

## 3.2 THE ROLE AND FUNCTION<sup>17</sup> OF OUTDOOR INFORMATION TRANSFER IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

### 3.2.1 MAIN FUNCTIONS

As an important element in the perceptual environment outdoor information transfer can make a positive contribution with regard to the following:

#### 3.2.1.1 Directing and guiding the road user and the pedestrian

To be directed by outdoor signs has always been a part of everyday life, to a lesser or greater extent, depending on the familiarity and complexity of the environment. Today the large number of functions, facilities and destinations in the urban environment has increased the need for direction and guidance. An ever-increasing mobility and tempo of life, the speed of modern transportation modes and the isolation of the motorist from fellow urbanites, by being encapsulated within the space of the private car, amplify this tendency. According to Preza (1994), the functional aspects of directing and moving people around the city are not only a matter of convenience. A system that efficiently guides tourists or shoppers to their destinations may also contribute to their quality of life by giving them more time to do what they came to do and a chance to do it in a better frame of mind. This also has economic implications, since pleasant visits imply return visits and higher spending by visitors. A well-planned sign programme may also contribute to traffic safety and the well-being of the motorist.

Signs also play an important role in directing and guiding the tourist and traveller. An effective sign system is needed to satisfy the information needs of the traveller. King and Wilkinson (1980, pp.46-48) proposed such a system for interstate and federal-aid primary highways in the United States in order to direct and guide motorists to services and attractions along the way. The system proposed for interstate and other limited-access highways consists of the following three information levels:

---

<sup>17</sup> Billboards may even provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. In the Netherlands, where the topography provides absolutely no scope for rock climbing, many a rock climber takes up the sport of *buildering* or urban climbing. Participants

- **General service signing:** The first and simplest level contains basic information on services and attractions and may include generic sign symbols. In South Africa this level will consist of brown tourism signs which form part of the official South African road traffic sign system. It therefore does not form part of this study.
  
- **Specific service signs or logo signs:** The second level of the proposed sign system consists of logo signs which will supplement or replace the general service signing by providing more information on specific services. A logo sign consists of a relatively large sign with various panels containing the logos of hotels, restaurants, fast-food outlets, filling stations or any other service of interest to the motorist. Such a sign is placed in advance of an off-ramp on a highway and indicates the services which can be reached by using the off-ramp. Logo signs are supplemented by smaller directional signs with logos placed along or at the terminal end of the off-ramp. The outdoor advertising industry plays an important role with regard to logo signs, making it part of the free-market system.
  
- **Information centres** along highways provide more detailed information in the form of brochures, maps and various displays.

On primary highways without limited access King and Wilkinson (1980, p.48) proposed a sign system consisting of only two levels. General service signing and small-size logo signing are combined to provide the first level of the system, while the second level consists of information centres.

### 3.2.1.2 Informing and warning the public in order to enhance general well-being and safety

Outdoor signs inform, warn and provide a public service in a myriad of ways. They ensure privacy and the rights of individuals and groups. They can be used as an *educational medium* by conveying messages concerning public campaigns such as family planning, environmental issues, health

---

in this sport climb everything that is climbable – bridges, church towers, light masts, trees and even billboards. There are even guidelines available on how to climb billboards (Euronet, online).



Outdoor advertisements and signs can be used as an educational medium by conveying messages concerning public campaigns such as family planning, environmental issues, crime prevention, road safety and wartime campaigns. It may bolster fund-raising campaigns for charities and community services and may convey messages concerning issues such as views on the use of alcohol and tobacco and the wearing of fur coats.

The above illustrations reflect the important role billboards played in public service announcements during and for a brief period after World War II.

**Figure 3.9**

**Outdoor information transfer provides a public service and enhances general well-being and safety**

issues<sup>18</sup>, crime prevention, road safety and wartime campaigns. They may bolster fund-raising campaigns for charities and community services and may convey messages concerning social views on issues such as the use of alcohol and tobacco and the wearing of fur coats. Outdoor signs might be used for political campaigns and for informing people of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They also provide information on and lead us in decisions which we have to make in our daily lives and which might have a direct bearing on our general well-being. Such decisions may vary from warnings against possible threats to instructions regarding the proper use of facilities and services, or decisions with regard to the spending of our leisure time.

Outdoor signs are used for the identification of enterprises, buildings or any other form of land use or locality. In contemporary society outdoor signs play an important role in the identification and awareness of urban elements and functions. A study conducted by McGill and Korn (1982, pp.198 - 9) on environmental awareness in an urban business area showed a much greater awareness of utilitarian elements labelled by signs such as businesses, than of purely aesthetic elements such as huge painted murals. These findings should be seen against the context and setting of the study area as well as cultural conditioning. The study area consisted of a small business area where people go to shop, eat and do business, while cultural conditioning implies the acquisition of a utilitarian rather than an aesthetic orientation to the environment by most urban residents. It must also be seen against today's lifestyle of ever-increasing consumption.

### 3.2.1.3 Stimulating economic growth and promoting freedom of commercial choice

As an important component of commercial advertising, outdoor advertising can make an important contribution to the complementary functions of expanding commercial sales and enhancing consumer choice.<sup>19</sup> These functions are described by certain proponents of economic growth as *freedom of*

---

<sup>18</sup> Research undertaken in Nebraska in 1993 and 1994 has shown that paid outdoor advertising can be a valuable method of increasing community awareness of health messages (Vidlak and Huneke, online).

<sup>19</sup> According to a report on the uses of billboards by Missouri business, billboards provide several types of information that can help consumers make purchase decisions. A survey undertaken amongst billboard users in Missouri indicated that 75% of businesses making use of billboards, provide information on the types of products and services the business offers, while 36,7% provide information on the quality of products and services, 21,4% on convenience, 17,9% on savings and value and 10,7% on prices (Taylor, 2000, p.9).

*commercial speech*. According to this point of view freedom of commercial speech is seen as an important ingredient of freedom of expression and therefore as a fundamental right guaranteed by the constitutions of most democratic countries. *The Freedom of Commercial Speech Trust*, a South African organisation, defines freedom of commercial speech as follows:

*The legal right to produce...  
bestows the legal right to promote...  
which ensures the consumer's right to choose.*

(Outdoor Graphics, 1997, Summer (4), p. 12)

Freedom of commercial speech or advertising is seen as being at the heart of the market-driven economy and a major contributor to healthy competition. According to this view, advertising plays an important role in the upliftment of communities' living standards in general.

*In a free society, mass production is predicated upon mass selling, another name for advertising. Mass production makes possible countless products at a cost the mass of people can pay and about which they learn through advertising* (Russel & Lane, 1993, p.11).

Advertising therefore plays an important role in lowering the cost of consumer items. It also plays a role by informing the public of the availability of products and services, thereby increasing consumer awareness. According to Oosthuizen (1997), an educated and informed consumer will be more demanding, which stimulates competition and therefore guarantees better products and brands since competition leads to innovation. Educating and informing the consumer stimulates economic growth directly by creating larger demands for products and services, through which job creation also takes place. Advertising is therefore important for both the economic well-being of a country and the material and social well-being of its citizens.

It can be foreseen that freedom of commercial speech and outdoor information transfer will play an increasingly important role in a new world of global trade and instant communication.



The outdoor advertising industry itself also contributes directly to job creation and serves as a source of revenue. Table 1 gives an indication of the economic impact of the outdoor advertising industry in the state of Florida.

**TABLE 1**  
**ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING IN FLORIDA FOR 2000**

<b>Strength of outdoor advertising industry</b>	<b>\$293 million</b>
<b>Estimate of strength by 2005</b>	<b>\$306 million</b>
<b>Business revenues supported directly or indirectly by outdoor advertising</b>	<b>±\$613 million</b>
<b>Income for Florida households directly or indirectly supported by outdoor advertising</b>	<b>\$233 million</b>
<b>Jobs directly or indirectly generated</b>	<b>7 510</b>
<b>Sales tax generated by outdoor advertising firms</b>	<b>\$25 million</b>
<b>Government income generated through licenses and permits</b>	<b>\$13 million</b>
<b>Market value of <i>free</i> public service ads</b>	<b>\$10,6 million</b>
<b>Landscaping and maintenance of public rights-of-way</b>	<b>\$400 000</b>

**Source: FOAA, online (1)**

Unfortunately, the painting of billboards by hand, which contributes to employment, is now being replaced by digitally printed vinyl images at a lower cost. In a city such as Chennai, India, hand-painted billboards advertising movies, which are painted on cloth banners, can be seen as part of local tradition (Chennai best.com, online). According to Mr Paul Anthony, Buying Manager, Portland India Outdoor Advertising, digitally printed billboards are currently increasing their share by 15% per year at the expense of hand-painted billboards in Indian metropolitan areas (Varghese, 2001, online). It will therefore not take long before the hand-painting of billboards will disappear as a source of employment in India.

### 3.2.1.4 Enhancing the visual environment

If sound design principles are applied tastefully, advertisements and signs may be used as instruments for obtaining the necessary visual diversity, interest and character in drab and dreary environments. High-quality street and advertising furniture may, for instance, make an important contribution to streetscapes while the use of banners may create a rather festive atmosphere. According to Bell (1996, pp. 99; 101), it could be argued that man has a basic fundamental need for visual diversity to provide stimulus and enrichment to his quality of life. This need may have arisen early in the history of man through a recognition that landscapes containing variety tended to supply more food and opportunities for shelter and therefore protection from predators as well as a better chance of survival during climatic fluctuations or other periodic environmental stresses. A lack of visual diversity and environmental understimulation may create certain human behavioural problems. If applied in a responsible manner, outdoor advertisements and signs can therefore contribute to better living environments.

More permanent signs and advertisements such as signs on top of skyscrapers may contribute to the visual scene by forming prominent landmarks. Such signs may even contribute to community identity and a sense of belonging such as the *Osborne* or *Veterano* bull, which was erected in large numbers in the Spanish countryside to advertise *Osborne's Veterano Brandy*. These huge billboards became such part of the Spanish landscape and national identity that their intended removal by the authorities was met by public protest (Pretoria News, 1994, October 29). In the larger townships of South Africa, community towers, consisting of an illuminated billboard, a television screen and electronic advertising, serve as visual focal points and community gathering points (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (1), p17).

The *en masse* and large-scale application of outdoor advertisements and signs create very striking nightscapes in entertainment and shopping districts such as Piccadilly Circus, Madison Square, Tokyo's Ginza district and the Strip in Las Vegas. Such large-scale application of outdoor advertising can be seen as a key ingredient of these world-renowned tourist attractions. Gordon Cullen (1971, pp.151; 85) sees such nightscapes as a most valuable contribution of the twentieth century to urban scenery – landscapes *of a kind never before seen in history, ... a surrealist drama of shapes, lights*

*and movement in which the message sinks back under the free show, the evening-out sensation.* The following descriptions of Las Vegas by Wolfe (1981, pp.20,18) give a very clear indication of the dazzling splendour of these night-time wonderlands:

*... Las Vegas is the only town in the world whose skyline is made up neither of buildings, like New York, nor of trees, like Wilbraham, Massachusetts, but signs. One can look at Las Vegas from a mile away on Route 91 and see no buildings, no trees, only signs. But such signs! They tower. They revolve, they oscillate, they soar in shapes before which the existing vocabulary of art history is helpless.*

*Las Vegas' Strip, U.S. Route 91, where the neon and the par lamps - bubbling, spiraling, rocketing, and exploding in sunbursts ten stories high out in the middle of the desert - celebrate one-story casinos.*

As a form of art or medium of expression, advertisements and signs can also influence architectural style and urban design. The French architect Jean Nouvel has projected a series of streetscapes and cityscapes, which can aesthetically be seen as a collage of popular visual culture. These images of an urban future are based on an overscaled and simultaneous display of information. According to Rasmuss (1996, p.11), Nouvel has taken Tokyo's Ginza district and even London's Piccadilly Circus as cues and has finally placed the *thrust of advertising into architecture*. Edgars City on the corner of Pritchard and Rissik Streets in Johannesburg can be seen as a good example of a visual component that will easily fit into Nouvel's cityscape. Referring to Edgars City, Rasmuss (1996, p.11) argues that Nouvel's cityscape images are a lot closer to the likely reality of future cities than the traditional language of architectural articulation and urban form and therefore merit serious attention. It embodies the actual street culture of our cities, and billboards and advertising panels provide a good medium to reflect moments of daily city life.

Another good example of outdoor advertising used as a design element is Robert Venturi's *Football Hall of Fame*, a building which is actually a huge billboard, displaying to passing motorists the results of recent football matches.





UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



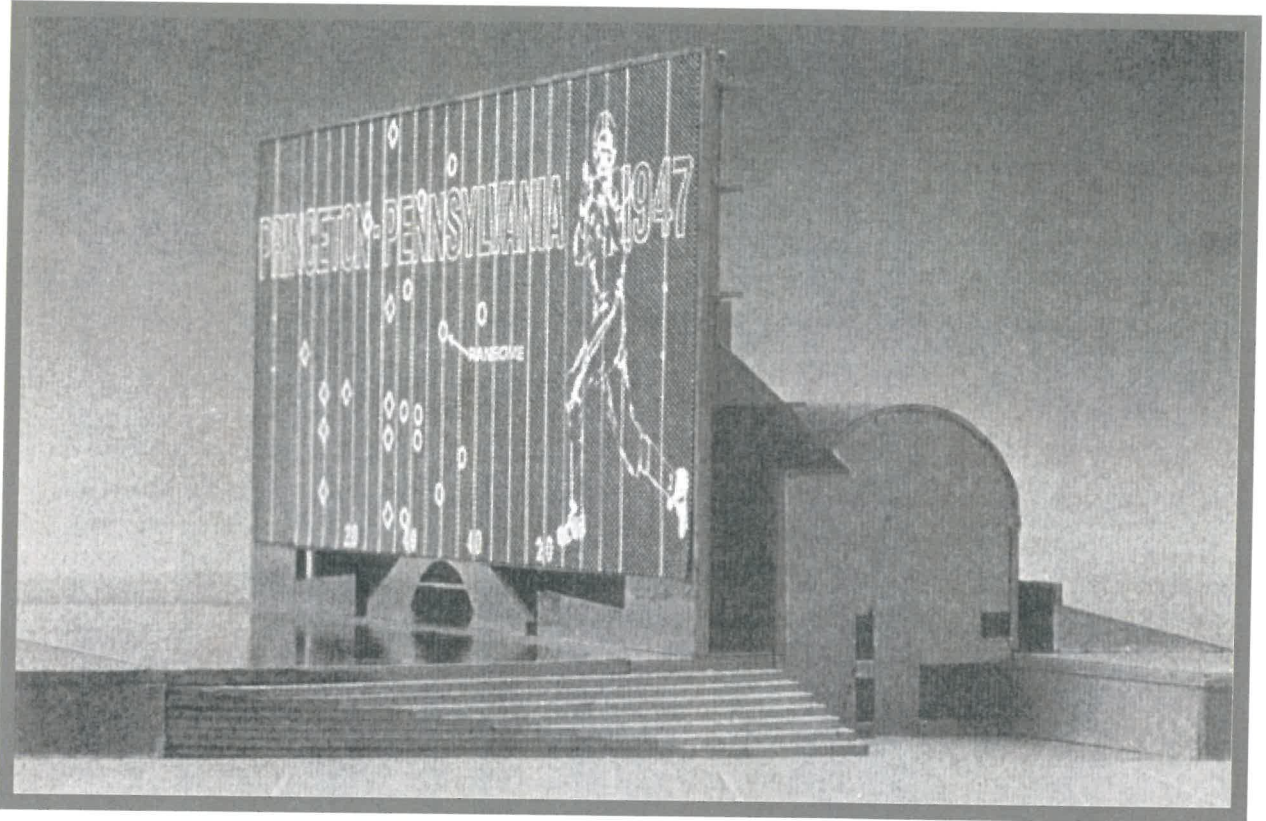
Figure 3.10

### Outdoor information transfer as a medium for architectural expression Edgars City

At Edgars City, on the corner of Pritchard and Rissik Streets in Johannesburg, signs are used as a medium of architectural expression and in this manner the necessary visual diversity, interest and character are obtained in a drab and dreary environment. It portrays the excitement of the city centre without contributing to visual clutter and sign proliferation. The Edgars City design speaks of harmony, simplicity and discipline. Large signs advertise brand names sold in Edgars. No smaller signs are allowed as they would clutter the design. This demonstrates that advertising control is necessary to ensure sound architectural and urban design.

Figure 3.11

Outdoor information transfer as a medium for architectural expression  
The Football Hall of Fame



Outdoor advertisements and signs can make an important contribution to the visual environment by forming a harmonious part of architecture. The *Football Hall of Fame* by the architect Robert Venturi uses a huge scoreboard as an information device and important design element.

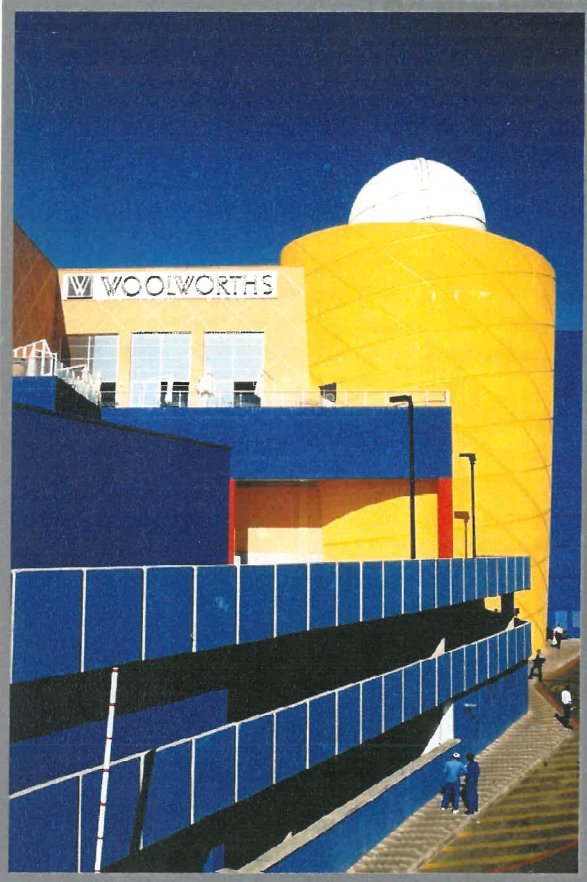
## Outdoor information transfer as a medium for architectural expression

### Menlyn Park





Figure 3.12  
continued



Outdoor advertisements and signs can make an important contribution to the visual environment by forming a harmonious part of architecture. The outdoor advertisements at Menlyn Park, the largest suburban shopping centre in Pretoria, fit well into the modern and colourful architecture of this shopping centre. Even the huge gantry billboard spanning across Atterbury Road next to Menlyn Park (top) blends into the architectural style of the shopping centre and contributes to local character. Gantry billboards normally provide good examples of the intrusive character of outdoor advertising since they confront the road user in a direct and blatant manner (Fig. 3.17). In this case the intrusive effect has been softened to a certain extent due to a harmony between billboard and architecture with regard to line, shape and colour.



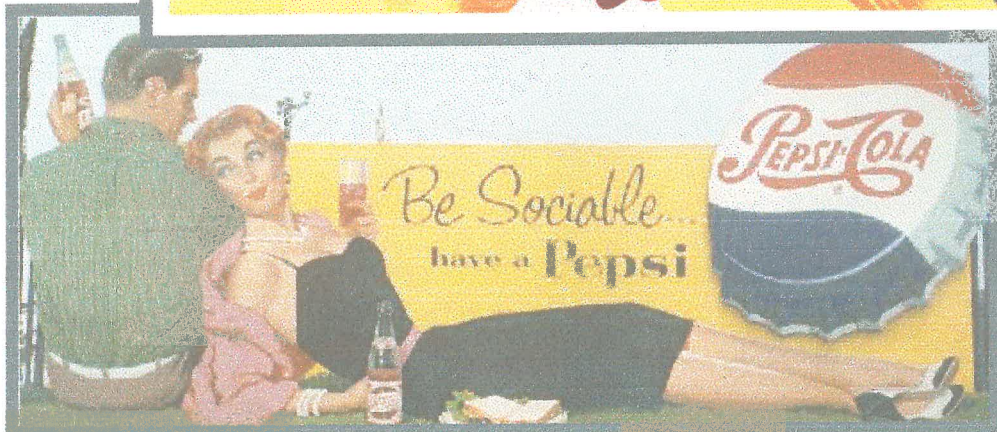
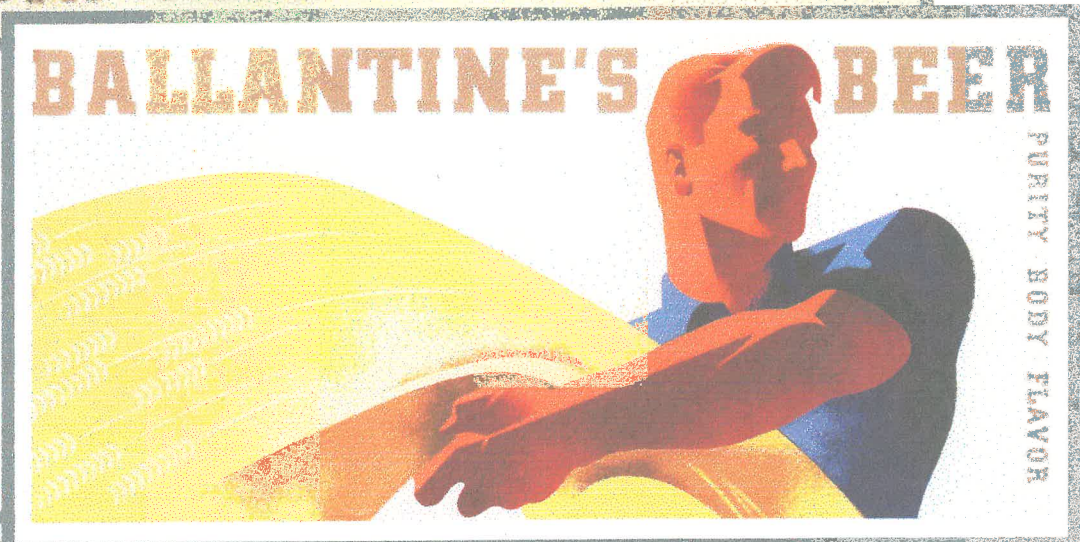
Date of photos: November 2001

Advertisements displayed on billboards or as posters are often of a very high design quality and may be considered a form of art (cf. Diggs & Thompson, 1999). The French art poster of the latter half of the nineteenth century and American billboard advertising, from as early as the 1920s till the 1950s, can be seen as good examples of this art-form in the past. In Las Vegas winning posters from a school competition were recently displayed on billboards donated by an outdoor advertising company. This project formed part of an initiative by the Las Vegas Arts Commission to enhance local neighbourhoods by means of public art (City of Las Vegas, online). And in South Africa, near the small town of Nieu Bethesda, a billboard along the national road featuring a black and white photograph of a donkey was used as part of an exhibition by the artist Jo Ractliffe (Dodd, 1999).

Hand-painted billboards present a special artistic touch. In the Indian city of Chennai hand-painted movie billboards are being recognised as a significant form of popular art (Chennai best.com, online). Other possibilities for hand-painted original quality and uniqueness include painted advertising murals, while even passenger-planes provide a canvas for artistic expression, which brightens up many an airport. In South Africa a *Nationwide Airlines* aircraft was turned into a painted image of a southern right whale in order to promote whale tourism along the South African coastline (The Star, 1998, October 6). Hand-painted murals brighten up dreary environments, promote community spirit, may involve community artists and may include both educational and advertising murals. (Knoll, 1999, pp.14-15). Hand-painted advertising murals may also contribute to placeness by expressing local culture and artistic abilities. Unfortunately, hand-painted billboards are currently being displaced by billboards produced by modern techniques such as digital printing and computerised painting, which are less expensive. Although these modern techniques do not have the hand-made image and original value of hand-painted advertisements, they also provide immense possibilities for presenting outdoor advertising as an art form. One of the latest advertising trends, car or bus wrapping, together with other forms of mobile advertising, often makes a very striking contribution, which can be described as *art on the road* (cf. DC Media & Marketing, online; Drive Ad, online; Graewolf Mobile Media, online). Huge computerised painted advertisements stretched against building walls or across building facades also provide huge artistic possibilities. These larger-than-life computerised painted advertisements are often used to conceal unsightly building renovations or constructions, while billboard panels are used to demarcate building sites.



Fraser, 1991, p.60



Fraser, 1991, p.74

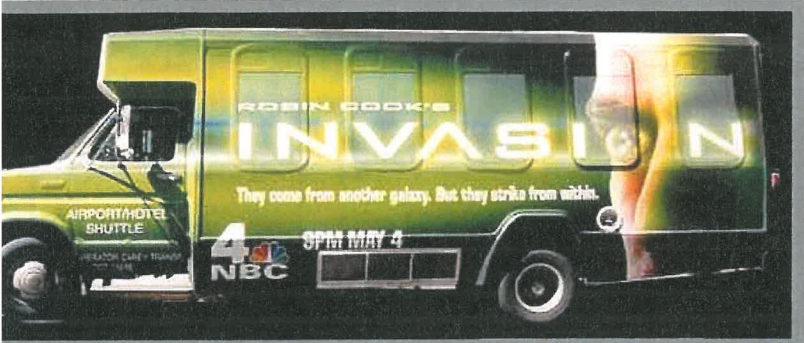
Sloman, 1999 [<http://www2.kenyon.edu/people/slomanj/main.htm>]

Even billboard advertising may make a positive contribution to environmental aesthetics. In the past many of these advertisements were of a very high design quality and may be considered a form of art. The 1920s contributed a classical, realistic style (top), followed by the more stylized approach of the 1930s (centre), while the 1950s saw a return to painted realism in a somewhat more informal style (bottom).

**Figure 3.13**  
**Billboard advertising**  
**as a form of art**



Media & Marketing - <http://www.wrap-a-bus.com>



DC Media & Marketing  
<http://www.wrap-a-bus.com>



Graewolf Mobile Media - <http://www.graewolf.com>



**Figure 3.14**  
**Art on the road**

Modern techniques such as digital printing provide immense opportunities for expressing outdoor advertising as an art form. One of the latest advertising trends, car or bus wrapping (top) together with other forms of mobile advertising such as advertising panels (bottom), often make a very striking contribution which can be described as *art on the road*.



Advertising can be used to enhance the visual environment by concealing unsightly building renovations. After part of the Pretoria Municipal Buildings was destroyed by fire, banner type signs were used to conceal unsightly building facades (top). At the same time these banners also served as a source of income to the Pretoria City Council. In Paris a banner concealing restoration work harmonises perfectly with building and trees (bottom).

**Figure 3.15**  
**Advertising**  
**concealing unsightly**  
**building renovations**



It has also been argued that advertisements such as billboards take the monotony out of long journeys and prevent road accidents by providing visual points of interest and stimulation to the weary traveller.

Outdoor advertising murals on walls and other surfaces, which are graffiti prone, may play an important role in combating this problem. This is especially applicable to walls and surfaces along railway lines in Europe and the United Kingdom where graffiti has become a major problem. However, such advertising murals should be provided with taste and must be maintained effectively.

#### 3.2.1.5 Source of income and similar benefits

Outdoor advertising may serve as a source of income to local authorities, communities and institutions. Outdoor advertising companies may also provide facilities, services and amenities in exchange for advertising rights or to improve their image. The following serves as examples in this regard:

- In South Africa a publishing group provided community towers containing big-screen outdoor television which broadcasts a variety of programmes to previously disadvantaged communities. Apart from advertisements on the outdoor screens the community towers are also used as an advertising structure to market a periodical aimed at these groups. Kiosks next to the towers sell this periodical as well as other products advertised on the tower and television. Promotions and competitions also form part of the advertising strategy (Finansies & Tegniek, 1998, September 25).
- In Berlin two 52-meter-high advertising banners against the towers of the Kaiser Wilhelm Church not only concealed restoration activities, but also put \$130 000 in the pockets of the church authorities – enough to cover all restoration costs (Beeld, 1999, Mei 11).
- An American enterprise, called *Beach 'n Billboard*, provides municipal beach cleaning machines with impression devices which impress advertisements in the sand, including *Please Don't Litter*



An American enterprise, called *Beach 'n Billboard*, has a unique way of advertising. It provides municipal beach-cleaning machines with impression devices which impress advertisements in the sand, including *Please Don't Litter* signs. This has led to an estimated 20% reduction in litter on such beaches.

**Figure 3.16**  
**Advertisements and signs**  
**providing a source of income**  
**and similar benefits**

signs. This has led to an estimated 20% reduction in litter on such beaches (Beach `n Billboard, online).

### 3.2.2 THE CHARACTER, EFFECTIVENESS AND CONTRIBUTION OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING AS A COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING MEDIUM

Outdoor advertising is aimed mostly at people in transit - people in private cars, buses, taxis, trains or on foot. In contrast with the other conventional advertising media it cannot be ignored, covered, switched off, put aside or left unopened. This intrusive characteristic is seen as a marketing advantage by the outdoor advertising industry. Chris Carr, a vice-president of Gannet Outdoor Group, was quoted as follows in *The Boston Globe* of 9 August 1994: *People can't shut off a billboard. TV and radio ads can be turned off or tuned out; billboards are the last unavoidable medium.* Outdoor advertising is a highly effective medium since it reaches almost all, with or without permission. It is a constant 24-hour medium with outdoor messages reaching audiences at any given time of the day. The mere size of modern advertisements makes it even more eye-catching and unavoidable. In the words of Reece-Myron (online):

*New technologies have turned one of the oldest advertising mediums into one of the most cost-effective, high-impact advertising mediums available. It's one medium where sheer size and results are worth consideration.* (Emphasis added.)

Traffic congestion in most urban areas strengthens the compelling nature of outdoor advertising even further. It forces the peak-hour motorist to look at the outdoor advertisement in a more leisurely and attentive way.

Since advertisements and signs are dependent on the *outdoor environment*, the outdoor environment should be seen as the actual medium of communication for imposing advertising messages upon viewers in a way they cannot avoid. Seen against this background outdoor advertising, as an advertising medium, can therefore not be limited to billboard or poster or any other type of advertising structure or sign. A more inclusive approach should be followed which would also include the *surrounding outdoor environment* as part of the advertising medium. According to this approach outdoor advertisement and sign structure form the internal media content and the surrounding environment the external media content, in the same manner as programme and article surrounding

the advertisement in media such as television and magazines can be seen as external content. According to Gunther (online), outdoor advertising can be seen as a pure advertising medium which conveys advertising messages directly without the distractions intrinsic to magazines, newspapers, radio and television. In the words of Cimine (online): *Outdoor is the one and only medium with a single purpose: to deliver advertising. Its focus is not diverted by other concerns, like programming.* This means that outdoor advertising's external media content should be interpreted as neutral content, which provides an advantage over other advertising media.

Outdoor advertising is also an adaptable and flexible medium. According to the South African outdoor advertising industry there are approximately 40 different outdoor media types ranging from bus shelters and litterbins to huge billboards which address a variety of advertising needs (Davidson & Ogston, 1995, p. 60). It can be accepted that the number of outdoor media types will increase as technology improves. The *South African Manual for Outdoor Advertising Control (SAMOAC)* makes provision for 35 classes of advertisements and signs (DEA&T, 1998). The conventional approach to outdoor advertising focuses on billboards, posters and other standardised sign types. However, other advertising media such as radio or television applied in the outdoor environment also constitute outdoor advertising. Improved technology is making the outdoor environment increasingly accessible to electronic media, which may include gimmicks such as talking bus shelters or miniature colour screens at filling stations showing commercials while customers fill their tanks.

Outdoor advertising is a very effective method of visual communication to adult populations in developing countries such as South Africa. In 1996 19,3% of the South African population had no schooling, while 24,3% of the African group, which constitutes 76,7% of the South African population, had no schooling (Statistics South Africa, 2001, pp.9; 37; 41). In provinces such as Limpopo and Mpumalanga, where 89% and 60,9% of the population are non-urban, 36,9% and 29,4% of the populations respectively had no education (Statistics South Africa, 2001, pp.6; 38). A large percentage of households in the rural areas of South Africa does not own television sets and because of illiteracy few people read magazines or newspapers. Radio and outdoor advertising therefore constitute very important communication and advertising media in rural areas. In 1998 only 50,3% of African households owned a television set, compared to 86,4% who owned a radio (Statistics South Africa, 2000, p.56). One can assume that this ratio would be much higher in rural areas. Research

has shown that the awareness or recognition rate of a product advertised on billboards in urban developing communities in South Africa might be as high as 75%, compared to an average rate of 65% for television campaigns in general (Beeld, 1995, Julie 13).

Outdoor advertising is a very cost-effective advertising medium. The only other medium that compares favourably to outdoor advertising in this regard is radio. Prices for outdoor advertising vary widely, but advertisers typically pay a CPT (cost per 1 000 viewers) of about \$2 for billboards in the USA, compared with \$5 for commuter-time radio, \$9 for magazines and \$10 to \$20 for newspapers or prime-time television (Gunther, online) (cf. Arens, 1999; Shimp, 1997). Comparative figures for South Africa (Table 2) also show that outdoor advertising is by far the most cost-effective advertising medium available. The cost-effectiveness of billboards can be ascribed especially to their effectiveness in providing high reach and frequency in a localised trade area (cf. McGann & Russell, 1988; Kotler, 1997)(cited in Taylor, 2000, p.16). Media planners define *reach* as the number of people in the target audience exposed to the message, while *frequency* is defined as the average number of times a member of the target audience is exposed to the message. According to a survey conducted amongst businesses using billboards in Missouri, 81,5% of the respondents find billboards to be cost effective, while 80% agree that billboards help them reach their trade area (Taylor, 2000, p.12). Lilley and DeFranco (1995; as quoted in Taylor, 2000, p.12) point out that billboard advertising in larger urban areas in the United States is mostly local in nature and that most billboard advertisers are small businesses. According to Taylor (2000, p.12), it is also well documented that other media are not as efficient as billboards in reaching a localised trade area (cf. Kotler, 1997; Arens, 1999). In the Missouri study of billboard users respondents were asked to rate a series of media alternatives in terms of their ability to communicate information at a price the business can afford. Billboards received an average rating of 5,42, which is considerably higher than any other alternative. The closest alternative is local newspapers at 4,15, followed by flyers at 4,06 (Taylor, 2000, p.13). According to Taylor (2000, p.16), the efficiency of billboards in reaching a local trade area is therefore especially critical for many small businesses who cannot afford any other expensive media.

Other forms of outdoor advertising are even of more critical importance for the informal sector. Due to the accessibility, extent and diversity of the outdoor environment, outdoor advertising provides ample affordable advertising opportunities, both legal and illegal, to the informal advertiser and



entrepreneur. This includes posters and notices, as well as other low-cost opportunities such as advertising trailers and banners. Outdoor advertising can be seen as the most accessible medium for informal advertisers and entrepreneurs compared to other advertising media such as print, radio or television. For this reason outdoor advertising will play an increasingly important role in countries such as South Africa with its strong informal economic sector, as well as an interface between First and Third World economies, which stimulates advertising in the informal sector.

**TABLE 2**  
**COST COMPARISON OF ADVERTISING MEDIA**  
(Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (2), p.13)

MEDIUM	RATE	AUDIENCE	CPT
The Star (Daily newspaper)	R19 623.5	47 000	R 417.52
Sunday Times (Sunday newspaper)	R 45 595	236 000	R 192.78
Car (Monthly magazine)	R 45 700	109 000	R 419.00
Highveld 94.7 (Regional radio)	R 3 795	56 000	R 67.77
5fm (National radio)	R 3 270	52 000	R 62.88
M-Net (Pay TV)	R 26 000	100 000	R 269.00
M1 Spectacular (Internally illuminated billboard)	R 800	208 000	R 3.87
M1 Freeway gantry ( Overhead billboard)	R 2 400	208 000	R 11.54
Bus shelter along Jan Smuts Ave Johannesburg	R 40	102 400	39c
Bus shelter along Oxford Road Johannesburg	R 40	67 200	60c

**CPT = Cost per thousand**

Newspaper ads refer to a half page ad while TV and radio refer to a 30-second spot. The outdoor advertising rate was calculated by dividing the monthly rate by 25 days a month. The number of people exposed to an outdoor advertisement was calculated by using the international average of 1.6 persons per vehicle.

According to *Outdoor Graphics* the above figures should be used with care since generalisations had to be made. In most cases rates are negotiable, and claimed reader / viewer / listenership has a margin of error. The figures are therefore for rough comparison purposes only. However, *Outdoor Graphics* argues that however one looks at it, even halving the exposure or doubling the cost of outdoor advertising, no other advertising medium comes near outdoor advertising in terms of being the least expensive way of broadcasting your message (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn, (2)).

Progress in technology associated with outdoor advertising may lower the cost of this medium even further. The printing of outdoor advertising images are going through a dramatic change. A few years ago it was prohibitively expensive to provide larger four-colour images, the only option being to hand-paint or screenprint the panel, raising the cost up to ten times. The advent of digital printing and painting processes now enables the production of images at a fraction of what it used to cost. It is expected that further technological progress will still lower prices significantly over the next few years. Electronic billboard structures, using different and more economical technology than the previous LED displays, are available today at half the cost (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (3), p.14).

Outdoor advertising has a very high reach and frequency compared to other media. According to DeLite Outdoor Advertising (online), a typical *showing* in the United States reaches more than three out of four adults in the market at a frequency rate of 15 times each. The high frequency can be attributed to a large extent to the fact that most people travel the same route to work, the shopping centre and other destinations, and are therefore exposed to the same message over and over.

Outdoor advertising is a very effective supplementary medium. It is being used increasingly to supplement broadcast messages and to expand the coverage of television and radio advertising campaigns, as well as to extend the life of such campaigns and to delay its decay in people's minds. Research has indicated that, by supplementing television advertisements, outdoor advertising can sustain awareness levels initially established by television at a fraction of the cost (Outdoor Graphics, 1997, Summer (3), p. 9). In the United Kingdom 35% of the top 200 television advertisers used outdoor advertising as a supplementary medium in 1991. In 2000 the figure stood at more than 80%. Certain overseas marketers, having built up an awareness and image for their brands over years of investment in television, are now even launching new variants of well-known brand names using outdoor advertising as the only medium, with excellent results. They are achieving phenomenal brand awareness in a short space of time – and at a fraction of the cost of other advertising media (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (2), p. 12). Apart from supplementing broadcast campaigns by means of billboards or other static images, a rapid advance in technology has made the outdoor screening of full television advertisement, or clips thereof, possible on video billboards, without any loss in picture quality. The coverage of television campaigns can therefore be expanded and their life can be

extended since customers are able to relive the television commercial experience at a fraction of the price (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Summer, p.12).

Radio and billboard also interact as supplementary media in the form of *talking billboards*. Motorists passing such a billboard are able to pick up a special frequency from a micro-radio station to receive more information from the advertiser. This method is especially valuable for locality-bound or on-premise advertising such as a billboard advertising a housing development where motorists may learn more about the development's amenities, pricing options and other details as they drive by (Lach, online).

Outdoor advertising is a favourable medium for place-based advertising, which was seen by Kelly (1994; cited in McAllister, 1996, p.66) as one of the upcoming advertising trends of the 1990s, with a projected annual growth of 50%. Place-based advertising involves the application of conventional advertising media in the following manner:

- It consists of advertisements displayed at social places with specific functions and which attract people with specific needs, interests, demographics and psychographics
- The surrounding environment plays an important role in creating a favourable atmosphere conducive to specific advertising messages.
- The advertisements relate to the activities at and the function of the specific place, as well as the lifestyles and psychographics of visitors to such places. Consequently dynamic synergism exists between place, advertisements and visitor.

Place-based advertising offers the following benefits:

- Place-based advertising can be seen as an effective instrument for niche advertising. It is aimed at narrowly targeted groups with a disposable income.



- Place-based advertising gives better control over viewing behaviour since it reaches consumers where they cannot escape since they are occupied by a specific activity or interest.
- Place-based advertising reaches the potential customer close to the point of purchase, which may encourage impulse purchases.
- The symbolic values of the relevant social places, as well as a friendly atmosphere, give credibility to the advertising message and put the potential customer in a receptive frame of mind.

From the above it is clear that outdoor and place-based advertising show a close similarity with regard to certain key issues, such as the importance of the surrounding environment and the tendency to impose messages upon audiences. This explains outdoor advertising's affinity for the place-based trend. The outdoor environment provides a large variety of place-based opportunities such as shopping centre parking areas, airports, sport stadiums, beaches and various other valuable social places. In general outdoor advertising is very effective at confronting people when they are ready to buy. This is especially true of billboards and signs along highways which guide and inform the weary and hungry traveller as to where to stop for food, fuel or lodging. What better example of a place-based advertisement is there when manufacturers of cars reach their best prospects, the owners of cars, with advertisements along roads and highways?

Outdoor advertising also fulfils an important role by being incorporated in and absorbed by other advertising media such as television. Television coverage of major sporting events provides many an opportunity for including outdoor images, such as advertisements featuring on racing cars, rugby or soccer fields, competitor's clothing or even on cricket wickets. In the United States this was a very effective way of getting round the ban on tobacco-related advertisements on television.

A certain part of outdoor advertising, called *ambient media* by the industry, also has a very high novelty value. One of ambient's main characteristics is the ability to surprise. Both its diversity and flexibility allow for placing messages in places the audience would least expect and for capturing surrounding audiences which are often difficult to reach. From petrol pump nozzle advertisements (in the United Kingdom where you have to fill your own car) and branded golf holes to ad bikes (small

advertising trailers towed by bicycles), the possibilities of ambient media are almost endless (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (2), p.12)

The outdoor advertising industry is currently experiencing a revival. In the United States spending on outdoor advertising is growing by nearly 10% a year - faster than newspapers, magazines and broadcast television, though not as fast as cable television and the Internet (Gunther, online). Figures are even more impressive for South Africa.<sup>20</sup> Outdoor advertising is currently one of the fastest-growing advertising media in South Africa, which may be attributed to the relaxation of strict control measures, an increase in more sophisticated signs and a realisation of the medium's cost effectiveness (Advertising Focus '94, p. 111). (See table 3.) While the total advertising expenditure for all media grew by 11.41% for the year ending August 2001, the expenditure on outdoor advertising rose by 24,22% to over R370 million, bringing outdoor advertising's share of total advertising expenditure up to 3,88% from 3,48% in the previous year. However, this figure should be higher due to the fact that certain outdoor advertising contractors did not submit their expenditure figures during this period. According to Billboards.co.za (online (2)), a more realistic outdoor advertising expenditure figure for the year ending August 2001 would be in the region of R450 million. This would mean that outdoor's share of total advertising expenditure should be in the vicinity of 4,7%. Although outdoor's share of total advertising expenditure is relatively low in comparison with other mediums such as print, television and radio, a constant improvement has taken place from 2,3% in 1989 to the current estimated 4,7%. According to Tony Davidson of the Outdoor Advertising Association of South Africa, outdoor advertising shows a healthy potential for growth while the upper limit of outdoor's share of total advertising expenditure in South Africa could be as high as 10% (Advertising Focus '94, p. 112). Due to the diverse character of outdoor advertising the role, extent, contribution and importance of outdoor advertising in developing countries such as South Africa cannot be calculated solely in terms of advertising expenditure figures. The significant contribution made by informal contractors and advertisers is very difficult to calculate in monetary terms. The fact that outdoor advertising is one of the least expensive advertising media in terms of cost per thousand is another indication that share of

---

<sup>20</sup> In countries that have only recently opened up to outdoor advertising and which can therefore be seen as virgin territories to be conquered by the outdoor advertising industry, growth rates are quite spectacular. According to Sign Biz Inc. (online), outdoor advertising in Beijing, China, grew at an annual rate of 273% from 1990 to 1999, while the use of outdoor advertisements nationwide increased 9 times during this 10 year period.



total advertising expenditure is not the most efficient way of calculating an advertising medium's role and importance. If the total audiences of each medium type could be calculated, this would provide a different reflection of outdoor advertising's contribution and importance.

**TABLE 3**  
**ADVERTISING EXPENDITURE**  
**As Measured by AC Nielsen**

MEDIUM	SEPT '99 – AUG '00	%SHARE	SEPT '00 – AUG '01	%SHARE	% INCREASE
Print	R3 578 295 498.00	41.76	R3 779 935 982.00	39.6	5.64
Television	R3 430 995 456.00	40.05	R3 974 823 995.00	41.64	15.85
Radio	R1 150 312 250.00	13.43	R1 206 833 432.00	12.64	4.91
Outdoor	R298 095 702.00	3.48	R370 309 014.00	3.88	24.22
Cinema	R66 526 729.00	0.78	R68 932 108.00	0.72	3.62
Knock N Drop	R43 353 260.00	0.5	R98 136 651.00	1.03	126.37
Internet			R46 519 466.00	0.49	
Total	R8 567 578 895.00	100	R9 545 490 648.00	100	11.41

Source: Billboards.co.za, online (2)



Various trends are counting in favour of outdoor advertising, which has acquired a more trendy and sophisticated image in recent times. An industry once known for advertising more *common* products such as beer and cigarettes, is now attracting image-conscious marketers such as Gap, Kelvin Klein, Apple and Disney (Gunther, online). New technology has made outdoor advertising more creative while digital printing ensures faithful reproduction and a neat appearance. A rapid advancement of technology used to manufacture video billboards and transmit the advertising messages they display has made the screening of television commercials in the outdoors possible without any loss in picture quality. Another exciting development include powerful light projection systems used to project advertising images onto large surfaces, while many an advertising sign can now shake, wink, glitter, speak and even puff scents into the air. Broad social trends are also favouring outdoor advertising, the most important of these being an increase in the use of cars. Daily vehicle trips in the United States are up by 110% since 1970 while the number of cars on the road have increased by 147% (Gunther, online). The increase in vehicles is outpacing population increase by far. The number of drivers in the United States increased more than three times as fast as the population between 1969 and 1995, and the number of household vehicles increased six times as fast. Furthermore, two thirds of all car trips are made by the driver all on his own, with only the radio and billboards for company (Edmondson, online). The increasing number of cellular phones is also creating possibilities of turning more and more billboards into direct-response advertising.

---