



## 3.4 PUBLIC OPINION AND PERCEPTIONS

### 3.4.1 THE MARITZ SURVEY

A survey undertaken by Maritz Marketing Research of Fenton, Missouri (Edmondson, online) gave somewhat ambiguous results regarding Americans' views on billboards. On the one hand, this study indicates that most Americans have negative feelings about billboards by not agreeing with the statements that *billboards are entertaining* or that *billboards can be beautiful*. (Only about one in six and one in four adults respectively agreed with these statements.) On the other hand, a positive view is reflected since the number of Americans who disagreed with the statements that *billboards are ugly* and that *billboards should be banned* surpass those who agreed by quite some margin.

The ambiguity of billboards being seen as neither beautiful nor ugly might be explained by the fact that Americans tend to view billboards more in terms of functionality than in terms of aesthetics. This assumption is supported by the fact that 53% of all respondents agreed with the statement that *billboards can be useful but should be strictly regulated*, compared to only 20% who disagreed.

Edmondson (online) gives the following interpretation of the above-mentioned trends:

*Most Americans do not appreciate the artistic or entertaining qualities of outdoor ads. Yet they don't hate billboards, either. They see outdoor advertising as marginally useful to their lives, and they accept it as a consequence of the free enterprise system.*

This acceptance might be interpreted as experiencing billboards as an integral part of the American landscape and an unavoidable part of the *American Dream*. After all, the billboard is an American invention. In the words of Gossage (1960, online) *...outdoor advertising has come to be regarded as an institution like any other overtly respectable industry ... it would be positively un-American to question them.*

Although the results of the Maritz survey support billboards to a certain extent, it still seems as if Edmondson (online), in analysing the Maritz survey, finds proof of a significant discontent among Americans concerning the increasing number and size of billboards. After making the following statement: *Many outdoor advertising companies believe that success depends on putting up more billboards, making them bigger, and loading them with ever-more elaborate gimmicks*, he comes to the conclusion: *But to ordinary Americans, more billboards and louder billboards will just add to the clutter, no matter how good-looking or creative they are.*

The bottom line of the Maritz survey is that although the majority of Americans may feel that billboards can be useful, they also indicate that billboards should be strictly regulated.

### 3.4.2 THE VISSER STUDY

The findings of the Maritz study are supported by a study undertaken by Visser (1997) on the attitudes and perceptions of the South African road user on outdoor advertisements. According to Table 7 respondents feel that advertisements are necessary. The number of respondents who agreed



with the statements that *advertisements supply information* and that *advertisements are necessary in our daily life* surpassed those who did not agree by a very high margin. However, most respondents did not agree with the statement that *advertisements reduce the price of goods*. The majority also did not agree with the statement that *we need more advertisements*, although by only a slight margin, which points towards the need for the effective management and regulation of outdoor information transfer. This conclusion is supported by the fact that while respondents feel strongly that businesses should be allowed to advertise on their *own* properties next to roads, the majority are not in favour of businesses advertising on *any* property next to roads, which means that they are not in favour of third-party or non-locality-bound advertising (Visser, 1997, pp.47-48).

**TABLE 7**

**SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD USERS – ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISEMENTS IN GENERAL**

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Advertisements supply information	86,5%	7,1%	6,4%
Advertisements reduce the price of goods	30,6%	55,1%	14,2%
Advertisements are necessary in our daily life	80,9%	8,3%	10,8%
We need more advertisements	39,3%	43,4%	17,3%

Source: Visser, 1997, pp.38-47

Although opinions were almost evenly spread in Table 8 it still means that a very large percentage of the respondents indicated that advertising boards have a negative impact when displayed next to roads. It is interesting to note that the opposition against outdoor advertisements increases when the environment becomes more natural or when such advertising boards are erected closer to residential environments.

**TABLE 8**  
**RESPONSE TO STATEMENT THAT ADVERTISING BOARDS CREATE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT IF DISPLAYED NEXT TO VARIOUS ROADS**

TYPE OF ROAD	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Urban freeways	37,6%	49,7%	12,7%
Rural freeways	50,8%	37,3%	11,8%
Streets near residential offices	42,4%	42,7%	14,9%

Source: Visser, 1997, pp.91-92

Somewhat contradictory to Table 8, Table 9 shows that a large majority of respondents feel that outdoor advertisements do cause environmental pollution and that they are very strongly opposed to such pollution, even if it means that outdoor advertisements would subsidise road maintenance. Respondents also indicate, by an even larger majority, that outdoor advertising should be managed and controlled effectively. What is also of interest is that respondents feel that advertisements may have a positive environmental function by covering ugly sites. This view is confirmed by Table 10, where respondents actually request that outdoor advertisements should complement the environment.

In addition to the indication in Table 9 that outdoor advertisements should be managed effectively, Table 10 indicates that the contents and positioning of advertisements should be managed by limiting the information on advertisements and by preventing grouping and cluttering. Another indication of the need for effective management of outdoor advertisements is that the respondents who participated in this study felt that outdoor advertising impacts negatively on road safety. (See 3.3.6.2.) The support for the use of minimum letter sizes on advertisements expressed in Table 10, to ensure legibility, supports this opinion regarding outdoor advertisements and road safety.



**TABLE 9**  
**SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD USERS – PERCEPTIONS ON OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Too much advertising causes environmental pollution	56,2%	29,4%	14,4%
Outdoor advertisements generate an income to subsidise maintenance costs on roads, I would be prepared to allow environmental pollution	19,6%	67,5%	12,9%
Outdoor advertisements obstruct scenery	53,8%	26,5%	19,7%
Outdoor advertisers should be allowed to advertise as much as they want to, along roads	11,2%	83,7%	5,0%
There should be a <i>National Code of Practice</i> to limit advertising along roads	91,4%	4,7%	4,0%
Motorists prefer to see advertisements, instead of green fields	5,3%	82,6%	12,1%
Outdoor advertisements should be placed on strategic places to avoid ugly sites, for example railway lines	71,1%	19,2%	9,7%

Source: Visser, 1997, pp.93-106

An important conclusion that can be based on the findings of the Visser study is that the South African road user wants the opportunity to contribute to the management of outdoor information transfer. When respondents were confronted by the statement *motorists should have a say, whether advertisements should be allowed next to roads*, 71.2% agreed while only 16,6% disagreed (Visser, 1997, p.73).



**TABLE 10**  
**SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD USERS – CRITERIA FOR ALLOWING ADVERTISEMENTS**

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
The information on advertising boards should be limited	88,2%	6,3%	5,6%
Minimum letter sizes should be prescribed to ensure legibility	91,1%	4,4%	4,6%
The advertising board should complement the environment	87,4%	5,3%	7,3%
Advertising boards placed in groups along freeways are overpowering	80,2%	11,5%	8,3%

Source: Visser, 1997, pp.77-84

The final conclusion that can be made from the Visser study is that, although respondents feel that outdoor advertising fulfils an important role and that it should be allowed, it does impact negatively on the environment and should therefore be managed effectively, while the public should also have the opportunity to make inputs to such management. Outdoor information transfer should furthermore make a positive contribution to the environment.

### 3.4.3 STUDIES INDICATING A GROWING OPPOSITION TO BILLBOARDS IN THE UNITED STATES

It seems as if there is currently a growing opposition to billboards in the United States, as well as a growing realisation of the aesthetic impact of this kind of advertising. Organisations such as *Scenic America*, with its affiliates which include *Scenic Texas*, *Scenic North Carolina*, *Scenic Virginia*, *Scenic Missouri* and *Citizens for a Scenic Florida*, are campaigning actively in this regard.



Various surveys in certain states and cities are giving a clear indication of a growing opposition to billboards in the United States as indicated by the following facts:

**BILLBOARDS DEGRADE THE ENVIRONMENT  
REDUCTION OF BILLBOARDS**

**BAN ON NEW BILLBOARDS**

- **Florida:** Residents prefer reducing the number of billboards over future increases by a 10 to 1 margin.
- **Texas:** 25% of cities with a population of 5 000 or more have ordinances that prohibit the construction of new billboards city-wide.
- **New Hampshire:** 64% of citizens oppose billboards on highways with 53% strongly opposing billboards.
- **New Hampshire:** Residents favour a ban on new billboards by a 56% to 29% margin.
- **Rhode Island:** 62% of respondents state that billboards make state roads less attractive, as opposed to 31% who simply felt that it makes no difference.
- **Rhode Island:** A two-to-one public support for a ban on new billboards.
- **Missouri:** 69% of citizens felt that fewer billboards would make their state more attractive to tourists, while just 26% disagreed.
- **Missouri:** Margin of opposition to new billboard construction is 78% to 15%.
- **Houston, Texas:** 79% of residents support maintaining or strengthening the city's ordinance removing all
- **Houston, Texas:** 81% of residents favour an existing ordinance banning new billboard construction.



billboards by 2013.

- Michigan: More than 90% of residents believe that the state has too many billboards or the right amount of billboards as opposed to only 2% who want more billboards.
- Michigan: Residents favour a ban on new billboard construction by a 60% to 32% margin.
- Virginia: By a margin of 89% to 5% residents believe there are too many billboards or the right amount of billboards and by a margin of 34% to 5% they believe there are too many billboards versus too few.
- Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce (NC): Members favour a ban on new billboards by a margin of 68% to 25%.
- Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce (NC): 62% of members were for a reduction of the number of billboards permitted in Cumberland County with 28% against such a step.
- Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (NC): 72% of members favour the banning of new billboards with only 26% against such a step.

#### OPPOSITION TO TREE-CUTTING FOR BILLBOARD VISIBILITY

#### LIMITED INFORMATION FROM BILLBOARDS

- Missouri: 80% of residents oppose a state law allowing the cutting of trees on public right-of-way in front of billboards (1994 survey).
- Rhode Island: 72% of respondents indicated that they received very little or no useful information about products and services from billboards.





- **New Hampshire:** 80% oppose tree cutting to improve visibility of existing billboards.
- **Florida:** Residents derived more information about roadside services from official (LOGO) signs than from billboards by a margin of 63% to 16%.
- **Florida:** 75% of residents oppose tree cutting to allow billboards to be seen.
- **Missouri:** Residents derived more information about roadside services from official (LOGO) signs than from billboards by a margin of 68% to 18%.
- **Michigan:** Residents oppose tree cutting by a 63% to 33% margin.
- **Virginia:** Residents prefer LOGO signs to billboards by a 71% to 21% margin.
- **Virginia:** Residents object to tree cutting in public right of way and would favour legislation prohibiting such a practice by a 63% to 32% margin.
- **Virginia:** Only 13% of residents stated that billboards were *very useful* to them, versus 20% who said they weren't useful at all.
- **Missouri:** 80% of residents oppose state law allowing the cutting of trees on public right-of-way in front of billboards (1994 survey).

(Sources: Scenic America, online (1) & (5); Scenic North Carolina, online (1) & (2); Scenic Texas, online (2); Scenic Virginia, online).

#### 3.4.4 ACTIVIST GROUPS

Another indication of increasing public opposition to outdoor advertising and advertising in general is the various activists groups, the so-called culture jammers, which have come to the fore during the

past decade or so. According to Williams (online), culture jamming *refers to the deliberate disruption, distortion, or subversion of mainstream media messages, primarily advertising*. Where outdoor advertising is at stake these groups are not against the aesthetic impact of the outdoor advertising structures *per se*. Their protest is aimed at the message impact by drawing the public's attention to the social, environmental and economic consequences of consumerism, which is enhanced through advertising. According to Pedro Carvajal, *culture jamming is an anti-consumerist movement articulating a critique of corporate and media power* (Prothers, 1998,online).

Although culture jammers may fulfil quite a useful role in raising public awareness regarding the negative aspects of advertising, they tend to take a somewhat coarse and unconventional approach which sometimes shows a disrespect not only for cultural, but even for religious values.

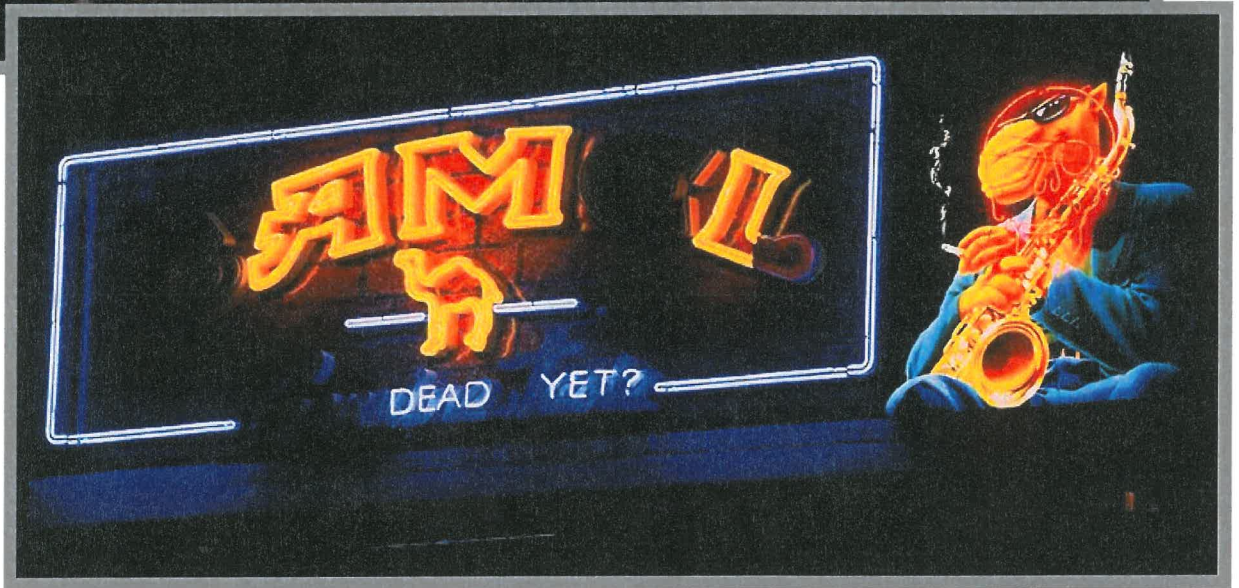
Some of these groups are focusing on changing and alternating existing billboards, such as the *Billboard Liberation Front* and the *Cicada Corps of Artists*, while others, such as the *Media Foundation* and *Guerrilla Art*, cover a broader field.

In the case of the *Billboard Liberation Front* there is something more than culture jamming at stake. It seems as if this well-organised and professional organisation consists of some adventurous souls with a very good sense of humour getting a real kick out of taking on the billboard industry (cf. Redmond, 1990; BLF, online). They have even been called the *Robin Hoods of advertising* by the *San Francisco Magazine* (1989, Sept.).

### 3.4.5 THE FLORIDA SURVEY

In a survey involving 1 165 randomly selected Florida residents an independent research group found that an overwhelming majority of people feel billboards are useful and should not be banned (FOAA, online, (2)). Eighty one percent of the respondents said, *When travelling, billboards are somewhat useful or very useful*, 90% said, *They provide a way for local businesses to communicate with tourists*, while 82,7% said, *They provide information about products and services to the public*. As many as 89% of the respondents indicated that billboards should not be banned. The presentation of the results of this survey by the *Florida Outdoor Advertising Association (FOAA)* seems biased since

Before



After

An indication of growing opposition to billboards is the work of various activist groups, the so-called culture jammers, who have come to the fore during the past decade or so. The aim of these groups is to deliberately disrupt or distort mainstream advertising messages. Some of these groups focus specifically on changing and altering existing billboards as shown by the work of the Billboard Liberation Front. They are not against the visual impact of outdoor advertising *per se*, but rather against the social, environmental and economic impact of consumerism

**Figure 3.33**  
**Culture jamming**



they present only the results favouring the outdoor advertising industry on their website. The question on the banning of billboards is definitely biased since it implies the respondents' financial commitment by phrasing the question as follows: *Would you advise your government to spend time and your tax dollars banning billboards?* (Emphasis added.)

### 3.5 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to determine the nature and extent of the need for the effective management of outdoor information transfer in terms of both the benefits and impact thereof. From conclusions in Chapter 2 on the status of the perceptual environment it can be derived that the nature and extent of the need for the effective management of outdoor information transfer go back to insufficient and pragmatic environmental ethics, which leads to the misuse and abuse of the perceptual environment and outdoor information transfer. This misuse and abuse of outdoor information transfer not only have a direct impact on the environment and tend to neutralise the benefits of outdoor information transfer, but also serve as a very strong symbolism of society's pragmatic and consumeristic mindset which may condition members of society even further to accept and participate in environmental abuse.

From the above-mentioned sub-problem the following hypothesis was formulated: *Outdoor information transfer, as an important part of the perceptual environment, benefits society and the environment, but it also impacts negatively on the environment. Sense of place and placeness play a crucial role with regard to the benefits and impact of outdoor information transfer. If a "laissez-faire" policy is followed with regard to the management of outdoor information transfer the impacts thereof will overshadow its positive contribution and will neutralise many of the benefits.*

The following conclusions will shed more light on this hypothesis.

### 3.5.1 THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR INFORMATION TRANSFER

It has been shown that outdoor information transfer benefits society and the environment by

- directing and guiding the road user and pedestrian.
- informing and warning the public in order to enhance general well-being and safety.
- stimulating economic growth and promoting freedom of commercial choice.
- enhancing the visual environment.
- providing a source of income and similar benefits.

A historical perspective on the function of outdoor information transfer has also revealed the importance of the outdoor advertisement and sign throughout history. Certain forms of outdoor information transfer, such as the generic trade symbol, the crier, the church bell and the artistic shop and inn sign, which contributed to the visual environment and a sense of place in the past, have perpetual value and are still relevant today.

Certain modern trends in the outdoor advertising industry point to a lesser environmental impact and even a positive contribution to the perceptual environment. These include new printing and painting technologies, which create more stylish and striking images and artwork, as well as the monopolistic tendencies in consolidating national and international outdoor advertising contractors, which means that smaller competitors, displaying less stylish products and images, are eliminated. However, these trends need to be managed effectively in order to realise their full potential.

### 3.5.2 THE IMPACTS OF OUTDOOR INFORMATION TRANSFER

There can be no doubt that outdoor information transfer impacts on the environment and society in a myriad of ways. These impacts are often interrelated and consist of the following:

- Psychological impact
  - Environmental overstimulation or information overload
  - Other impacts related to placelessness
    - Crime and vandalism
    - Poor community identity and a uniform world culture
    - Devaluation of place and commercialisation of placeness
- Ethical or moral impact
- Unsustainable consumption patterns
- Impact on tourism resources and unfriendly tourist and retail environments
- Impact on traffic safety and traffic flow
  - Distracting the attention of the motorist
  - Interfering and creating confusion with traffic signals, traffic signs and road markings
  - Obstructing the view of the motorist
  - Forming physical obstructions
  - Billboards and signs hitting pedestrians, cyclists and motorists
  - Impairing traffic flow
- Direct ecological impact
- Noise pollution
- Light pollution

- Devaluation of property values and urban decay

It is interesting to note that even the advertising industry admits that billboards have a negative impact on the environment:

*As a private person, I have a passion for landscape, and I have never seen one improved by a billboard. Where every prospect pleases, man is at his vilest when he erects a billboard. When I retire from Madison Avenue, I am going to start a secret society of masked vigilantes who will travel around the world on silent motor bicycles, chopping down posters at the dark of the moon. How many juries will convict us when we are caught in these acts of beneficent citizenship? (Ogilvy, 1971, p.112.)*

It has also been shown that the problem of uncontrolled signs and advertisements cannot be seen in isolation. It is closely linked to other practices that impact on the aesthetic environment, such as littering and graffiti. In the words of Miller (online):

*Billboards, litter and graffiti must not be considered separate and disconnected phenomena; they can only be understood collectively... All three make a mockery of aesthetics and ethics by imposing unsolicited, uncompromising and unavoidable images upon the public.*

The management of outdoor information transfer must therefore also be linked to and co-ordinated with the prevention and management of littering and graffiti:

*If we do not have the will to rid ourselves of litter and graffiti, we will never be able to stop the proliferation of outdoor advertising that is turning a drive around town into a trip through the Yellow Pages (Miller, online).*

### 3.5.3 PUBLIC NEED FOR CONTROL

It has been shown that although outdoor information transfer fulfils an important role and should not be banned, it does impact negatively on the environment and should be controlled. There is also a

rising discontent among the public regarding the increasing number of outdoor advertisements and the resulting impact of such advertisements.<sup>22</sup> This assumption is supported by the findings of various surveys in the United States, as well as the Visser study in South Africa. Even the Maritz survey, which is one of the studies most favourable to billboards, indicates that although billboards can be useful they should be subjected to strict regulation. These findings provide a very strong rationale for the effective management of outdoor information transfer.

Furthermore, it has been shown that the effective management of outdoor information transfer should include the involvement of the public.

#### **3.5.4 A LAISSEZ-FAIRE APPROACH OR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT?**

If a *laissez-faire* approach is followed in managing outdoor information transfer the dynamics and inherent characteristics of outdoor information transfer may very easily get out of hand and may even be self-destructive. A balanced and holistic approach to the management of outdoor information transfer is needed. Benefits and impacts have to be seen in the context of effective management, which means optimising the benefits while minimising the impacts. A lack of effective management will not only increase the impacts of outdoor information transfer, but will also undermine and will be counterproductive to its main functions and benefits. An inverted situation may very easily be reached where impacts are maximised while benefits are minimised. Effective management will therefore also be in the interest of the outdoor advertising industry.

##### **3.5.4.1 Lessons from history**

History has shown that outdoor information transfer, and especially commercial advertising, has a latent and inherent capability of impacting negatively on the visual environment. It only needs favourable circumstances such as periods of economic growth, technological progress or periods of

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<sup>22</sup> Active opposition to outdoor advertising is not limited to developed countries such as the United States. Even in the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Area in South Africa organisations like *Citizens' Revolt Against Poster Pollution (CRAPP)* is taking a stance against the aesthetic impact of outdoor advertising.



promotional frustration in other advertising media for outdoor advertising to show its hand and leave major footprints on the environment. The current economic and technological climate provides extremely favourable circumstances for outdoor information transfer, together with major impacts on the environment and society. Economic globalisation is having a major influence by creating opportunities for exporting the American lifestyle to the rest of the world, together with a more extravagant and impetuous approach to outdoor information transfer.

#### 3.5.4.2 Forces enhancing the impact of outdoor information transfer

The following driving forces behind outdoor information transfer will lead to an ever-increasing escalation of its impact if a *laissez-faire* approach is followed. These forces provide a sufficient motive for the effective management of outdoor information transfer:

##### (a) The obtrusive character and inherent dynamics of outdoor advertisements and signs

Outdoor information transfer's *modus operandi* of forcing itself upon the public inevitably points to a *natural* tendency of increasing its impact. This tendency necessitates the effective management of outdoor advertisements and signs and even necessitates stronger control than is exercised in the case of any other advertising medium.<sup>23</sup> The obtrusive character of outdoor advertisements and signs was described as follows by Justice Brandeis (Citizens for a Scenic Florida, online (1)):

*Billboards, street car signs, and placards and such are in a class by themselves... Advertisements of this sort are constantly before the eyes of observers on the streets... to be seen without the exercise of choice or volition on their part. Other forms of advertising are ordinarily seen as a matter of choice on the part of the observer... The radio can be turned off, but not so the billboard (Justice Brandeis in Packer v. Utah 285 U.S. 105, 110, 52 S.Ct. 273, 274, 76 L.Ed. 643 (1932)).*

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<sup>23</sup> This is especially true with regard to moral impact. Due to its unavoidable nature it stands to reason that the moral impact of outdoor advertising should be controlled much stricter than is the case with any other advertising medium.

In other words, outdoor advertising violates the individual's freedom of choice. Every citizen not only has the right to look at decent environments, but also not to have outdoor advertisements pushed down their throats in a too obtrusive, blatant and indigestible manner. In the case of all other advertising media the observer has the choice to observe or not to observe. Advertisements in the printed media can be ignored by the turn of a page and commercials on television by changing channels. But when the outdoor advertising contractor makes use of the visual zone along streets and freeways the motorist has no choice but to observe. In the words of Gossage (1960, online) the television viewer is *allowed to skip to another channel ... or to bed; you can turn it off entirely. Or you can throw the set out the window. You cannot throw U.S. 40 out the window, especially if you are on it. Nor can you flip a billboard over. Or off. Your exposure to television commercials is conditional on their being accompanied by entertainment that is not otherwise available. No such parity or tit-for-tat or fair exchange exists in outdoor advertising.*

What is more, in the process of forcing outdoor advertisements on the public the outdoor advertising industry is using publicly owned *media*, the road system and the aesthetic environment, free of charge or at a minimum fee. To quote *Scenic Texas* (Online, 1):

*Isn't it enough that our cities are covered up with billboard blight? Surely Texans have had enough of this pervasive industry intruding on our "space" with advertisements that you cannot shut off. The billboard industry cannot exist without our publicly built roadway system. Yet, they pay no impact fee, and little in taxes. The taxpayer is essentially subsidizing a billion-dollar industry.*

And in the words of Gossage (1960, online):

*Outdoor advertising is peddling a commodity it does not own and without the owner's permission: your field of vision. Possibly you have never thought to consider your rights in the matter. Nations put the utmost importance on the unintentional violations of their air space. The individual's air space is intentionally violated by billboards every day of the year.*

According to Gossage (1960, online), in contrast to other visual elements which might intrude on your gaze, such as power lines or a dumping site, billboards have no other real functions:

*... it is there for the sole and express purpose of trespassing on your field of vision. Nor is it possible for you to escape; the billboard inflicts itself unbidden upon all but the blind or recluse. Is this not an invasion of privacy? ... this invasion of your privacy is compounded in its resale to a third party. It is as though a Peeping Tom, on finding a nice window, were to sell peeps at two bits a head. Thus we see that what the industry has to sell doesn't really belong to it. It belongs to you. So much for the free enterprise argument.*

Gossage's statement that billboards have no other functions should not be seen out of context. As is shown in section 3.2.1 of this study, outdoor advertising might benefit individuals and communities in various ways. However, the purport of his argument is true, since the benefits of outdoor advertising are not in the same relation to its impacts as is the case with other advertising media, where the benefits of advertisements far outweigh their impacts. The essence of his statement should be read in his use of the words *fair exchange* earlier. In many cases the same benefits presented by outdoor advertising may still be obtained by using outdoor advertisements and structures with a much lower impact, or by using other media with an even lower impact and where the potential viewer can choose whether to view the advertisement or not. The bottom line is still that the outdoor advertising contractor and the advertiser are forcing messages onto the road user which he cannot avoid by using and misusing resources belonging to the public free of charge or at a relatively low fee. Many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and informal entrepreneurs see the environment as a free-for-all advertising resource, to be utilised without any restrictions and at no cost. Where an outdoor advertising structure is erected on private property, the advertising contractor will normally pay rent to the owner of the property. However, this is only for the right to keep his structure on such land and not for the right to use roads and visual resources, which belong to the public, as advertising and viewing media. The value of outdoor advertising as a relatively inexpensive medium must be seen against this background. According to an article in *Little Man* (1996, March), the proliferation and high impact potential of outdoor information transfer can be ascribed to an advertising medium that is too cheap:

*In the world of business, if the absurd position were to arise that a particular product was so cheap that it became uncontrollable in the market, the very first thing that*

*would be done would be to raise its price. In the case of outdoor advertising the product that is too cheap is street space and the viewability created by street space.*

In order to solve this problem *Little Man* (1996, March) proposed the introduction of a viewability tax,<sup>24</sup> which would be payable on all outdoor advertising viewable from public open space. This should include outdoor advertising on private property. Viewability tax should be distinguished from rent paid for the physical occupation of property by advertisements, which is payable to the private landowner or to government where advertising takes place on public property. Viewability tax would not only provide financial resources which would enable controlling authorities to manage outdoor information transfer effectively and to remove illegal advertisements and signs promptly, but it would also support the maintenance and beautification of public streets upon which outdoor advertising depends for placement and viewing. By supporting public facilities the public will be compensated to a certain extent for enforced exposure to outdoor advertising. Viewability tax should not be seen as an unlimited source of income, to be exploited by controlling authorities at the cost of visual resources and the destruction of the perceptual environment. It still calls for sustainable management and a diminishing of the impacting potential of outdoor information transfer through correcting an aberration in the market caused by excessive cheap outdoor advertising opportunities. Viewing tax should rather be used as a mechanism to prevent the inappropriate and excessive number of advertising structures on public land in order to obtain sufficient funds to manage outdoor information transfer. Viewability tax should also be used to combat the unsustainable *Treasury Principle*, which refers to the persuasion of the controlling authority by the financial benefits offered up-front by an outdoor advertising contractor to obtain an outdoor advertising concession, which might actually not be to the benefit of the public since it might impact on tourism resources and the local living environment.

As a point of interest it is important to notice that the effective management of outdoor information transfer not only implies a limitation of choice in observing advertisements and, according to the proponents of freedom of commercial speech, a limitation of consumer awareness and therefore the choice of products and services. It also enhances and promotes the choice to look at beautiful environments and to ignore advertising audacity and blatancy. The limitation of the first choice is

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<sup>24</sup> Goa, a state in western India, has already levied a similar tax on outdoor advertising, which even includes advertisements displayed in showrooms or painted on glass windows (Noronha, online).

necessary to secure the second choice. No freedom of choice can ever be without limitations or can be separated from responsibility. A balance between freedom of commercial speech and the freedom to observe a pleasant environment is therefore needed in managing outdoor information transfer.

If a *laissez-faire* policy is followed, the inherent characteristics and dynamics of outdoor advertisements and signs, as expressed by the competition, encroachment, attachment, imperialistic, transition and disorder principles, will lead to an ever-increasing impact that will overshadow all benefits. Even if most of the outdoor advertising contractors within the industry may have a very responsible attitude, there will always be the uninformed advertiser and rogue contractor with an unscrupulous attitude who will lead the way and in whom the above-mentioned principles will find their fullest expression. Advertising messages projected against clouds and mountains and billboards in orbit around the earth might therefore not be too far-fetched.

The intrinsic dynamics of outdoor information transfer will also be to the detriment of the outdoor advertising industry. By using the surrounding environment as a neutral medium of communication, outdoor advertising, in contrast to the other advertising media, can be seen as a pure advertising medium without the distraction of articles, news reports or programmes intrinsic to magazines, newspapers, radio and television. However, this characteristic benefit of outdoor advertising can very easily be destroyed through the uncontrolled proliferation of signs. Through such a proliferation outdoor advertising will be polluting and cluttering its own neutral environment, forming its own distraction by signs competing against one another. The effect will be the same as paging through a magazine consisting of advertisements only, or viewing a television channel telecasting nothing but commercials. With an increase in sign proliferation a stage is reached where the internal forces and dynamics of outdoor advertising operate at an accelerated pace and where displayers of advertisements and signs are forced to compete against one another with an ever-increasing intensity. In the end only the fittest and most prominent signs will *survive* and be effective in this expanding billboard jungle, and in the process the aesthetic environment will be destroyed. Unfortunately, unlike Darwin's *survival of the fittest*, it will not be only the fittest that will survive, eliminating all other competitors. A large number of less fit billboards and advertisements will always be there, trying to catch some attention while outdoor advertising contractors owning less successful advertising structures will always be trying to convince their clients that outdoor advertising is

working. It is clear that if a *laissez-faire* policy is applied the internal forces of outdoor advertising and sign display will destroy advertisement and sign, as well as the aesthetic environment.

By managing outdoor advertising in an effective manner the playing field for all participants is levelled and thus a damper is placed on the dynamics of outdoor advertising that impacts on itself and the aesthetic environment.

The obtrusive nature and inherent characteristics and dynamics of outdoor advertisements should be seen against the background of the powerful economic forces behind outdoor advertising.

### **(b) The persistency and tactics of the outdoor advertising fraternity**

Since outdoor advertising is a *billion-dollar industry*, this industry (especially in the United States) is very active in lobbying politicians, often using professional lobbying firms, and large sums of money are often spent to discredit campaigns for the effective management of outdoor information transfer and to undermine legislation.

The following quote gives a good indication of this approach.

*The outdoor advertising industry has had doors slammed in its face all over Florida the last few years as residents grew tired of a landscape marred by towering signs and urged their local governments to ban billboards. But in those hallowed halls in Tallahassee where our state legislators work, the billboard industry has found the doors wide open and the red carpet rolled out* (The St. Petersburg Times, 1991).

A very good example of the power and influence of the billboard lobby in the United States, is the nullification of the 1965 Highway Beautification Act, passed at Lady Bird Johnson's urging, and which was aimed at cleaning up the clutter of billboards along federal highways. The billboard lobby succeeded in changing the Act bit by bit, adding exceptions and expensive compensation requirements up to a point where it was rendered almost powerless (Altoona Mirror, 1991; Matlack, 1991). In the words of Miller (online): *The Highway Beautification Act, initially passed to control billboards on federally funded streets and highways, has been lobbied-over into the "Outdoor*

*Advertising Subsidy Act.*” The amended act has also been called *a sign-industry-dominated program that is actually enriching and subsidizing the industry* (Altoona Mirror, 1991).

In South Africa the lack of funds for the seventh *All Africa Games* was used by sponsors and outdoor advertising contractors to obtain billboard space in areas where billboards should never have been erected. This even included massive advertising gantries spanning freeways in the Johannesburg metropolitan area (Outdoor Graphics, 1999, Autumn (1)). These concessions have given momentum to a trend of erecting unwanted billboards in the South African metropolitan areas in conflict with the recommendations in the *South African Manual for Outdoor Advertising Control (SAMOAC)*. SAMOAC was introduced in 1998 as a national guideline document. The main purpose of this document was to limit the impact of outdoor information transfer by following the British and European approach of smaller and fewer billboards rather than the extravagant American approach. Due to the persistency of the outdoor advertising industry, large numbers of billboards are now being allowed in the South African metropolitan areas that are much higher and bigger than recommended by SAMOAC. This can be seen as one of the most important reasons why SAMOAC did not achieve its main purpose in most of the South African metropolitan areas. As a point in case even the previous Pretoria Municipality, which could be seen as very conservative regarding outdoor advertising, succumbed to the funds offered by the outdoor advertising industry and allowed a number of enormous gantry signs, which are not allowed at all according to SAMOAC.

A common practice followed by the outdoor advertising industry in the United States, in order to influence politicians, is to contribute to their campaign funds (Altoona Mirror, 1991; Matlack, 1991).

The donation of free billboard space to charity is often used as an important instrument of persuasion by the outdoor advertising industry.

*Donations of free billboard space to charity would appear to be a commendable practice by the billboard industry. However, in the vast majority of cases, these donations are part of a calculated strategy to undermine local, state, and national efforts to control billboards. Furthermore, because billboard companies maintain more sign structures than they have advertisements, free billboards are a*

*convenient way to fill otherwise empty billboard space. In short, free billboards aren't intended to be free at all (Scenic America, online, (6)).*

The donation of free billboard space to charity is often not only aimed at lobbying officials at controlling authorities, but also at politicians to influence the vote on billboard legislation, while Scenic America (online, (6)) also mentions a case where free billboard space was used in an effort to influence a court decisions on a billboard company's challenge to local regulations. The strategy behind this approach is to provide free billboard space specifically to charities that are supported by key officials, politicians or decision makers (Citizens for a Scenic Florida, online, (2)).

Benefits obtained on behalf of communities by awarding billboard concessions cannot always be seen as beneficial. This problem is clearly illustrated by the *Treasury Principle*. This principle refers to the persuasion of the controlling authority by the financial benefits offered up-front by an outdoor advertising contractor to obtain a concession which might actually not be to the benefit of local communities since it might impact on tourism resources and the local living environment. Concessions are given to contractors without the necessary pre-planning and the involvement of local communities and civic groups. The only benefit received is the replenishing of the depleted coffers of the relevant authority, which is, in most cases, only a short-term benefit. The benefits obtained from outdoor advertising are often used as an enticement to obtain the involvement and co-operation of controlling authorities and policymakers in advertising strategies and to affect the judgement of decision and policymakers.

Owing to the current monopolistic tendencies of consolidating national and international outdoor advertising contractors, lobbying power are also being consolidated, which means that the persistency factor will become a much bigger reality in the future.

### **(c) Domination of outdoor advertising and monetary motive as driving force**

Outdoor advertising, which can be seen as the promotion of the sale of goods and services and the generation of income, form the most dominant and aggressive part of outdoor information transfer. The creation of monetary wealth therefore seems to be the most prominent motive and driving force behind the largest part of outdoor information transfer, which again points to a tendency to generate



environmental impact. To be realistic, even less commercialised signs, such as shop signs or a brown tourism sign directing the tourist to a hotel or guest house, have as a primary function the generation of income and therefore have the potential of getting out of hand and impacting on the environment.

Even where outdoor advertising is used as a medium of expression in the grand tradition of architecture, in order to fulfil a more sublime function by contributing to the visual scene as a form of art, generating income seems to be the true motive. Nouvel's future cityscapes, which integrate outdoor advertisements into building design and which are seen by Rasmuss (1996, p.11) as *a lot closer to the likely reality of future cities*, can be seen as a good example in this regard. The following statement made by Rasmuss (1996, p.11) with regard to Nouvel's images reflects something of the monetary aspirations of a global economy:

*The realisation that not only the floor area, but also the skin of a building can generate income, has long had an impact on urban buildings. We are only just beginning to see the flood of text and images that will devour our buildings in the future.*

It must be clearly stated that the concepts of architects such as Jean Nouvel and Robert Venturi using outdoor advertising as inspiration have merit and can make a very positive contribution to the visual environment if managed correctly.

Educated and informed consumer choice and an increased consumer awareness in order to rise living standards and the quality of life are other good examples of a noble function performed by outdoor advertising often presented to the public. However, the *Freedom of Commercial Speech Trust* had to admit that informing and educating the consumer to make an informed purchase choice is second to promoting and selling products and services (Outdoor Graphics, 1997, Summer (4), p. 12). This *noble* cause is therefore often misused as a handy instrument to increase sales and generate income.

The advertising industry and the proponents of freedom of commercial speech admit that advertising should take place in a responsible manner and that there should be certain limits to the motive of creating monetary wealth. According to Oosthuizen (1997, p.16), *...freedom of commercial speech does not imply freedom to promote at any cost*. However, it seems as if the true meaning of

responsible behaviour is not always fully grasped by the proponents of the freedom of commercial speech. The main objective still remains increased sales and profit. The commitment to responsible behaviour is therefore often misused for the mere purpose of *greenwashing* and the creation of an illusion of environmental concern in order to further their main objective of increased sales and profits and in order to ensure the self-regulation of commercial speech and outdoor advertising.

In many cases where the outdoor advertising industry is endeavouring the responsible management of outdoor advertising through self-regulation, intense competition between otherwise responsible companies may often lead to less acceptable practices. The *Outdoor Advertising Association of South Africa* (Billboards.co.za, online, (1)) has made the following statement with regard to its principles and code of conduct, which are kept by members on a voluntary basis:

*...the Association will be the first to admit, with regret, that companies within this industry have often ignored these rules as members of this Association competed for market share and dominance.*

It has also been shown in 3.3.2.4 that modern vernacular expressions and design elements, of which outdoor advertising forms an important part, are dominated by economic forces and monetary aspirations. Modern vernacular expressions leave very little room for reflecting other values such as environmental awareness and cultural identity. Other values can only develop and find expression in a climate of effective management of visual resources, which includes the management of outdoor information transfer, together with sufficient community involvement and education.

The dominance of monetary and commercial values in modern society is often misused and basic management principles are often ignored in the design process in order to *give people what they want*. Peter Blake (1979, pp. 19-20) puts it this way:

*Many members of the emerging pop-garde in environmental design have taken the position that the public wants junk, then – by all means – let us give them junk. Venturi, for example, has said that “Main Street is almost all right,” which is balderdash. Main Street, USA, is almost uniformly dismal, disgraceful, and frequently disgusting. He has glorified the Las Vegas strip, conveniently forgetting, I suspect, that the proliferation of highway extravaganzas like vast shopping centers, fast food*

*chains, and similar razzle-dazzle merchandizing efforts have destroyed whatever stores and restaurants the traditional urban street still had to offer – and thus destroyed a significant part of the quality of urban life, including the quality of Main Street – which ended up (as a direct result) not even remotely “all right”.*

*But, above all, it seems a bit condescending to me that highly sophisticated designers and critics have decided that if the public prefers vulgarity, then it is the function of artists and intellectuals to dish out garbage... At the risk of seeming a trifle pompous, I would like to suggest that **the artist must also be a messenger for an ideal.** (Emphasis added.)*

#### 3.5.4.3 Neutralising the benefits of outdoor information transfer

Without effective management the benefits of outdoor information transfer will have a very negative impact on the environment and will even undermine and be counterproductive to the benefits themselves. A historical analysis of the function and impact of outdoor information transfer has shown that insufficient control can very easily neutralise any positive contribution. A good example is the English pictorial signboard of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which made a remarkable contribution to streetscape and sense of place, but were eventually banned during the latter half of the eighteenth century due to insufficient control of the size and number of signs. An objective view of the benefits of outdoor information transfer shows that this tendency is just as valid today as in the past.

##### (a) Directing and guiding the road user and pedestrian

Signs fulfil an important role in directing, guiding and indexing the surroundings, but an excessive number of signs for the purpose of directing and guiding, with excessive contrast and competition between signs, lose their functionality and purpose and become a liability by contributing to visual clutter. The situation can very easily get out of hand if each enterprise and institution is allowed to use pointer boards or guidance signs to direct the public to their enterprise or institution. In the United

States the use of large billboards for directing and guiding is often a common practice<sup>25</sup> (cf. Taylor, 2000). A well-designed, co-ordinated and well-managed sign system in both urban, rural and natural environments would be a far better option. In many cases such sign systems might contribute to the enhancement of local character and placeness. This may include historical town centres and conservation areas in the natural environment.

Many factors might contribute to the proliferation of illegal or unwanted directional and guidance signs of which the two most important are an insufficient sign system for directing and guiding and a lack of control and poor management. South Africa is a very good example in this regard. Of the three-levels of the system proposed by King and Wilkinson (1980) (see 3.2.1.1) only the first level, namely general service signing, has been implemented in any real sense of the word in the form of brown tourism signs, but in most provinces it is not functioning very well. Specific service signs in the form of logo signs are not allowed. However, certain elements of the specific service signs are currently being incorporated into the brown tourism signs. Information centres are limited to tourism bureaux in towns and cities, which are often difficult and time-consuming to find, while no such facilities are provided along important routes outside urban areas. In order to fill these gaps a proliferation of illegal advertisements and even illegal brown signs are provided in order to direct the tourist and traveller to services and attractions. There is no need to say that these illegal signs have a very negative impact on aesthetic resources crucial to tourism. This proliferation of illegal signs, together with insufficient control, also inhibits the viability of information centres to be provided by the private sector and which are of critical importance in providing more detailed information to the tourist and traveller in an aesthetically friendly way. The timely removal of illegal signs and advertisements is crucial in the effective development and functioning of any sign system aimed at directing and guiding the tourist and traveller. In referring to the slow removal of non-conforming billboards after the implementation of

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<sup>25</sup> According to a survey on the uses of billboards by Missouri business, 89.3% of companies who use billboard advertising indicate that they use billboards for directing people to their places of business (Taylor, 2000, p.9). It is therefore no surprise that information communicated on billboards can be especially important to the traveller and tourist passing through or visiting an area in the United States. The results of a survey conducted by the *U.S. Travel Data Center* (1991) indicate that motorists, by a large majority, find billboards to be helpful in locating services such as hotels, restaurants, filling stations, tourist attractions and retail stores. In South Africa *directing customers to your business* is also recognised as an important benefit of outdoor advertising by the *Outdoor Advertising Association of South Africa*, who mainly represents companies specialising in larger billboards (Outdoor Graphics, 1999, Autumn (2), p.15).

the *Highway Beautification Act of 1965*, King and Wilkinson (1980, p.37) made the following statement:

*This slow pace of billboard removal is removing the urgency of developing and implementing alternate information systems. This condition applies particularly to information systems elements which requires the investment of private capital and/or financial commitments from service suppliers.*

Signs should not be seen as the only means of directing, guiding and orientating the road user and pedestrian. Imageability or placeness can almost be seen as a more important tool for orientation and guidance in urban areas:

*The distemic space of the large city is overly complex, and lacks the necessary cues to facilitate its imaging and legibility by diverse groups of people who are unfamiliar with its spaces and structure.* (Motloch, 1991, p.285).

Greenbie (1981, as cited in Motloch, 1991, p.285) puts it as follows:

*...the larger urban landscape has become a bewildering catchall of discordant elements. without perceptible structure and clear means for orientation for the traveller, as anyone leaving an expressway to enter the typical large city for the first time knows very well.*

The business community and planning and roads authorities may very easily fall into the trap of trying to solve the problem by providing excessive signage in order to orientate, direct and catch the attention of tourists, travellers and pedestrians. Such an approach will only worsen the problem since the excessive number of signs will further contribute to the *bewildering catchall of discordant elements* and complexity of the visual environment and will therefore make the urban environment even less legible and destroy what little imageability may exist.

### **(b) Informing and warning the public in order to enhance general well-being and safety**

Without effective control this function is often misused by the commercial sector. The logo of the sponsor and the *commercial message* may very easily overshadow and even destroy the primary function of warning and informing.

### (c) Stimulating economic development and promoting freedom of commercial choice

The stimulation of economic development is an important function of outdoor advertisements and signs and cannot be ignored. But, if managed ineffectively, outdoor information transfer might be detrimental to economic development and might even neutralise its positive contribution. It can also be said that though economic development is necessary and inevitable, ugliness and aesthetic decay are not.

Although the right to freedom of commercial speech and commercial choice is important it should be considered together with the right to an environment that is not harmful to human health or well-being. It should also be measured against the freedom of choice and personal right to avoid any commercial message. The right to freedom of commercial speech can therefore not be seen as an unlimited right.<sup>26</sup> This is especially true of outdoor advertising, which should always be within the limits of decency and aesthetic respectability, all the more so since outdoor advertising has a natural tendency to enforce its message onto the viewer and to dominate the visual scene. This tendency is even admitted by the outdoor advertising industry with billboard messages such as *try crumpling this ad up & throwing it away* and *the power of presence*. (See figure 3.17.) The principle of a limitation regarding *outdoor advertising speech* has been recognised by the juridical system:

*We do not think the right to advertise a business is such that a businessman may appropriate common airspace and destroy common vistas* (Judge Bronson in *Sun Oil Co. V. City of Madison Heights*, 199 N.W.2d 525, 529 (Mich. 1972) as cited in *Citizens for a Scenic Florida*, online, (1)).

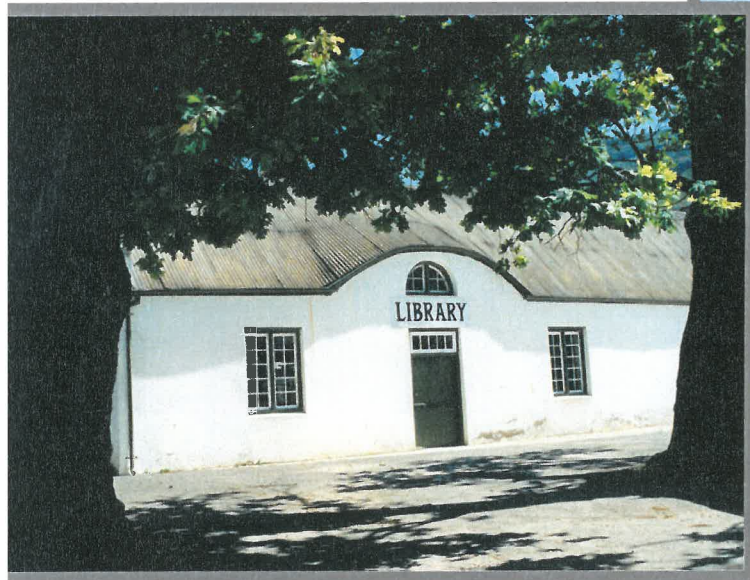
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<sup>26</sup> Proponents of freedom of commercial speech in the United States very often allocate an almost untouchable status to this *right* by linking it directly to the Free Speech clause of the First Amendment of the American Bill of Rights and to the rights of the individual (cf. Huber, online). According to Person (online), an outdoor advertising proponent, commercial messages on billboards are also expressions of the same right that gives the American citizen freedom of political speech:

*The First Amendment makes no distinction between commercial and non-commercial speech, and the message "Two McBurgers - \$ 1.99" should be no less constitutionally protected than "Free Nelson Mandela."*

and

*...it shouldn't matter whether a billboard is beautiful or ugly: Both are protected by the right of private property. The idea that someone's property rights should be taken away because a handful (or even a majority) of people deem a particular structure "ugly" is absurd.*



village of Suurbraak, near Swellendam in the Western Cape, established as a mission station of the London Missionary Society in 1812. This village has a rich history, a very strong sense of place and huge tourism potential.

The welcome sign to the village is a good example of how poor information transfer's function of informing the public can be misused by the commercial sector. The logo of the soft drink overshadows the primary function of welcoming the visitor. Although the name Suurbraak is written in quite large letters, the background of the message supports the commercial logo. The soft drink company has taken advantage of the community's need for funds by providing a welcome sign that is nothing more than a direct advertisement of their product. Their sponsorship of the welcome sign should have been more subtle, or their product advertisements should have been limited to shops in the community where the product is sold.

**Figure 3.34**  
**Advertisements and signs**  
**Destroying the function of**  
**informing the public**

Very often outdoor advertising proponents do not see the connection between freedom of commercial speech and the freedom to live in a decent and healthy environment.

The proponents of unrestricted outdoor advertising opportunities often base their case on the argument that advertising leads to an increase in consumption and therefore to economic growth and the creation of additional job opportunities. The relation between advertising and economic growth is not as simple as it seems. An increase in outdoor advertising will not always lead to an increase in economic growth. The effective management and the limitation of outdoor advertising speech might even be beneficial to economic development. This tendency can be linked directly to various positive results of the effective management of outdoor information transfer, such as the aesthetic improvement of communities, the improved visibility and legibility of signs and the prevention of visual complexity and information overload. Contrary to the belief of the outdoor advertising industry that businesses such as service stations and eating and drinking establishments would be devastated financially by effective control measures, various towns and cities in the United States showed a steady increase in sales after the introduction of stricter control measures.<sup>27</sup>

Effective management of advertisements and signs contributes to the efficiency of such advertisements and signs. Effective management which contributes to placeness and sense of place will lead to the creation of vivid images of which the advertisement will be part and which will be remembered over extended periods of time.

Even where an increase in outdoor advertising makes a positive contribution to the development of certain enterprises or economic sectors, such benefits will have to be weighed against a possible impact on the tourism industry resulting from degenerated tourism resources brought about by unrestricted and uncontrolled outdoor advertising.

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<sup>27</sup> In Williamsburg, Virginia sales for eating and drinking establishments rose by more than 65% from 1988 to 1992, three years after billboard controls were tightened. In Raleigh, North Carolina sales from eating and drinking establishments rose by about 20% from 1989, before billboard control, to 1992, after controls were introduced. The total retail sales in Houston, Texas grew by over 100% from 1981, the year after a ban on new billboard construction was passed, until 1992 (Scenic America, online (1)).



It is therefore a foregone conclusion that the effective management of outdoor information transfer is essential, both to provide sufficient opportunities for conveying messages and to conserve and enhance the aesthetic environment, of which both are fundamental to economic development. It is furthermore clear that the sustainable management of outdoor information transfer cannot be limited to the sustainability of the aesthetic environment only, but should also embrace sustainable economic development.

Seen from a different angle insufficient control of outdoor information transfer might be detrimental to economic growth through creating a climate that discourages investment and retail sales. According to Rypkema (1996, p.62), local urban character and placeness play an important role in attracting investments in the global economy. (See 2.2.4.) It is therefore no surprise that government institutions in Singapore are using this country's *clean and green* image as an important attraction in obtaining foreign investments. In accordance with this policy outdoor advertisements are controlled strictly and are even not allowed on industrial sites. Another example is the *City Council of Westminster* who is placing a premium on maintaining the local character of shopping streets such as Regent, Oxford and Bond Streets in order to attract shoppers from all over the world (City Council of Westminster, 1993). (See 3.3.5.)

From the above it is therefore clear that outdoor information transfer also reveals a destructive and neutralising tendency with regard to the function of stimulating economic growth in the absence of effective management.

#### **(d) Enhancing the visual environment**

According to Jacobs (1972, p.39), streets and sidewalks can be seen as a crucial aesthetic component of the city: *Streets and their sidewalks, the main public places of a city, are its most vital organs... If a city's streets look interesting, the city looks interesting; if they look dull, the city looks dull.* Outdoor signs, and especially shop signs, can play an important role in giving life to certain urban streets and contributing to placeness if managed effectively. If not, it can destroy aesthetic attributes and placeness.

Many an outdoor advertisement may be considered a work of art. However, no outdoor advertisement can be treated in isolation, but has to be seen in relation to advertising structure as well as outdoor setting. The outdoor advertising industry tends to spend as little money as possible on outdoor advertising structures, concentrating on the structural aspects while ignoring aesthetics. Sufficient landscaping of sites surrounding outdoor advertising structures seldom receives any attention. The artistic contribution of most outdoor advertisements is neutralised by the visual impact of advertising structure and sign proliferation and the lack of integration between advertising contents, advertising structure and the surrounding environment. Sense of place and the surrounding environment should be taken into consideration if the aesthetic and artistic potential of outdoor information transfer is to be actualised.

In general it can be said that although outdoor information transfer has an exceptional potential to contribute to the aesthetic environment and placeness, this potential is seldom realised. At the basis of this dilemma is the outdoor advertising industry's exclusive focus on the message function of outdoor information transfer, to the detriment of the aesthetic function, which is supposed to provide an important supportive role to the message function. In most urban areas no co-ordinated strategy exists to unlock the aesthetic potential of outdoor advertising and the rest of outdoor information transfer. In many cases outdoor advertising structures such as billboards tend to be concentrated in areas of urban decay, which creates the perception that outdoor advertising is both a source as well as a product of urban decay.

In reality outdoor information transfer, and especially commercial advertising, contributes to the aesthetic environment only in exceptional cases. Cost-effective structures are generally given preference over more pleasant-looking outdoor advertising furniture and other appealing approaches such as the incorporation of advertising panels into building design. The striking effect of car wrapping is often lost in the humdrum of urban traffic. The appeal of shop signs, once an important contributor to streetscape and placeness, has been lost to the unchecked internal forces of outdoor advertising as well as uniformity and drabness, which is the outcome of modern sign materials, design techniques and production methods. Even the striking nightscapes of entertainment districts have its dark side. These districts might not reveal the same enchantment and glamour during daytime:

*Piccadilly Circus, or Times Square in New York, or almost anywhere in the central areas of Tokyo, Los Angeles, San Francisco, or any great city, are transformed by night into magical scenes of brashly colourful, vivacious wonderland. By daylight, the same places in most cities – Piccadilly Circus especially – show building facades of sordid shabbiness* (Burke, 1976, p.112).

It is obvious that effective management is a prerequisite for actualising the aesthetic potential of outdoor information transfer, in the absence of which outdoor advertising will destroy whatever its own aesthetic potential might be.

#### **(e) Source of income and similar benefits**

This function should be treated with caution. Apparent benefits may not always be benefits, but may turn out to be liabilities instead. Donations of free billboard space and financial donations to charities by the outdoor advertising industry are often used as a calculated strategy to undermine efforts by authorities to control outdoor advertising and to influence decision-makers (Scenic America, online (6)). Even if there are no ulterior motives involved, the negative aspects of outdoor advertising may still outweigh monetary benefits. Since the perceptual environment is a public asset, benefits obtained from outdoor advertising should not be limited to individuals but should be aimed at the community. Monetary and community benefits obtained from outdoor advertising should be acknowledged, but should not be obtained at the cost of aesthetic decay.

Without effective management the source of income obtained from outdoor advertising might often be neutralised by the lack of income from sources such as tourism or retail sales due to the impact of outdoor advertising.

### **3.5.5 THE ROLE OF PLACENESS**

In this chapter it has been shown that placeness plays an important role in analysing and expressing the benefits and impacts of outdoor information transfer.

- At the base of this statement lies the pivotal role of placeness in the perceptual environment. Sense of place forms the essence of the aesthetic environment and it can therefore be said that without sense of place beauty and aesthetic appreciation will lose their meaning. Sense of place makes one place distinct from another and gives it charm and appeal.
  
- From the beginning of recorded history outdoor signs have made an important contribution to local character and sense of place. Whether it be the voice of the Greek crier in ancient Athens or the pictorial signboard of seventeenth and eighteenth century England.
  
- Placeness is an important ingredient for creating favourable conditions for tourism and economic development, for community identity, the quality of human living environments, prevention of crime and vandalism, a sense of permanence, friendly retail environments and for maintaining and improving property values. There is also a strong relationship between placeness, information relevancy and information overload. Outdoor information transfer has a large influence on placeness. Placeness therefore serves as an important instrument in analysing and expressing the impacts and benefits of outdoor information transfer.
  
- It has been shown that if the artistic contribution of outdoor advertisements and signs is seen in isolation this contribution will be lost. Sense of place and the surrounding environment are necessary ingredients to actualise the aesthetic and artistic potential of outdoor information transfer.
  
- Placeness is necessary to put the advertising message in the mind of the observer. Placeness can be seen as the innate ability of a place or setting to form vivid mental images, to effect major changes in emotional state and to be remembered over extended periods of time (Motloch, 1991, p.296). Effective management of outdoor information transfer that contributes to sense of place will lead to the creation of vivid mental images of which advertisements will be part, and such advertisements will therefore be remembered over extended periods of time.

### 3.5.6 VERIFICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 2

**Hypothesis 2: Outdoor information transfer as an important part of the perceptual environment benefits society and the environment, but also impacts negatively on both. Sense of place and placeness play a crucial role with regard to the benefits and impact of outdoor information transfer. If a *laissez-faire* policy is followed with regard to the management of outdoor information transfer, the impacts thereof will overshadow the positive contribution and will neutralise many of the benefits.**

The above conclusions have shown that:

- Outdoor information transfer benefits society and the environment.
- Outdoor information transfer also impacts on the environment and society.
- Sense of place and placeness play a crucial role with regard to the benefits and impact of outdoor information transfer.
- If a *laissez-faire* policy is followed with regard to the management of outdoor information transfer, the impacts thereof will overshadow the positive contribution and will neutralise many of the benefits.
- There is a definite need for the effective management of outdoor information transfer.

Hypothesis 2 has therefore been shown to be true.