN NIGERIAN CITIES: IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Billboard as a form of transit art is one of the many outlets of graphic communication through which products, services and messages are being exposed to wider audience. The perception of the dynamics of billboard and its communicative value can have a considerable effect on the character of an environment. This paper therefore examines billboards placement in Nigerian urban cities and the effects of their placement within the environment of display with a view to educating the public on the ideals for the enhancement of the visual appearance of its environment. It also discusses for further discussion the characteristic nature and types of billboards on Nigerian highways. Suggestions are offered on appropriate creative display and maintenance of billboards in Nigerian cities.

Introduction

With the recent trend and development in the state of urban aesthetics and communication which has been regarded as an aggregate of all existing conditions that affect the life and development of its citizenry, man lives to interact with others and appreciate the various aesthetic setting of its environments in Nigeria. In order to live successfully, he has to meet up his basic needs as when required in terms of food, shelter, clothing etc. This means that he has to explore and exploit his environment as well as to refine and transport his exploits for maximum benefits. In the process of doing this, man becomes more entangled in a web of interaction which results to political, social and economic development on the one hand and to seek the enhancement of the visual appearance of its environment on the other.

There have been various studies on urban aesthetics and communication and factors that can enhance its appreciation. Carlson (2000) observed visual pollutions as one among other major factors that affect environmental aesthetics and communication development. Visual pollution according to Carlson is a term that refers to all the ways human visual capability is deflected within the environment. Carlson noted that visual pollution could reduce the quality of perception of the people. Haphazard placement of billboards in Nigerian cities constitutes much of sort visual pollution which is fast harming the aesthetic perception of urban dwellers in Nigeria.

It is against this background that attempt is made in this paper to examine billboards placement in Nigerian urban cities with a view to educating the public on the ideals for the enhancement of the physical character and visual appearance of its environment and directing the attention of various arms of government agents in collaboration with professional bodies that are responsible

for the maintenance of highways billboards design and advertisement to the menace posed by its hazard placement in Nigerian cities.

Historical Background

The concept of highway advertisement and communication system has been gaining current in many advanced countries. This belief is made strong by the fact that highway communication has some impact on the safety of life of the people as well as providing conducive environment for all. This concept equally sees the objects in the streets making up the city as figure and not mere junks. As such, emphasis has been on city planning and management which embraces all sphere physical, aesthetics, and other constructions that could harm image of the city.

The concept of billboard as a form of advertising media through which products, services and messages are being exposed to wider audience was not new either in Nigeria as it has once gained moment prior to independence. Even after independence, Nigeria like any other nation had developed various forms of billboard designs for various communication and commercial purposes which one regarded as one of the major infrastructure characteristics of an urban environment. Most of these urban environments were adorned with various forms of billboards and signposts to make life more meaningful to the dwellers. Placement of billboards for both traffic and commercial activities on day and night basic with their rhythmical arrangement were prominent.

Today, the situation appears to be different. This is because most of the structure as been destroyed and those surviving are being subsumed and besieged by weeds or hideout for destitute. The beauty of the cities are also been destroyed by poor arrangement and maintenance where billboards are carelessly drawn across various highways in the cities. Structural defective billboards, which could deprive clearer messages to the targeted audience, are being seen in most cities. Most parts of the highways in the cities have stumped with various destroyed billboards due to neglect. Rapid growth of ghetto, illegal highway signposts and sign obstructions in form of haphazard billboard placement, each directing and misdirecting, thereby constituting visual pollution are threat to visual perception. Based on the above observations, one may be forced to say that the aesthetic perceptions of city dwellers are fast deteriorating and that the Nigerian city highways are lacking pleasant appearance.

This paper surveys the aspect of city highway aesthetically placements of billboard and the need to reduce visual pollution that are often becoming threat to visual perception. It specifically examines the following for further discussion:

- (a) The concept of Billboards and usage in Nigeria;
- (b) Types and characteristics of billboards;
- (c) Factors affecting billboards placements; and
- (d) Billboards maintenance on Nigerian city highways.

Billboards Development and Usage in Nigeria

According to Steward (1993), billboards came into being as a result of the evolution of signs, which were initially associated with gesture or motion. It however gained significance in the 1390s when merchants were required to label their premises with their own signs. In the 16th century, the use of signs gained a wider currency as it was defined as any writings, including letter; pictorial presentations, illustrations and decorations banners, flags or any other figure of similar characteristics. Signs could be made into a structure, painted on with the aim to announce, direct caution or advertise a business, commodity or providing information. The significance of billboards became much in England in the 16th century. Steward (1991) noted that the merchandized were directed to mount their signs on their building surface. This encouraged the idea of house numbering for easy identification. As a result of various studies and experimentation that greeted the industrial revolution era, Davis (1965) noted that the merchandized typesetting and the movable types of printing machines were invented. These gave additional impetus to handbill placements. In the 19th century other printing techniques such as, the screen-printing, lithographic printing, etc. became more intensive. There arose a scramble for bill posting spaces. The situation degenerated into a point when street wall and all available spaces on houses were pasted with poster handbills. The local authority through ordinances, were later forced to reject careless posting of bills and the term “post no bill” become popular with many supposedly free spaces. In order to find a way out, traders began to construct signposts or billboards and sought approval for their erection.

The use of billboards in Nigeria followed after the pattern in Europe. The first billboards were erected in the 20s. The earlier Advertising companies such as; West African Publicity Companies, U.A.C, later Afromedia, etc. began to propagate the use of billboards for highway advertising, and manufacturing industries. After independence, petty trading became another business. The petty traders eventually grasped the importance of billboards, which they used maximally to boost their trade. With the economic downturn of the late 90s which made it impossible for the government to pay salaries regularly, many workers in their bids to make ends meet embraced in trading enmasse so as to improve their revenue base. Small shops and supermarkets raised considerably in all streets. Signs and billboards were grossly abused and resulted to the unpleasant situation in the cities.

Characteristics and Types of Highway Signposts / Billboards

Billboards / Signposts are expected to perform such rules as locating users in an environment providing information on merchandise, labeling of structures, embellishing or enhance beautifying the appearance of an environment as well as protecting the safety of the public, and to complement the built environment effect. Therefore, these are some qualities

expected of them. All signs and lettering be it on billboard, woods, plastics, electronic system, fabrics, etc. are expected to be legible and harmonious must contain letterforms that can be seen and recognized without difficulties and register quickly in its overall shape. The background of letter forms should not interfere visually with its reading, it must be consistency in height, embrace good colour combination and the size of the letter forms should dependent on the overall environment in which the sign is to be placed. Positioning of letter also considered important and should not constitute an obstruction to consumers.

The placement of billboard in Europe and America are usually controlled by ordinances and legislation. Through ordinances such factors as the allowable square feet .height billboards, consistency with the built environment and urban beautification are cons..... paramount. The local authorities simply enact ordinances, which reflect the attitudes of community towards signs. In most cases the law provides simple, clear and environment sensitive standard for various types of advertisement.

Effects of Billboards /Signposts Placements on Nigerian City Highways

In Nigeria, the local government is mandated by the constitution and decree 211 of 1998 that the local authorities are to control and collect levies on outdoor advertisement. However, it appears that the local authorities are only interested in the money making aspects leaving aesthetic planning of the various elements that makes up the streets into the hands of the traders. In order to examine the various effects of billboard placements by the individuals on Nigerian city highways, a survey was carried out in three selected State capitals in Nigeria – Ibadan, Lagos and Kaduna in accordance with the suggestion of Nasar and Hong (1999) when they noted that appearance of the environment could be improved upon if we know how the populace reacts to features. Similarly, the reviewed literature also proved that various studies have been carried out in Europe and America that looked at environmental aesthetics from various angles. Nasar and Hong (1999) in their efforts to examine urban signscape in the United States investigated popular reactions to signscape features with the use of coloured photograph of varied signscape to elicit information, which could bring about improvement to city learning. The study revealed that respondents preferred reduction in sign obstructiveness and complexity which they believed could lead to environmental pollution. Geller et al (1982) noted that among the five urban scenes in the U.S. the commercial scene has signs and billboards that were most disliked by respondents. Their study on perceived urban duly made use of coloured photographs of the five senses revealed that visually overloaded streets and be detrimental to the quality of living.

Most of these studies seem to agree that aesthetics has to do with the analysis of concepts and the solution of problem that arises when one contemplates aesthetic objects. Aesthetic objects are capable of attract responses,

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judgment and preferences from individuals. Osborne (1970) observed that individuals can relate his aesthetic experience if he is given the opportunity to fix his attention on heterogeneous but interrelated components of a supposedly art object. The study of aesthetic generally has shown that man cannot live long without beautiful, harmonious and order environment (Spreiregen, 1965). In this study, three Nigerian cities were adopted for sampling (Kaduna, Ibadan and Lagos) because they all have both commercial and features. Questionnaire and photographs serve as the major research instrument. Questionnaire on urban street aesthetic and communication evaluation was also administered to one hundred respondents from the three areas. Out of the 100 questionnaires administered, 50 were received – 20 from Lagos, 16 from Ibadan and 14 from Kaduna. Out of the 50, 25 of the respondents were between 20 and 50 years old, 15 of them between 20 and 35 years old and 10 were above 35years. Out of the fifty were 15 graduates, 20 undergraduate, 10 primary qualifications while 5 had no formal education. Coloured photographs of the scenes were displaced for ninety minutes. Respondents were asked to look at the displayed photograph deeply and explain their views towards the scene. Raw scores of the questionnaire were analyzed in percentages.

Forty respondents who completed the questionnaire were able to put their views are (90%) agreed that aesthetically placed sign/billboards can improve the city environment by stating that overcrowded billboards can desensitize people to their environment; 10 (10%) also viewed that overcrowding of billboards can cause visual pollution It was noted that the residential areas are relatively quiet with beautiful structure adorn both sides of the street, the commercial areas are busy with activities and signs and placement are heavier. All respondents in the three areas were surprised and wondering how signposts and billboards were displayed in such a chaotic manner. It was noted that the signboards have been forgotten by their owners while those erecting new ones could note whether their newly erected billboard could bring more sales.

Discussion and Conclusion

It was observed that the majority of respondents wanted graphic designers to be part of city planning based on the significant roles of graphic designers in modern city planning in the usage of typography, colour study, signs layout and materials. Similarly, majority of the respondents strongly believed that signs/billboards, if properly and harmoniously placed could add beauty, excitement, vitality to the environment. Some suggested that one or two large billboards with word changeable devices would advertise for every trader in a large shopping complex rather than the chaotic sight by individuals. The use of wooding / iron plate's signs and billboards were not encouraged because respondents felt that wooding / iron plates get rust quickly as a result of the exposure to moist, rain and sun.

From the survey result, it is obvious that aesthetically placed signs and billboards could contribute to the beauty of the streets, the built environment and the quality of living. The use of neon-signs, cold-cathode incandescent light and the computerized billboard system could bring a type of refurbishment to Nigerian city life, while the removal of low standard signs and billboards from the city streets would also enhance the much cherished vitality to the Nigerian populace.

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