

THE EFFECTS OF THE UNCONTROLLED USE OF SIGNBOARD, BILLBOARDS AND POSTERS ON MAIDUGURI URBAN LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

This research was conducted to examine the spatial and visual impact of signboards, billboards and posters on the urban scenery of Maiduguri, Nigeria with a view to proposing measures for integrating them into the overall urban landscape of the town. The research was conducted using questionnaires administered to 335 respondents drawn from 10 residential districts of Maiduguri stratified based on housing densities. The sampled residences were randomly selected using Table of Random Numbers. It was found out that signboards, billboards and posters create spatial and visual problems manifested in blockage of view of motorists, psychological diversions, environmental littering, and blockage of pedestrian walkways and depreciation of highway investments. The study has therefore recommended appropriate legislation to define restrictions and standards of size, colour, position, placement and removal orders for these elements in the urban landscape especially under democratic governance and the associated use of these items in electioneering campaigns, business and general publicity.

Keywords: urban landscape, poster, signboard, billboard, legislation.

Introduction

The visual character of a community – the appearance of its streets, neighbourhoods and business areas – is essential to its long term economic viability and helps determine how residents and visitors alike perceive it. Sign control is an integral part of improving visual character and quality of life. Aesthetic beauty does not depend on the practical or scientific value of object. It depends only on the pleasure the object brings to people (Newton, 1991, Rubenstein, 1992).

The essential feature of billboards, signboards and posters notwithstanding, it is true that nothing destroys the distinctive visual character of our communities faster than uncontrolled billboards and use of posters. City Planners (2005), New Foundland and Labrador (2005) and the District of Columbia (2001) portray legal actions against this menace. Today, billboard proliferation and indiscriminate use of posters are threatening to turn our landscape and communities into continuous outdoor commercial scenery and to further separate us from our scenic heritage.

Urban Designers, Landscapers, Town Planners, Architects and other environmentally conscious residents of most urban centres in Nigeria are questioning the aesthetics and functionality of the elements that find themselves into the urban scenery. Some of these elements are commercial and political hot-cakes: Goods, services, ideas and opinions are popularly advertised through these street furniture. They also show direction, mileage and location to the reading audience. McMahon (1998) and TranSafety (1998) have however described billboards as a type of pollution, saying, "Pollution is not limited to the air we breathe or the water we drink, it can equally offend the eyes and the ears." This is significant to the urban designer in that items originally meant to enhance urban beauty and functions are being indiscriminately placed in such a way that they mar rather than make the urban environment.

Although signs are a form of on- or off-premise advertisement communication (Gardner, 1999, Aluko, 2000) meant to attract attention of the public commercially, politically

or ideologically, many cities rely on their natural beauty and visual quality to attract business and tourists. It has been observed however that billboards intrude on the traditional landscape and devalue our greatest asset: the natural beauty of our environment (Achi, 2004). Political campaign posters in Nigeria are fast becoming a the millennium pollutant as they are posted on milestones, walls, trees, roads and utility poles and even inside the premises of schools, hospitals and erstwhile revered locations without restrictions. It is therefore important to investigate this phenomenon in order to attempt proper integration or restoration of the natural beauty of the urban environment and provide a good basis for tourism, conservation and urban preservation.

Against this background, this study examined the effects of uncontrolled use of signboards, billboards and posters on the Maiduguri urban scenery with a view to properly integrating these elements into the city's urban landscape.

The objectives of the study include:

1. To examine the spatial and visual impact of signboards, billboards and posters in Maiduguri urban landscape.
2. To identify the urban design problems associated with the uses of signboards, billboards and posters in Maiduguri urban environment.
3. To identify the relationship between signboards, billboards and posters and other urban design elements in Maiduguri urban landscape.

This research is considered significant in that it is focussed to the enhancement of the beauty and functionality of the Maiduguri urban scenery. It will therefore benefit both the government and individuals in Maiduguri metropolis. It stands to assist in reducing road accidents, reduce depreciation in property value hitherto affected with posters and can be utilised as a means of revenue for collection by the governments in Maiduguri especially from defaulter.

Methodology

Primary data required for this study and

sourced with the use of the questionnaire include:

- a. Data on spatial distribution of signboards, billboards and posters in the Maiduguri landscape.
- b. Data on spatial and visual problems relating to the use of signboards, billboards and posters in Maiduguri
- c. Data on the relationship between signboards, billboards and posters and other urban design elements in the Maiduguri environment
- d. Data on the adequacy of existing legislations relevant to the use of these urban design elements as well as information on public awareness of these legislations.

A survey design was adopted for this study as it collates the views of the residents of Maiduguri who are first hand witnesses of the phenomenon being examined. The 34 residential districts in Maiduguri are made up of 21 high, 8 medium and 5 low density residential areas out of which the ten (30%) were selected. Having been stratified into residential densities, the Table of Random Numbers was used in selecting the 10 residential districts eventually utilised. The assistance of the students of Ramat Polytechnic was utilised in numbering the houses in the selected districts out of which 10% was also selected by the Table of Random Numbers to identify selected houses. In all, a total of 338 houses were covered for this research.

A set of 22-item questionnaires on Residents Perception of the Menace of Street Furniture (RPMSF) was utilised in the study. RPMSF Section A was on the characteristics of the respondents covering location, age range, gender, occupational and educational characteristics. Section B was on the benefits and problems of using signboards, posters and billboards in Maiduguri while Section C was on the public awareness of existing legislations on the menace as well as possible areas of action to correct the identified ills. The last question sourced the comment, suggestions and proposals of respondents.

The questionnaires were administered to one resident of every house originally selected

by a table of Random Numbers on the basis of 10% of the total number of houses identified in each residential area. Thus, out of the 3,381 houses identified in the selected wards, 338 houses were sampled. Percentages were used in the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires distributed.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 reports the ten wards selected for the study, the number of houses selected in each ward on the basis of the 10% sampling prescribed in the study design as well as the distribution of the respondents on the basis of their gender, age, occupation and educational status. In all, 338 respondents from the ten wards of different residential densities participated in the study made up of 68.7% male respondents and 31.3% females. Respondents between the 26-35 years of age dominated the study polling 35.2%, closely followed by the 15-25 years and 36-45 years age ranges polling 29.9% and 20.9% respectively. Those above 45 years and those who chose to be anonymous were 9.3% and 4.8% respectively.

More civil servants participated in the study than students, traders and farmers as they polled 45.1%, 36.7%, 10.8% and 3.9% respectively. Another 3.6% did not indicate their occupations. Table 1 further report that 37.6% of the respondents have obtained a Polytechnic diploma while 35.8% own a university degree. There were another 9.9% who own the NCE, 12.5% have obtained the secondary school leaving certificate, 3.3% own the primary school leaving certificate while 0.6% of the respondents did not indicate their educational status.

Use of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in Maiduguri

The researcher's observation during the fieldwork revealed that signboards, billboards and posters are highly proliferated along the streets and on too many structures in Maiduguri metropolis especially within the Central Business District (CBD). Table 2 reveals the observations of respondents on

issues related to the use of these elements in Maiduguri. First and foremost, 76.4% of all the respondents appreciated the use and functions of signboards, billboards and posters in the metropolis as 83.9% of them attest to the fact that signboards, billboards and posters are used in their work/business places. They identified road reservation (56.1%) as the place where most signboards and billboards are located. Others however see them on pedestrians' walkways (25.1%) and inside property lines (16.1%). Nine respondents representing 2.7% were undecided on this matter.

As for posters, 82.1% of the respondents claimed that posters are place just anywhere (on trees, roundabouts, walls, electric poles, and school buildings). This underscores the proliferation of these items within the study area. In the views of 71.3% of the respondents, signboards, billboards and posters have conflict with road reservation while 26.0% did not agree as 2.7% chose to be anonymous on the matter. Whereas 69.9% of the respondents agree that increased business/commercial outlets have brought about increase in the use of signboards, billboards and posters, they could not explain the proliferation as 34.3% were silent on giving reasons for the proliferation, 19.4% were not aware, 20.1% put it as a result of lawlessness while 22.1% affirm that it was because there are no regulatory measures to guide the use of signboards, billboards and posters that has been responsible for the proliferation.

Urban Design Problems in the use of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in Maiduguri

Respondents were asked to identify the urban design problems that are associated with the present uses of signboards, billboards and posters in the study area. Their views presented in Table 3 show that 69.9% of the respondents see the problem while 27.8% could not see the associated urban design problems. Eight respondents representing 2.4% were rather undecided. When confronted with the possible problems, 42.7% agreed with all the problems while others specifically identified with the

problems as follows: blockage of parking areas (8.1%); Obstruction to vision (22.4%); Pose risks during rainstorm (10.2%); Lower property value (2.1%); litter and block pedestrians way (7.8%) and anonymous (6.9%).

The respondents were further asked to identify with the spatial and visual problems associated with the use of posters in Maiduguri. Most respondents (38.5%) agreed with all the problems stated while others were specific, including: litter urban landscape (18.8%); spoils urban scenery (29.2%); irritates the eyes on sighting (7.5%) anonymous (6.0%). Further still, 51.9% of the respondents were not aware of the health and visual problems associated with the use of posters in the Maiduguri Urban landscape even though 39.7% claimed they were aware and another 8.4% were undecided.

Legislative Aspects of the Use of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in Maiduguri

From Table 2 we derive that 51.9% of the respondents were not aware of any law governing the use of signboards, billboards and posters in the study area. Only 39.7% claimed they are aware of such legislations as another 8.4% were anonymous on the subject. Discussions with some of the respondents affirm their ignorance of the existence of any such laws. To further reinforced their position, 59.1% of the respondents have never known any person who sought permission for the use of signboards, billboards and posters in the urban landscape. Another 3.0% were undecided while 37.9% claimed they have known those who sought such permissions. Attempts to secure such laws in the Town Planning office in Maiduguri did not succeed as the officers could not lay hands on such written laws.

Possible Solutions to the Problems of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in Maiduguri

The respondents volunteered the following solutions to the problems associated with the use of billboards, signboards and posters in Maiduguri:

a. Enactment of appropriate legislations to

control the use of such street furniture.

- b. Appropriate enforcement of existing laws in this respect.
- c. The use of fine as punitive measures for those who break the laws in this respect.
- d. The mandatory deposit for pasting and removal of posters before any election.
- e. The prohibition of the use of posters on Milestones, Schools, Hospitals and other public walls except those authorized by the organisation itself.

Summary of Findings

The following findings have been derived from the study:

- a. Functionally and aesthetically, billboards, signboards and posters have purposes they serve in the urban landscape which have attracted the admiration of Maiduguri residents, particularly commercial advertisement. Most businesses and organisations therefore use them as advertising and information elements.
- b. Increase in the number of commercial and business outlets has brought about increase in the use of posters, billboards and signboards in the Maiduguri urban landscape.
- c. Billboards, signboards and posters do conflict with road reservations, block pedestrian walkways, obstruct vision, litter the streets and constitute problems during rainstorms. They are proliferated and indiscriminately sited within the Maiduguri urban landscape. The residents are aware of these visual and spatial problems associated with their use.
- d. Awareness of the people is very low on the existence of laws governing the use of signboards, billboards and posters in Maiduguri as not many people are known to have sought for permission to place any of these items within the Maiduguri urban landscape.
- e. Appropriate legislation and the enforcement of same are among the leading suggestions for redressing the problems associated with the use of these elements in Maiduguri

Table 1: Respondents' Views on the Use of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in Maiduguri

S/N	ISSUES RAISED WITH RESPONDENTS	MEASURE/OP TION	WARDS AND RESPONDENTS										TOTAL	%
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
			Dambo	London	Shehuri S	Shehuri N	Shuwari	Bulabulin	Shagari	Ramat	New GRA	House Assembly		
1.	Whether respondents appreciate Signboards, Billboards and Posters.	Yes	73	25	32	21	17	42	20	17	15	4	256	76.4
		No	6	7	3	10	-	15	2	4	13	1	61	18.2
		Anonymous	-	-	2	5	2	4	1	-	2	-	18	5.4
2.	Reasons for proliferation of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in the Maiduguri Urban landscape.	No Regulatory Measure	13	5	14	12	2	11	2	2	10	3	74	22.1
		Lawlessness	19	8	1	6	4	18	3	6	2	1	68	20.1
		No Awareness	16	10	3	6	-	9	1	5	14	1	65	19.4
		Anonymous	31	9	7	9	12	18	17	8	4	-	115	34.3
3.	Whether they use Signboards, Billboards and Posters in their work/business places.	Yes	74	26	22	28	12	56	14	20	27	2	281	83.9
		No	5	6	3	8	5	6	8	1	3	3	40	11.9
		Anonymous	-	-	2	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	6	1.8
4.	Whether signboards, billboards and posters have conflict with road reservation	Yes	52	22	22	22	10	41	22	15	29	4	239	71.3
		No	27	10	3	12	8	20	-	6	-	1	87	26.0
		Anonymous	-	-	2	2	1	2	1	-	1	-	9	2.7
5.	Where signboards and billboards are located in the urban landscape	In Road Reservation	47	14	19	15	14	33	18	10	14	4	188	56.1
		On Pedestrian Walkways	25	6	6	9	1	12	5	6	13	1	84	25.1
		Inside Property Lines	7	12	1	8	4	15	-	5	2	-	54	16.1
		Anonymous	-	-	1	4	-	3	-	-	1	-	9	2.7
6.	Where posters are usually used in the urban landscape	On Trees	-	3	-	-	-	3	3	-	-	-	9	2.7
		On Roundabouts	3	1	1	3	1	10	-	1	-	-	20	6.0
		On Walls	2	2	1	2	1	3	-	2	-	-	13	3.9
		On Electric Poles	5	2	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	12	3.6
		On School Buildings	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.9
		All Of The Above	69	23	23	31	16	43	17	18	30	-	275	82.1
		Anonymous	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	5	4	1.2
7.	Whether increase in Business/Commercial Outlets increases the use of signboards, billboards and posters	Yes	54	21	20	23	16	40	18	15	22	4	233	69.6
		No	25	11	6	10	2	14	4	6	1	1	80	23.9
		Anonymous	-	-	1	3	1	9	1	-	7	-	22	6.6

Source: Fieldwork, 2006.

Table 2: Respondents' Views on the Legislative Issues on the Use of Signboards, Billboards and Posters in Maiduguri (n = 338)

S/N	ISSUES RAISED WITH RESPONDENTS	MEASURE/OPTIONS	WARDS AND RESPONDENTS										TOTAL	%
			1 Damba road	2 London ckiki	3 Shehuri S	4 Shehuri N	5 Shuwari	6 Bulabulin	7 Shagari	8 Ramat	9 New GRA	10 House Assembly		
1.	Whether aware of the problems associated with the use of Signboards, Billboards and Posters.	YES	62	24	8	24	11	38	18	18	28	3	234	69.9
		NO	15	8	19	10	8	25	1	3	2	2	93	27.8
		Anonymous	2	-	-	2	-	-	4	-	-	-	8	2.4
2.	Spatial and visual problems associated with the use of signboards and billboards in Maiduguri	Blockage of parking areas	4	2	-	4	3	10	1	2	-	1	27	8.1
		Obstruction to vision	24	9	11	5	3	11	3	5	1	3	75	22.4
		Risks during rainstorm	5	1	3	2	-	2	-	1	20	-	34	10.2
		Lower property value	1	4	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	7	2.1
		Litter and block pedestrians way	5	2	2	3	-	8	1	-	4	1	26	7.8
		All of the above	37	13	4	16	13	28	17	11	4	-	143	42.7
		Anonymous	3	1	7	6	-	3	1	1	1	-	23	6.9
3.	Spatial and visual problems associated with the use of posters in Maiduguri	Litter urban landscape	32	6	1	3	2	10	3	1	3	2	63	18.8
		Spoils urban scenery	12	4	17	13	10	17	2	2	20	1	98	29.2
		Irritates the eyes on sighting	6	5	-	-	-	7	1	4	-	2	25	7.5
		All of the above	26	16	6	15	6	26	15	13	6	-	129	38.5
		Anonymous	3	1	3	5	1	3	2	1	1	-	20	6.0
4.	Whether aware of the health and visual problems associated with the use of Posters in the Maiduguri urban landscape.	YES	23	15	5	13	3	20	16	12	24	2	133	39.7
		NO	54	17	19	21	13	34	5	8	-	3	174	51.9
		Anonymous	2	-	3	2	3	9	2	1	6	-	28	8.4
5.	Whether aware of legislations/laws governing the use of signboards, billboards and posters in the urban landscape.	YES	30	18	6	14	11	32	17	12	13	2	165	39.7
		NO	48	14	20	17	8	27	5	8	6	3	156	51.9
		Anonymous	1	-	1	5	-	4	1	1	1	-	14	8.4
6.	Whether aware of persons who sought permission for the use of signboards, billboards and posters in the urban landscape.	YES	21	7	6	17	13	27	15	5	15	1	127	37.9
		NO	27	25	20	16	6	33	7	15	15	4	198	59.1
		Anonymous	1	-	1	3	-	3	1	1	-	-	10	3.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2006.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been advanced on this study:

- a. Urban Design practitioners should commence an appropriate legislation process to evolve a contemporary, proactive and generally acceptable law on regulated use of posters, billboards, signboards and banners in Maiduguri.
- b. If taxation is considered an aspect of revenue generation by government, it is recommended that appropriate tax be levied on those who use posters, billboards and signboards in line with the size of their signboards as it exists in some parts of Nigeria. This also extends to the payment of pre-determined rates for posters placed. Such deposits are confiscated should the campaigners fail to remove such on specified dates. Parts of such deposits are used in removing such posters and for keeping the urban landscape better cleaned.
- c. Irrespective of all monetary sanctions, Post No Bill restriction orders must be respected on Milestones, School buildings and Hospital premises since studies have related behaviour with information read on the posters, billboards and signboards.

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