

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS: IMPACTS AND REGULATORY PRACTICES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Building the visual image is one the main characteristics of urban development. Thus, it is important to manage outdoor advertisements in city areas as a supportive component of urban design rather than a mean of visual pollution and clutter. Throughout the world, mix schools of thoughts exist about outdoor advertisings. But it is an accepted medium for many reasons. This review paper narrates relationship between boards and urban development, the overall evolution of this tool, the need and process of its standardization in developed countries, their negative and positive effects. It also highlights the current legislative mechanisms of advertisements in USA, UK, Asia and a peer view into the new dimensions which are required to inculcate with existing controlling and management frameworks in order to have better integration with urban planning principles.*

**Keywords:** *Outdoor advertising, regulations, visual pollution, billboards*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With every passing day, the world's urban population is increasing due to a number of factors such as natural growth, rural urban migration, and social and economic opportunities for better living [1, 2]. It is reported that 51% (3.3 billion inhabitants) of the world's population live in urban areas which will reach up to 60% by 2030 [3]. It is also recorded that 500,000 people move daily in cities all around the world [3]. It means rapid urbanization demand more mobility and facilities. According to a report, it is estimated that people in urban areas spend 2 times more time out of home for leisure than in 1960s [3]. Such prevailing situation in the world, outdoor media was emerged to meet the requirements of the time and expectations of the consumers. And by the time, outdoor advertising industry has been recognized globally. In 2012, it is calculated that outdoor advertising market have 6.6% share of the worldwide advertising market in terms of formats and regions [3]. Internationally, this medium has a long history from its inception to its regularization particularly in UK, Europe and America. And efforts have been made to control and manage outdoor advertisements in order to minimize their advantages over advantages. On the other hand, in developing countries (9.6% share of outdoor advertising) intentions are being in process to regulate this medium comprehensively. Therefore, this paper narrates and reviews the history of the outdoor medium and their legislation in the world, current practices and policies in both developed and developing countries. It also tabulates the key points in paradigm shift which need to incorporate from current to future approaches regarding management of outdoor advertising in the world.

## 2. HISTORY OF THE OUTDOOR MEDIUM

Urban areas are dynamic spaces which have emerged as a response to economic, social and environmental factors [4]. Particularly, the field of urban design is much concerned with city visual character, urban form, natural and built environment in connection with urban spaces [4]. Outdoor medium of advertisement has become one of the critical aspects of the built environment.

The concept of outdoor advertisements was started at least 5,000 years before. It is quoted that for the very first time; this medium was used in Egypt to print notices on papyrus in order to capture runaway slaves [5], [6]. Along with this, they

have used this tool to guide merchants and travelers on roadside by writing on stone tablets. However, the Babylonians were the next to explore the value of hanging boards on places to boost up their businesses. After them, this concept was brought in practice by Greeks to list out games in the form of panel covered columns as well as for government announcements. Similarly, during Roman Empire, widespread use of signs were started for information dissemination of books and paintings, attention catching of travelers. Europe also used this method frequently, but in French this medium was used for publishing law statements, requirements and compulsions. Consequently, at the end of 1300, in Europe, it was obligatory for all the businesses/trades to install the boards for their identification [5,6]. With the passage of time, in 1480, William Caxton started typing billboards in England to advertise a religious law book *The Pyles of Salisbury Use* [5, 6]. Therefore, by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the popularity of the new technology of boards "London was literally darkened with great swinging signboards of every description..." [5,6]. In continuity, first hoarding/billboard was erected in British but his owner was liable to seek permission for its commercial posting with an official statement [5,6]. The city council granted permission with some fee and then advertisers were authorized to put their structure in heavy traffic areas for location identification [6]. In parallel to this, no tax was imposed on private advertisers (newspaper advertisers) by the British Government, which persuaded the faster growth of advertisings [5, 6]. As the outdoor advertisings got success in British especially in colonies, America (Philadelphia) also followed the trends of their European counterparts which were mostly pictorial in nature [6]. But during the Revolutionary War, signboards were experienced as the primary communication medium. However, restrictions on sizes through municipal laws as well as development of new means of advertisements limited the use of signboards in US [6]. By 1850, this medium was far advanced and P.T Barnum was the pioneer for posting. Anyhow, the great increase in bills has been started during the Civil war (1965). At the other end, during this period, severe criticism was started on the boards and for the very first time, the New York State Legislature passed legislation to prevent outdoor advertising [6]. It is also estimated that 30% of the total advertising cost

was spent on outdoor medium which has been reduced to 25% by early 1890's due to the rise of other tools [6]. On the whole, this was the time, when the need for regulations of outdoor advertising was felt in US [6]. The first association; International Billposters Association of North America for regulating boards was appeared in 1872 and it worked for about ten years [6]. This association led ground for another platform named as Associated Billposters in the United States and Canada (ABUSC) in 1892. The later one, ABUSC had great impact on the legislation industry of outdoor advertising due to a number of factors [6].

### 3. IMPACTS OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS

Outdoor advertisings and transfer of information feed one of the prime functions of modern cities. But on the other hand, if they are managed and regularized properly, they can have real impacts on urban living environment, and tourism resources just like in United States of America [18]. The following paragraphs capture the both sides of the pictures comprehensively and briefly:

One school of thought is of the view that stringent regulations or complete ban of advertisements will result in economic loss. In present day urban life, these are a good source of attracting business and trade so excluding them from an area is untrue and silly [9]. Furthermore, it is also revealed in a study of Philadelphia that outdoor advertisings in particular billboards has a very positive effect on any area economy in two ways, i.e. by facilitating landowners for effective utilization of property and by encouraging positive marketing of any product [7,8]. For instance, Auckland city council efforts to clean CBD from billboards failed because of the opposition of outdoor media companies and advertisers. They were of the view that such actions will make Auckland like the "Eastern Bloc before the fall of the Berlin Wall". Signs are not merely a reason for environmental proliferation, but they provide grounds for city decorations and figure if they are properly aligned with planning techniques [10]. Because they adorn spaces with beautiful signs, illuminated billboards, painted flowers/sceneries at main places, attractive campaigns boards along highways and roads to make life populace and pleasant [10]. They develop visual diversity, festivity, local character in the form of permanent landmarks on sky scrapers [11]. Addition to this, there is no second fact against that outdoor advertisements emerging as one of the biggest revenue source for any area. Data on recent trends reveal that budgets for boards have been increased in international markets [12]. They are considered as guides. They are key helpers to locate the desired destination, estimating distances. Along with this, a good sign system directs about locations and serves as a guiding tool for road users and pedestrians [11]. They also inform us about upcoming mega events, fashion trends, sale offers, conferences, festivals, housing scheme, new developments etc, [12]. It is one of the best ways for fund raising, dissemination of information about public campaigns, etc [11,13]. However, the most popular form of advertisements is billboards which are providing the platform for creativity and environment embellishment [14]. It is assumed as a form of art that helps in enhancing and inspiring architectural style and urban design of urban areas in a very positive way [11].

For example, Billboards and hand painted posters, car/bus wrappings, stretched advertisement on the wall and the facades of the buildings express very appealing artistic abilities [11]. Another fact is that this media have become the second largest source of information after television, with the blend of architectural space factors like roads, natural landscape and environment [15]. Modern cities are filled with all kinds of symbols and information which ensure the routine functions of that space and also a hub of information for the public [15].

Anyhow, there are two sides of the picture, but according to the good standards of the aesthetics and beauty, in most urban areas, outdoor advertisings are marked as a sign of ugliness and mess for urban life [9,5,7,10 ,6]. It is also bitterly termed as 'litter on stick' and 'sky trash' in the literature [17]. For example comparison of Hawaii, Sao Paul, Bermuda, without advertisements and urban areas with advertisements show the level of ugliness which is being created by this mode of information [9 18]. With this, it is an admitted fact that appearance is the key characteristics of any environment and presence of boards have severely affected this value of any area like Miami beach, Massachusetts park, Maine, Vermont and Alaska [9, 19]. Due to such effects, advertisements have been banned in many parts of the world like Sao Paolo in Brazil, Vermont, Alaska, Hawaii, and Maine in USA with almost 1500 towns [19,20]. Along with, in 1935, in Masachusetts, it was declared by the court that advertisings particularly billboards are one of the cause of road accidents. As it is an accepted fact that these tools are designed to draw attention of the viewer and on the other hand, today's heavy traffic and high speed of driving, demand higher level of concentration [5,9]. But this argument does not favor to the above conclusion of the relationship between road accidents and billboards [9,19]. It is also studied that reading speed of a driver doubles than that of average one in the presence of traffic, business signs, billboards and other type of advertisements [19]. In addition to this, this medium, particularly billboards are declared as 'the junk mail of the American Highway' [17]. Another fact is that billboards devalue a home on an average of \$4546 per house in an area with them as compared to the area without billboards [7]. It is also concluded that strict sign controls do not have negative impacts on the economic prosperity of a city [5,7]. Furthermore, it is argued against boards is that they illuminated late at night, which is harmful for natural, scenic, historic values [19]. They have severe consequences on several aspects of urban lives. In a nutshell, they have bad effects on appearance of night skies, human psychology as well as physiology by disturbing rhythms of the human body, ecological disorders of many species, economical and environmental lives by the huge wastage of energy and road safety measures through unleashed lighting by creating glare, minimizing visibility and by blinding road users [5,8]. It is observed that the specific identity/character of a place which differentiates one place from the other is known as sense of placeness. This particularity of a space becomes a source of visitor attraction due to its native ability and image. But over and frequent spread and change of advertisements at any place create urban blight and weaken the image permanence

of the area. [5]. It is also observed that usually advertisers use their right to disseminate ‘creative and humorous’ message in contrast to their ‘social responsibility’ [21]. In this way, public spaces are sold out for private interests [21]. Therefore, in the UK, clutter code was approved to handle issues of billboards and to protect spaces. One of the opponents of boards and signs write that

*“We will be miles ahead of the rest of the world in creature comforts, but we will have paid a price by the loss of variety and personal identification” [21].*

It is also one the severe argument of the critics that advertisements detract from historical and contemporary spaces which can be an ultimate source of attraction for residents and tourists. In continuation, Auckland city council puts ban on billboards in the central business district to create better appreciation opportunity for building heritage and natural landscape [13]. Similarly, Sao Paul city has passed the Clean City Law to prohibit every form of outdoor adverting in the city in 2006. Despite the other repercussions of the law on jobs and revenues, citizens (above 70%) favored the law during a survey in 2011 because they were of the view that this removal policy has brought back the architectural magnificence of their city [13]. Furthermore, outdoor advertisings are also marked a cause for ecological destruction, littering, unsustainable consumption patterns, ethical devaluation, and commercialization of places, unfriendly tourism and retail environment [5,11].

**4. EXISTING REGULATORY PRACTICES/ FRAMEWORKS OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING IN THE WORLD**

The focus of rules and regulations of outdoor advertising is on two main principles of amenity and public safety [5], [22]. The term amenity addresses both visual and aural amenity. All around the world, particularly in UK, USA and Europe, a variety of legal documents have been designed and executed for the effective control and management of every king of advertisements. For instance, regulations of town and country planning, advertisement policies, and advertisers guides, rules and codes for advertisement (like Portland sign code 1996), bylaws (like Auckland city bylaws), advertising Control Acts for highways (for example in South Carolina), and guidance booklets [5] [23]. There are two systems of regulating outdoor advertising in the world named as self regulatory framework and statutory framework [24]. In almost all over the globe, outdoor adverting is regulated in combination of planning authorities and advertising agencies [25] [26]. In

Singapore, outdoor advertising are regulated by Building and Construction Authority while local municipal authorities are responsible for managing boards in China [27]. Only in Singapore, contents are being considered by the authorities otherwise only visual appearance and structural stability are checked [27]. Similarly, sign boards and outdoor advertisements are regulated by local planning authorities and municipalities in both United States and United Kingdom [27]. Furthermore, in UK, most forms of signs are managed by the UK Town and County Planning system. Presently, any display of boards without the consent of respective planning authority with the fee rate of £2,500 per offense. In South Africa, SAMOAC is the national document for guiding national, provincial, local authorities and advertising industry regarding the management and control of outdoor advertisements [8]. While in Japan, this medium is being regulated by planning agencies, advertising agencies and the most importantly, by communities which is a step ahead than other countries’ practices in this regards [25]. Moreover, Australia also has same regulatory practices of boards like USA with a bit of difference [25]. But unlike most developed nations, developing countries (like Pakistan and Nepal) in the world generally and in South Asia region specifically are in the process of realization, formation of regulations and policies/mechanisms as well as identification of responsible regulating agencies [5,28, 29, 30]. However, in India, outdoor advertising are standardized and regulated by local planning authorities, but they need to improve and replicate in all parts of the country [31].

**5. GLOBAL PARADIGM SHIFT IN REGULATING AND MANAGEMENT OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS**

With the passage of time, it is direly felt that to protect and enhance the overall living environment of any community; it is inevitable to look into the outdoor advertising industry just beyond the rules of amenity and public safety. Because it is stated that at present check on the quality of contents, colors, lettering and symbol sizes, text amounts and type of materials against the principles and concepts of urban environmental graphics and city planning is out of the scope of the controlling bodies [22]. Therefore, management of boards is not just for revenue generation but it is now considered as an entity which must be treated and controlled under whole planning and design systems of the cities [15]. The following table presents the comparison/shift in approaches towards the effective dealing of outdoor advertisements with changing urban environmental demands.

<i>Summary of Paradigm Shift in outdoor advertising control and management/regulations</i>		
<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Existing Practices</i>	<i>New Dimensions</i>
1	Key Principles of amenity and public safety	Cultural sensitivity, conservation of man-made and natural environment with economic development, transparency by communities/citizens/stakeholders [32] [25].
2	Focus on visual impression and structural soundness of the boards [27]	Concern about size, color, content, material and form etc [12].
3	Implementation of advertisement policies and laws	Integration with urban/city planning concepts (landuse and zoning plans, comprehensive plans, development plans)
4	General policies and rules and regulations for the whole neighborhood or city or country	Need is determined to develop policies at neighborhood level
5	Relaxed, soft and general requirements of space and position of outdoor advertisements	Space and position standards[32]
6	Regulations were designed and passed on the basis of	New slogan is only consideration of aesthetics in formulating

	aesthetics[9]	rules and regulations for outdoor advertisements is not logical and sufficient [9]. It advocates that the concept of public welfare is broad and inclusive. It includes not only visual but also physical and monetary cleanliness [9].
7	Private management	Public-private partnership [12], [19]
8	Non-integrated landuse plans with advertisement laws	Implementation of land use/zoning restrictions in complement of public health, safety and welfare considerations/principles [19]. Consciousness towards the responsibility of outdoor advertising as a part whole city management system [10] [15]
9	Same rules for all types of advertisements	Required special considerations for large boards (billboards/hoardings) [18]
10	Lack of an up to date use of technology with changing scenarios	Development of intentions/interests for the use of technologies which can be helpful in minimizing driver's distraction like commercial electronic variable message signs (CEVMS) [25].
11	Sole responsibility on planning bodies in coordination with self regulating agencies for the management of outdoor advertisings	Establishment of social responsibility for promoting harmonious development between boards and urban image [15]

The table shows that approaches for control and management of outdoor advertisements have been shifted from general to specific. They are more focused on creating the overall city image by regulating advertisement in line with landuse, zoning and urban plans and principles.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Very briefly, it is concluded that management of outdoor advertisements has direct relation to urban planning generally and with urban design in particular. The sensitivity of the issue regarding regularizing of this medium has been felt a century before in developed countries whereas developing countries have started initiatives from the recent past. However, the developed world is devising and reviewing their existing policies and legal documents and implementing technologies related to the management and control of outdoor advertisings to bring this subject into urban planning with extreme sensitivity. More, their management is laid with planning institutions which should strive to enhance the advantages of this medium rather than dis-advantages by blending landuse and zoning practices.7.

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