



Finding Cinderella's shoe: Guidelines for the planning of contemporary outdoor advertising media

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to explore how experienced media practitioners plan contemporary outdoor advertising in the South African context. In depth interviews were conducted with purposively sampled participants at media agencies responsible for the outdoor advertising campaigns of some large as well as small advertisers in South Africa. The findings revealed three key considerations for effective outdoor advertising campaigns namely the placing of outdoor advertising; creative execution and the potential impact and image the medium. The study provides advertisers with recommendations as how to deliver targeted exposure to specific geographic markets and to capitalise on the potential impact and image associated with advertising on colossal buildings and structures.

Keywords: Outdoor advertising media, billboards, out-of-home advertising media, leisure, South Africa

Introduction

'Outdoor is not medium; it is an extra-large' (OAAA, 2016). This amusing mantra of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America accentuates how brands can literally become larger than life when advertising on these huge formats. The impact of colossal advertising on buildings and billboards stems from - among other things - our perceptual uniqueness as humans. The visual cortex of human brains is arguably the largest of all creatures and is responsible for processing visual information (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). Mediums such as super-size advertising boards and large screens in movie theatres offer audiences a unique exposure to monumental images, whose psychological impact is directly proportional to their greater-than-life dimensions. It is the size of these images that connect outdoor advertising in a kind of kindred communicational potency (Baack et al., 2008).

Contemporary Out-of-home (OOH) media include four major platforms: outdoor advertising media; street-and-retail furniture advertising media; transit advertising media, and alternative OOH advertising media. Currently, OOH advertising is the most-viewed medium in South Africa, reaching 95% of all adults (OMD South Africa, 2016). The focus of this article is specifically on the planning of outdoor advertising in South Africa. Outdoor advertising refers to all large-format advertising displays on boards, buildings and structures viewed from the road; and it is typically intended for viewing from extended distances by vehicular traffic, while driving (SAMOAC, 2016). It remains the most popular OOH advertising medium in South Africa when the advertising expenditure is compared with that spent on other types of media in this class (OMD South Africa, 2016). Due to their size and outside locations across the urban landscape this medium can reach consumers outside their homes – where most people spend most of their day at work – or otherwise away from home. This is not possible with traditional media, such as television, radio, magazines or newspapers (Nagel & Louw, 2004).



Consumers worldwide are more mobile than ever before, due to the urbanisation and centralisation of economic activities (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). Not only are they now more mobile, but they also spend significantly more time commuting between home and work, due to traffic congestion and distance. South Africans spend more than an hour each day commuting, compared with the 45 minutes spent by commuters in the United Kingdom, 44 minutes in Germany, and 43 minutes in the Netherlands (World Bank in PWC, 2016). The increased time spent outside homes in the open air, whether for recreation or simply commuting from one place to another, presents an opportunity for this medium.

Despite the extensive reach and promising potential, far less money is invested in OOH advertising in South Africa compared to traditional print and broadcast media types (OMD South Africa, 2016). Outdoor advertising is therefore often referred to as the 'Cinderella media' in South Africa, due to the untapped potential (Patterson, 2011). Despite its smaller contribution to the overall spending within the advertising industry, outdoor advertising is becoming of greater importance due to its ability to reach consumers who are exceptionally mobile and exposed less frequently to traditional forms of media (Wilson & Till, 2011).

It also seems to be the Cinderella or stepchild of the academic researcher, due to high costs involved with enacting field experiments and the large national surveys required to study this medium (Donthu & Bhargava, 1999). Some prominent international authors have examined the response of consumers to outdoor advertising displayed on boards on a cognitive- (Donthu et al., 1993; Bhargava et al., 1994), evaluative- (Wilson & Till, 2011) or behavioural level (Donthu & Bhargava, 1999). Only a handful of empirical studies were conducted in a developing economy context. These studies focused on the regulation of outdoor advertising of harmful products (e.g. De Bruijn et al. 2014; Suditu et al. 2016) or the promotion of public health campaigns in rural areas (e.g. Nagel & Louw, 2004; Pauwels, 2005).

Nagel and Louw (2004) explored the response of South Africans to outdoor advertising in Limpopo, a semi-urban rural area. Pauwels (2005) explored the use of posters and outdoor advertising to communicate TB – and HIV/AIDS-related messages – to the public health sector. These studies focussed specifically on the perceptions of black low-income consumers of outdoor advertising. The westernised approach by advertising agencies when creating communication and their failure to adapt the message to a local or African context, or to the communities' own traditional symbols, values and usages were criticised. This lack of sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences is problematic in light of the potential value of outdoor advertising to drive attitudinal brand loyalty among consumers in South Africa (Human et al., 2011). This challenge also underlines the need for this current study to explore practitioners' applications of outdoor advertising aimed at South Africa consumers.

Against this background, the following problem statement is formulated for this study. Advertisers in South Africa do not seem to realize the potential of contemporary outdoor advertising (OMD South Africa, 2016; Patterson, 2011, PWC, 2013). Outdoor advertising is one of the least researched of any advertising medium (Katz, 2014, Wilson & Till, 2011). Some older studies have focused on the factors influencing the recall of advertising on billboards in America, but ignored larger and contemporary outdoor advertising formats (Donthu & Bhargava, 1999; Donthu et al., 1993; Bhargava et al., 1994). More recently a couple of researchers have explored the attitudes of bottom of the pyramid black consumers in South Africa towards the symbols and images on selected billboards in townships (Nagel & Louw, 2004, Pauwels, 2005).

The studies might offer a valuable consumer perspective but there is paucity of research on how media practitioners plan outdoor advertising campaigns in South Africa. If the critical factors to be considered when planning outdoor advertising for the South African context are not understood,



brands run the risk of relying on inappropriate misplaced formats and ineffective creative executions to deliver their communication. This might also lead to wasting time and sources on westernised campaigns that ignore the cultural diversity and distinctive travel behaviours in our country.

The aim of this study was therefore to explore how experienced media practitioners plan outdoor advertising in the South African context. Considering the practitioners' experience and application

lead to discovering of novel solutions, validated existing research and contributed to the limited theory on outdoor advertising media planning. This article is organised as follows: First, outdoor advertising in a developing economy context is introduced, followed by a review of the major outdoor formats and studies on outdoor advertising effectiveness. Then, the methods used in this study are described, followed by a discussion of the findings. The article concludes with managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

Outdoor advertising in a developing economy context

Contemporary outdoor advertising refers to all large-format advertising displays on boards, buildings and structures viewed from the road; and it is typically intended for viewing from extended distances by vehicular traffic, while driving (SAMOAC, 2016). Traditional outdoor advertising on billboards remains by far the highest contributor to total OOH advertising revenues in African countries (PWC, 2013; OMD South Africa, 2016). Growth in Africa was significant the past decade; e.g. the Nigerian market grew with 247% from 2008 to 2012; the Kenyan market increased with 203% from 2008 to 2012 (PWC, 2013). These dramatic growth rates have slowed down, but consistent growth is predicted to continue the next five years. Nigeria was worth US\$181 million in 2015 but will become the fastest-growing market with a CAGR of 7.8% representing US\$263 million in 2020. Kenya is predicted to be the second-fastest market over the forecast period, growing at a CAGR of 7.0% from US\$ 98 million in 2015 to US\$138 million in revenue (PWC, 2016).

Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is being driven by a number of factors: real rapid rates of urbanisation, larger audiences of international travellers and regular commuters due to the rise in destinations offered by international and national airline carriers and car ownership rates; high penetration and visibility; improved literacy levels among the population and investments by large international and local media companies (Continental outdoor, 2016; Ornicco, 2016; Primedia, 2016). However, the OOH industry in Africa also faces some major challenges such as the lack of effective verification of audience sizes, traffic count data and available inventory, increasing but also inconsistent regulation and legislation across states and even touts in rural areas demanding fees to allow the changing of advertisements or structures (PWC, 2013).

Outdoor advertising formats

In the South African Manual for Outdoor Advertising Control two outdoor advertising formats are distinguished: advertising on constructions or buildings and freestanding outdoor advertising signs. outdoor advertising on constructions or buildings utilises existing urban structures, in order to host outdoor advertising, such as around construction sites, on existing buildings or walls, or advertising on towers and bridges (SAMOAC, 2016). Since these formats are often temporary or attached to existing building structures, they can be regarded as more advantageous to the environment, leaving no long-term impact. Construction site wraps and hoardings at the bottom of buildings are temporary fences erected around building sites or infrastructural development in central business district areas, almost like large billboards over a few metres (Wide open platform, 2016).

In high traffic and urban areas, these formats offer effective ways to convey an advertising message to a wider audience. This space is then rented for advertising purposes, while the building may still be in the process of construction (see *Figure 1*). Wall murals and building wraps are more permanent advertisements on one wall or an entire building; and they are located close to major freeways and

highways, along commuter routes and in business districts (SAMOAC, 2016). Building wraps are often several storeys high and, depending on the location, can sometimes be seen for many kilometres (Wide open platform, 2016).

Figure 2 illustrates an example of the effective use of a building wrap for Red Bull close to the Nelson Mandela Bridge in Johannesburg. They employed several of these large formats across South Africa to achieve distinctive brand presence in key locations combined with short term construction wraps to promote the inaugural Red Bull X-Fighters event (Wide open platform, 2016).

Figure 3 shows some of the cooling towers branded for First National Bank at major cities across the country. In each of the cities one tower is wrapped with FNB's brand, while the others featured vibrant artwork depicting each city's unique cultural heritage. The surface of these structures provides ideal opportunities for painted or wrapped advertisements, which may enhance the visual environment, especially when using themes that reflect the local culture or history to contribute to the local scene.

Figure 1 Constructional site wraps close to Maponya Mall, Soweto

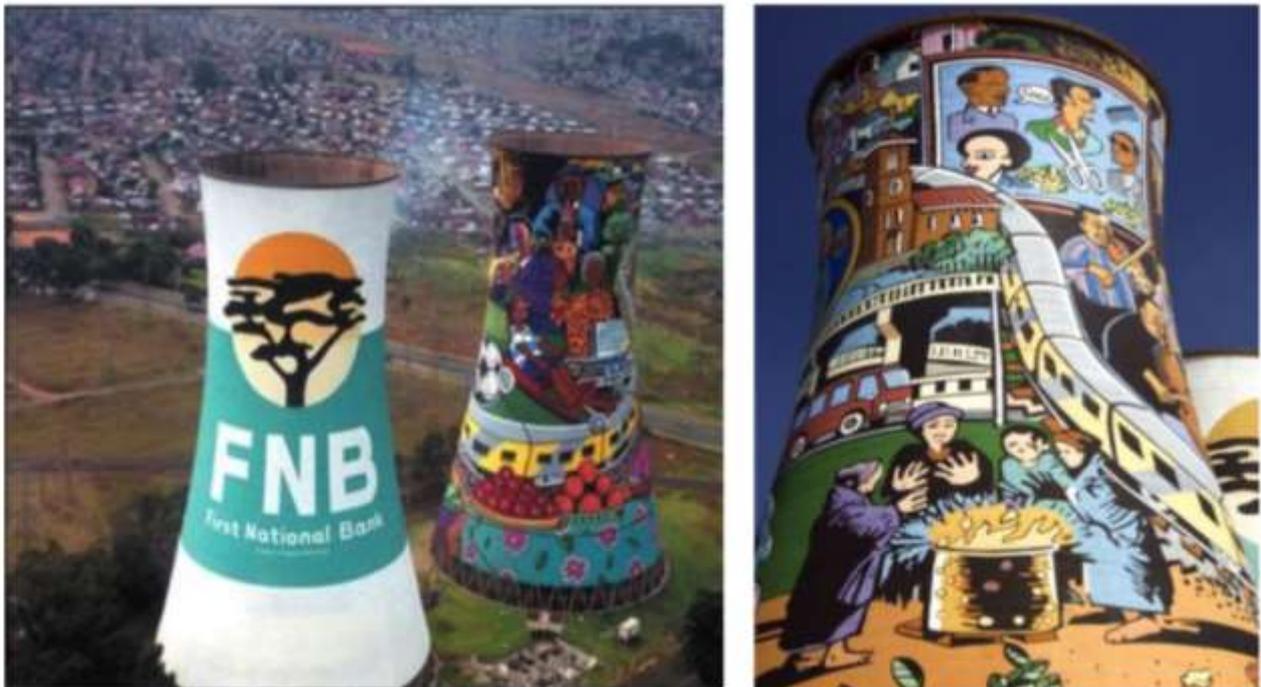


Continues...

Figure 2: Building wraps for Red bull, Johannesburg



Figure 3: Advertising on the cooling Towers at Soccer City, Johannesburg



Source: The researcher, Wide open platform, 2016, Outdoor network, 2016

Freestanding outdoor advertising media, also referred to as billboards, are advertising structures, which are not attached to a building or to other structures. In South Africa, the size of outdoor advertising formats ranges from relatively small (3.6x2.5m, 3x2m, 3x6m) to much larger (3x12m,



4.5x18m, 9x6m, 12x12m) (OHMSA, 2016). Large signs such as spectacular outdoor advertising signs, super-signs and gantries are typically located facing major highways or close to the entrances to large cities. These larger signs are often used to target higher income groupings that work or live in these urban areas. Super signs or super-outdoor advertising signs are large standard-sized outdoor displays between 36m² and 81m² found on major arterial routes and at major traffic convergence points in metropolitan areas (SAMOAC, 2016).

Figure 4 shows an example of a super outdoor advertising sign at a taxi rank in Umlazi, a township on the east coast of KwaZulu-Natal that was used as a long-term branding display by Vodacom (a large cell-phone and telecommunication operator across Africa).

Spectacular outdoor advertising displays, sometimes referred to as walls capes, are very large, typically over 50 m², non-standard elaborate structures located at strategic land-mark positions, on highways and in urban areas; and they are generally illuminated (SAMOAC, 2016). This format is not standardised; and it comprises a wide variety of unusual creative sizes and shapes that are custom-designed to gain maximum attention through special eye-catching effects, such as cut-outs, extensions or 3D designs, fibre optics, giant internally illuminated panels, three-dimensional sculpted features, video-screens, hydraulic movements, or computer graphics (Outdoor network, 2016).

Gantries are outdoor advertising displays fixed to an overhead structure, such as bridges, walkways or free-standing boards to span a road, thereby offering maximum exposure – due to their position right in front of the approaching vehicular traffic (SAMOAC, 2016). A popular location for advertising gantries is at the entrances to major centres or towns in South Africa. *Figure 5* shows a gantry at the exit of Cape Town airport, which offers Vodacom high-impact exposure to visitors. On this gantry is a creative and humorous advertising message to welcome tourists as they entered the lovely city of Cape Town.

Campaign outdoor advertising displays are standard-sized formats advertising typically aimed at slow-moving traffic, pedestrians and shoppers. Campaign outdoor advertising uses boards not larger than 18 m², with 3m x 6m being the most popular format (commonly known as 48 sheeters) in South Africa (SAMOAC, 2016). Campaign outdoor advertising is typically used in rural, peri-urban and urban metropolitan areas, to reach geographically targeted audiences (Continental outdoor, 2016). This advertising medium is also often used in traditional township areas, at taxi ranks, or close to local shopping centres, to target the emerging market, while it is also found close to up-market areas and on the way to shopping malls (Primedia, 2016).

Some of these outdoor advertising campaigns advertising are depicted in *Figure 6*. The photo on the left is a board in a small township to advertise Cadbury's chocolate. This board is designed to be read diagonally from top left to bottom right. It contains some formal English in centre (P.S.- a postscript as an addition or reminder - I love you) and vernacular or local dialect ('waya waya'). There is a clear association between the product, a 'sweet', and the phrase 'sweet-talk waya waya' displayed in clear bold-text in the same sized fonts as the caption (P.S.) The phrase itself is seductively ambiguous in that it can be interpreted as 'sweet-talk', or using pleasing words of love or fondness to persuade someone special to do something or as referring to the sweet itself as an object of reflection. The phrase waya-way can be translated as "the art of wasting time" and is associated with pleasurable moments (Urban dictionary, 2016). The love letter with kisses placed under the sweet also reinforces the underlying sensual tones of the campaign. The photo on the right is a board located close to Maponya Mall in Soweto advertising Equal - a brand of sweetener substitute. It also combines some formal English with the phrase 'woza' which means 'come one' and aims to provoke a sensual mood with the playful couple dressed in pure white. These two campaigns promoting some form of sweetness illustrate just how ironic and fascinating advertising in South Africa can be.

Figure 4: Super outdoor advertising at Umlazi



Figure 5: Gantry at Cape town for Vodacom



Figure 6: Campaign Boards in township areas



Source: The Researcher, 2016, OHMSA. 2016, Outdoor network, 2016

These examples of outdoor advertising formats served to illustrate the creative potential for brands using outdoor advertising and the current variety and quality within this platform in terms of quality, size, location, and architectural design in South Africa.



Framework to plan effective outdoor advertising

The levels of advertising effectiveness contained in the well-established hierarchy of effective model are often used to offer insights into the intended effects of advertising and other persuasive marketing messages (Barry & Howard, 1990; Vakratsas & Ambler; 1999). The model proposes that advertising can be applied to influence consumers on three levels, namely cognitive (e.g., awareness, attention), affective (e.g., attitude toward the ad/medium, attitude toward the brand), and conative (e.g., purchase intention).

These levels can be considered when planning or researching effectiveness of outdoor advertising campaigns. The table below present academic studies from leading international and local journals on the effects of outdoor advertising at each of these levels It can be seen that these studies typically measured cognitive effects such as the recall and recognition of outdoor advertising; some explored affective responses such as attitudes towards outdoor advertising and only a few examined behaviour or sales response to outdoor advertising. These studies focused specifically on freestanding outdoor advertising signs or billboards and did not consider advertising on constructions or buildings. The most frequently employed method was a survey, while interviews and experiments were each used only two times in these studies.

It also reveals that the existing literature consider two major issues to examine outdoor advertising effectiveness. The first issue is the *placement of the outdoor advertising boards*, which includes the positions, and geographic locations of the boards. The second issue is the *creative execution* that incorporates the design and execution of the message. These two issues that contribute to outdoor advertising effectiveness are reviewed in the following sections.

Table 1: Framework to plan effective outdoor advertising

Level of effectiveness	Research methods	Authors	Placement of outdoor advertising boards		Creative execution
			Location	Position	
Cognitive					
Recognition of outdoor advertising	Survey	Klerkx & Van Meurs (2009)			Δ
Capturing attention to outdoor advertising	Experiment	Wilson & Casper (2016)	Δ		Δ
Factors influencing recall of outdoor advertising	Surveys	Donthu et al. (1993)		Δ	Δ
Improving the recall of outdoor advertising	Surveys	Bhargava et al. (1994)		Δ	Δ
Targeting of outdoor alcohol advertising	Observation	Wilson & Till (2012)		Δ	Δ
Attitudinal					
Attitudes towards outdoor messages advertising in townships	Personal interviews	Nagel & Louw (2004)			Δ
Effectiveness of outdoor advertising used to communicate TB- and HIV/AIDS-related messages	Personal interviews	Pauwels (2005)			Δ
Behavioural					
Sales response to outdoor advertising	Experiment	Donthu & Bhargava (1999)		Δ	
Outdoor advertising to build attitudinal brand loyalty among low-income consumers in South Africa	Surveys	Human et al. (2011)	Δ		



Placement of outdoor advertising boards

Outdoor advertising facilitates the targeting of specific geographic areas or neighbourhoods that, in a sense, represent a captive audience of people who live and/or work in those areas (Wilson & Till, 2012). Thus, the location and position of outdoor advertising boards is a significant factor contributing to both the likelihood and frequency of audience exposure in geographic areas and the consequent recall of advertisements (Bhargava et al., 1994; Bhargava & Donthu, 1999). Donthu, Cherian and Bhargava (1993) telephonically interviewed residents of a large town to determine their level of recall of messages advertised on billboards a specific geographical area. It was found that advertising boards aimed at drivers of cars were more noted when placed on the highways when compared with suburban roads, and at the right-hand side of the road compared with on the left-hand side. Boards with promotional messages offering some incentive and located close to retail outlets can be effective on a behavioural level directly leading to increased sales (Donthu & Bhargava, 1999).

Businesses that regularly use outdoor advertising as part of their marketing efforts reaffirm the importance of strategically located and well-positioned outdoor advertising. Researchers found that businesses regard presence at specific geographic locations as a major benefit and believed that outdoor advertising offered unique advantages not offered by other local and national media: specifically, to serve as a last reminder in close proximity to the point-of-sale, communicate information at an affordable cost and to attract new customers from the neighbourhood (Taylor et al., 2006, Taylor & Franke, 2003)

This medium's cost-effectiveness in targeting geographically contained consumers in specific areas can unfortunately result in some negative consequences. Excessive and/or unregulated outdoor advertising boards have been criticised for being aesthetically displeasing, representing a potential safety hazard for motorists and facilitates the targeting of objectionable products such as alcohol and tobacco to vulnerable populations such as low-income consumers, certain ethnicities and adolescents (Wilson & Till, 2012). As a result of public pressure many outdoor advertising sites have been eliminated or curtailed and legislation strictly regulates the size, lighting and spacing of outdoor advertising to minimize roadside clutter and for safety reasons (SAMOAC, 2016). Large corporations are also recognising their corporate responsibility to minimise potential environmental harm by implementing innovative solutions such as solar-powered billboards to provide rural communities and schools in poverty-stricken townships with electricity, eco-friendly alternatives for printing and production processes, recycling of billboard material and providing litterbin facilities in urban and suburban areas (Continental outdoor, 2016).

Due to the global increase in regulatory and public pressure to limit the growth and spread of outdoor advertising some advertisers have become concerned about the quality of remaining outdoor advertising sites. Some have investigated these concerns. Wilson and Till (2011) examined the impact of outdoor advertising boards in specific contexts on consumers' overall attitude towards the brand and the associated - image. They used quantitative experimentation, by showing the digital manipulation of boards – with either more-positive, or more-negative environments – to a number of test and control groups, and then measuring their reactions. The results suggested that the location at which outdoor advertisements are placed does not appear to affect consumers' attitudes and beliefs about the advertised brand. They believe that this is due to low levels of message processing of advertising outdoor next the road and consumers are not sufficiently engaged in the external environment for the background context to influence their evaluation of the advertised brand.

However, this study was conducted in a developed country; and all the respondents were students. This study also considered only one format (outdoor advertising billboards) in a digitally manipulated roadside environment. The results might not be valid in a developing country, such as South Africa, or when comparing consumers from different economic groups, or when using qualitative research with psychological projection techniques to understand deep seated associations.



Creative execution

Creativity is a critical consideration for advertising practitioners and scholars. When reviewing the substantial body of literature on creativity and advertising it seems that the focus is predominantly on advertising in traditional media with very little on how it can or should be applied in out-of-home environments (Wilson et al., 2015). The contexts and cultural environments in which outdoor advertising is viewed differ significantly from traditional media and should be considered when designing the execution of the creative message. For instance, television and magazines can assume a certain level of directed attention as advertisement are inserted within the medium and typically replace content in its entirety when visible. In this manner, attention does not need to be diverted to another part of the media space to view an advertisement. Television advertisements are displayed on the whole screen, and most advertisements in magazines occupy a full page, so exposure to their advertising is quite likely, providing consumers are attending the medium (Wilson et al., 2015). With outdoor advertising the medium is the message since there is no supporting or surrounding editorial content or programmes. Vehicular traffic in the streets generally lacks motivation and opportunity to process outdoor advertising, because they are usually involved in another task, such as driving (Bhargava & Donthu, 1999; Donthu et al. 1993). As a result, few cognitive resources are made available for secondary tasks, such as taking notice of advertisements (Van Meurs & Aristoff, 2009).

Outdoor advertising messages must be designed for the context, where the audience is exposed to messages to maximize the effectiveness. Advertising is difficult to see and process in the roadside context, which is also a highly distracting environment, because the exposure is usually fleeting and the level of involvement in message processing low (Donthu et al., 1993). Consequently, creativity will only have an impact on recognition when billboards are larger in size and within an individual's visual field. This visual threshold represents a threshold for creativity and attention must thus first be captured before creativity increases the memory for brands in advertising (Wilson et al., 2015).

Since outdoor advertising is a fleeting medium, the need for visual simplicity and short copy when designing the creative execution is crucial. Van Meurs and Aristoff (2009) used a tachistoscope to determine the impact of the layout, the message content, and the brand identification of outdoor advertising boards on the speed of recognition of the brand and product advertised. The findings suggest that brand/product recognition could be enhanced by using easily identifiable branding (logos, packaging, brand colours, new product information), strong contrasting colours (bright or primary colours used against a light or neutral background), fewer informative cues (large amounts of text, different colours) and by leaving out other distracting content. A noteworthy effect was the negative influence of humour and pictures of women with eye contact on brand recognition. This might be because the attention is devoted to processing the humour, rather than the brand being advertised.

Furthermore, the cultural environment where the boards are positioned will also influence viewers' processing and responsiveness of the message. Nagel and Louw (2004) investigated the perceptions of black low-income consumers towards outdoor advertising in a rural area in Limpopo. They observed a westernised approach by advertising agencies when creating communication and criticised their failure to adapt the message to a local or African context, or to the communities' own traditional symbols, values and usages. This lack of sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences is problematic in light of the potential value of outdoor advertising to drive attitudinal brand loyalty (Human et al., 2011) and promote positive health behaviour among bottom of the pyramid black consumers in South Africa (Pauwels, 2005).



Study design and procedure

The study was qualitative in nature and an exploratory research design was applied. This method offered a theoretically flexible approach for analysing the qualitative data; it provided an in-depth understanding of how specialists use this OOH advertising media platform in campaigns rather than just validating facts. Data was collected from media practitioners who met the inclusion criteria (Directors, Partners, Strategist and senior planners who oversee or plan outdoor advertising campaigns for international and local brands in South Africa) by means of in-depth interviews. These agencies serve relatively small and very large clients, with several of these clients amongst the top media spenders in South Africa.

Since the aim of an exploratory qualitative enquiry is not to generalise to the larger population, but rather to get in-depth information of the situation within the specific context, a large sample size is not necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a qualitative study that uses purposive sampling, the sample size is determined by the information that is needed to address the research question (Patton, 2002) and by the number of people who have sufficient knowledge and experience of the research topic to provide the information. The researcher obtained advice from directors of two of the largest outdoor media companies and the official OOH advertising media trade association of South Africa on the most suitable agencies or specialists to represent the specialists in the industry and planning the bulk outdoor advertising spending in South Africa. The identified and the highest-ranking executive at the nominated media agencies were contacted telephonically to request in-depth interviews. Fifteen from those agencies invited agreed to be interviewed (Table 2). Ten of the practitioners were employed at large internationally recognized advertising media agencies; five were from independent specialist agencies. Seven of them were on a senior level, while the rest were on directorial level. Seven of the participants were female and the rest were male.

Table 2: Characteristics of the participants.

Pseudonym	Level in agency	Number of employees	City	Gender
P1	Director/ Partner	501–1 000	JHB	M
P2	Director/ Partner	5001–10 000	JHB	M
P3	Strategist/ Senior planner	11–50	CPT	M
P4	Strategist/ Senior planner	51–200	CPT	F
P5	Director/ Partner	11–50	JHB	F
P6	Strategist/ Senior planner	5001–10 000	JHB	F
P7	Strategist/ Senior planner	51–200	CPT	F
P8	Strategist/ Senior planner	11–50	JHB	F
P9	Director/ Partner	51–200	JHB	F
P10	Director/ Partner	51–200	JHB	M
P11	Director/ Partner	51–200	Kzn	M
P12	Director/ Partner	51–200	Kzn	M
P13	Strategist/ Senior planner	51–200	Kzn	M
P14	Director/ Partner	51–200	Kzn	M
P15	Director/ Partner	51–200	Kzn	F

Non-directive and directive questioning were combined in the interviews to stimulate the participants to talk to broadly about planning campaigns but also about specific cases illustrating planning principles in South Africa (Brinkmann, 2014). Respondents were informed about the study's aim, permission was asked to record the interview and they were assured of anonymity. The duration of the actual in-depth interviews for this study lasted about two hours each and was conducted at the key informants' offices. Most of specialist were located in Johannesburg. The length and depth of the interviews resulted in data saturation and information-rich discussion on outdoor advertising campaign planning considerations.

The data was analysed according to approach suggested by Morse and Field (2013). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy based on the recordings. Then coding took



place in multiple stages of reading and coding. The author closely read and coded each interview transcript. During this process, the texts were unitized and concepts were highlighted and labelled. Over time codes were created through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison. The codes were then categorised according to the thematic meanings and placed in the context of established knowledge. This was done to identify where the results supported literature and where it could claim unique contributions. To limit error in the qualitative design and achieve rigour, Guba's guidelines (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were applied in this study. Credibility and transferability were accomplished through a comprehensive review of the available literature on the major outdoor advertising formats and factors that contribute to outdoor advertising effectiveness to conceptualise and frame the findings, purposeful sampling by only including experts with knowledge and experience about the topic, rich descriptions of the data facilitate transparent coding. Detailed reporting on the research methodology and inter-textual thematic analysis of the interviews with each of the specialists and of the interviews overall to explore possible contradictions or exceptions were performed to satisfy the concerns for dependability and confirmability (Morse & Field, 2013).

Results

The interviews revealed that the participants' considered the two major issues identified in the existing literature on outdoor advertising effectiveness namely the *placement of outdoor advertising boards* and *creative execution*. Some unique insight on how these are applied by South African practitioners to guide their media planning decisions were also revealed and will be discussed. The third theme relating to the potential impact and associated image of outdoor advertising formats in the South African landscape was not found in the existing literature and is unique to this study. These themes will now be discussed.

Theme 1: Placing of outdoor advertising aimed at a mass market versus geographically targeted audiences

Outdoor advertising can effectively be used as a mass communication medium to reach a wide market (Bhargava *et al.*, 1994). Traditional outdoor advertising forms the foundation of most campaigns planned by the participants and is still regarded as the only remaining mass media available to deliver advertising messages to a broad national audience based on their ability to reach the broad-based population and the increasingly mobile audience in urban areas in a cost-effective way. *'So, you will find that billboards are sort of the stock standard, you will find them absolutely everywhere; and they are cost-effective in terms of the number of people you are reaching by traffic counts'* (P4). However, the production or printing costs involved for especially large outdoor advertising formats, such as buildings or murals, can be very expensive. *'That is where production comes in. Sometimes production (for a building wrap) can be more than R500,000. But that is a once-off payment. So, it depends on how long they book it, to make it more cost-effective. Although it is more expensive, it is becoming more popular'* (P8).

Outdoor advertising is used less in campaigns in some developed countries, because they have more pedestrians in the streets and commuters using their public transport or walking between train and bus stations. Consequently, other OOH advertising media platforms, such as street and retail furniture and transit advertising media are predominately used in their campaigns to match their travel profile. *'We (in South Africa) use more road-side stuff here. People don't drive around as much overseas as they do here. There, they use all the transit mediums, like buses and tube'* (P3). The planning of campaigns should thus be customized for the South African landscape in view of the distinctive travel behaviours and media options available.

At times, outdoor advertising is not available or allowed in specific areas (SAMOAC, 2016). The participants explained that the availability of outdoor advertising might be inadequate or limited in certain areas, such as rural areas or townships, where the large format outdoor advertising is scarce; *'...in rural areas, there is not much out there; you've just got 48 street posters'* (P2).



In suburban neighbourhoods or areas, outdoor advertising is also restricted or prohibited, due to the tight control by the local town councils and the stricter legislation in certain zones: *'...pretty much everywhere, except in suburban areas, where it isn't allowed'* (P6). The lack of available outdoor advertising options, as a result of this limited supply of outdoor advertising in certain cities and township areas, combined with a relatively high demand by advertisers, often compels the participants to consider alternative OOH advertising media options, such as street-furniture or transit advertising media. *'... in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town, there is the scenic area where everybody would like to advertise because of all the money and the decision-makers living there. It's highly restricted by council, thank goodness for that, but there are bus shelters, so that is the only way to advertise there'* (P9). Another alternative to overcome the strict legislation in certain areas is to use sales promotion activities such as *'...the handing out of samples, road shows, live events'* (P4).

Outdoor advertising is also valuable on a local level to target specific geographical areas or towns by using geo-demographic targeting (Taylor & Franke, 2003). Some resourceful and practical techniques on how to maximize this geographic flexibility of outdoor advertising in the South African context could also be proposed, and specifically:

Target local segments in the market by using outdoor advertising located in specific geographic areas, on secondary routes or specific locations, such as close to schools or in specific townships. *'The target market reached by billboards is difficult to pin-point because it is so wide. Unless of course, if that billboard is in at a specific location, like a township, or a school'* (P8). This facilitates the targeting of specific neighbourhoods that, in a sense, represent a captive audience of people who live and/or work in those neighbourhoods (Wilson & Till, 2012). However, sugar-sweetened or alcoholic beverages and fast foods brand should be handled socially and ethically responsible by avoiding the placement of boards close to schools. It might also be insensitive the use of influential advertising appeals such as celebrity endorsements, affiliation, and status appeals to target vulnerable communities based on their income, ethnicity and age.

For effective placement decisions for outdoor advertising nature of the traffic, the number of motor vehicles, and the type of target audience on the roads passing the location of the outdoor advertising media must be taken into account. *'Not Sipho Gumedi driving his taxi. Who might not be making the purchase decision; it might be his wife making the purchase decision. So, you are just narrowing it down to the more specific. Then you could say, yes, I've got a travel agency and to travel you've got to have money; so I need to be where money is, and to get to reach those that are most likely to travel overseas. So, therefore, I want to be in or close to specific shopping centres with specific travel agencies in that shopping centre to reach those people who go to shopping centres, who have got money and are likely to travel'* (P1).

Being aware of all the outdoor advertising media available in the targeted area; and know how to employ them in an effective outdoor advertising campaign would also help to reach a targeted audience. *'If you want to reach business people or bankers, then you'll be in the airports, and the CBD by default. If you want to reach mothers, you would try and be outside schools. ...being in suburban areas is fantastic and all the major arterial routes. Because that is where they are living'* (P6). This requires analysis of the daily movement and behaviour-purchasing path of the target market in order to delivery relevant and timeous message to consumers when and where they are most receptive.

Focussing on areas close to the point-of-purchase, in order to target shoppers or potential consumers, while or just before purchase decisions are likely to be made is also an option: *'But if you do a campaign for Pringle (luxury upmarket clothes and accessory brand) for example, I need to understand where their outlets are, who their consumers are, and what they do in the area. This information, you have to ask for. So if they are trying to launch a new handbag and you send them*



billboards near a shopping centre and there aren't any Pringle shops in the near vicinity you are missing the aim' (P6). The closer an advertising message appears to the point of purchase, the more likely consumers would be to recall the message, visit the store and buy the advertised brand (Donthu & Bhargava, 1999).

Focussing on central convergent areas, where pedestrians and traffic that form part of the target audience pass often, in order to increase the frequency of exposure, such as the entrances and exits to towns or townships, and central shopping areas can assist a brand to maintain top of the mind awareness. Repeated exposure at familiar landmarks help brands to create continues awareness and associations as targeted consumers enter or leave their neighbourhoods. *'Speak to the emerging market at exits and entrances into townships'* (P6).

Moving or rotating the creative message between outdoor advertising boards in major metropolitan areas can increase awareness. When using a larger number of smaller outdoor advertising media located across wider areas, higher levels of reach and frequency are delivered. *'The Alcohol brand can do it very well. For instance, SAB will have 10 brands, so SAB will have 20 signs, so they will just rotate them every 3 months'* (P3).

Theme 2: Creative potential and execution

The basic principles for designing effective outdoor advertising messages, as suggested in the previous studies (Bhargava *et al.*, 1994, Donthu *et al.* 1993, Van Meurs & Aristoff, 2009, Wilson & Till, 2012; Taylor *et al.*, 2006) were reiterated by the participants, specifically: the "less is more principle", which is achieved by concentrating on the key idea to be conveyed, by using short copy, and by transforming complex or detailed messages into short but original executions appropriate for the outdoor advertising context where it will be processed. *'Remember they are on the move and limited time to process the ad. Five seconds is the average time allowed for reading a billboard. So, design powerful strong unique creative outdoor advertising is critical'* (P15). *The use of appropriate font size, type, and spacing so that the messages can easily be read from various viewing distances, ...otherwise it just blends and becomes a blur* (P3).

Instant brand identification by prominent placement of the logo or the product in the advertisements to be clearly visible from a distance for a mobile audience is also important. This principle is illustrated by means of an example of Cat Footwear. *"It is nice and bright and it is simple. It's effective. They use it very effectively for their shoes. They typically do not feature more than three models of shoes on a poster. The logo is a legend. It says what it needs to without trying to be too clever. I think it works. They are not trying to get too clever"* (P10).

Despite the creative potential of outdoor advertising and well-known design principles the lack of effective and creative message design was a major concern raised by the participants. This problem is not only experienced in South Africa, but seems to be a global challenge. The media planning, message design and overall campaigns are often done by different people or agencies, with little interaction and cross-functional teamwork.

"I think that being creative is the single biggest challenge we have, globally really, because it is not a uniquely South African problem. ...Unfortunately, the media people have very little input. That is a constant challenge; and I think that is the sad dichotomy – if you look at how the process works – they work in isolation from one another. Often the process – in an ideal world we would be involved in the process from the word go – you know, briefing the creative and so on, but it just doesn't work that way. Things get too busy, people, there is still the whole advertising industry tends to still be somewhat silo-eyed. You know, people work in silos; and there is not all that much cross-pollination of ideas'. (P10)



Others regarded the reluctance of creative people to design messages specifically for outdoor advertising as a contributing factor to the problem of ineffective creative executions; and remarked that *“creative agencies have all the technical skills and tools to create these creatives for outdoor, but they just do not have the drive. Because there are so many more rewards with TV adds. You win more awards; there is more money in it, and far more prestige. There aren't enough rewards in outdoor”* (P6).

Furthermore, some unique applications not emphasised in the international scholarly literature were also revealed. Newspaper and radio are typically recognized in the literature for being local mediums due to their ability to deliver messages in a specific language or to a particular geographical area (Dowling & Grier, 2015). However vernacular advertising messages or localised creative executions by combining English with some African phrases, can be utilised to target specific ethnic or language groups in a multi-cultural diverse society such as South Africa. This is applied by culturally sensitive brands in the multilingual landscape of South Africa to address specific ethnic groups via outdoor advertising in some geographical areas or townships. *‘Vernacular advertising is something which can be very, very effective. It has been used with great success by brands such as KFC in the past. Think about their Streetwise campaigns on billboards where they used the slogan ‘Kasi’s number one meal’. Kasi - is from Tsotsitaal that mixes and adopts a variety of languages - and means township. Also ‘Cinga smart Yitya smart’ which combines English and Xhosa and translates to think smart and eat smart’* (P11). This type of creative execution can be successful for targeted or localised campaigns’, however it should be applied with care and sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences in the geographical area targeted so that some of the audiences members do not feel alienated (Nagel & Louw, 2004; Pauwels, 2005). On a practical level, multicultural or multi-language advertising can reduce costs in that it targets a wider audience with a single version of an advertisement (Dowling & Grier, 2015).

Theme 3: Potential impact and image associated with the medium

Outdoor advertising is regarded as a high-impact medium, due to its extraordinary size, creative flexibility, new innovations and strategic positions available (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). Some valuable suggestions were made on how to increase the impact of outdoor advertising – also referred to as the *‘Wow factor’* (P7) in the South Africa context, specifically: Use super large formats for outdoor advertising formats, such as tall buildings, murals or building wraps, to offer strong visual impact and to increase the brand stature. The potential impact of especially large outdoor advertising lies in its ability to create or enhance the brand image and status, because it imparts either a strong message, or a powerful image of a differential product advantage in the minds of the target audience.

‘If you want to be perceived as a big brand, just using TV and radio won't do it. But if you go and brand a tall building in the middle of the CBD people will perceive you as a big brand. Advertising on some scattered 48 Sheetters (small campaign billboards) in a township or rural trading stores, bleached by the sun, will make your brand appear weak and apologetic. No, you must be bold, big and bragging with vision and imagination. We look for the biggest and most powerful for solutions for our big brand campaigns, like temporary hoardings at the bottom of buildings or wraps around construction sites.’ (P3).

Iconic outdoor advertising formats with superior creative executions are thus utilised to dominate competitors on smaller advertising boards and stand out from competing stimuli in the surrounding environment. Advertisements on these large formats are potentially more attractive and noticeable (Katz, 2014); and they can be used to portray the advertised organisation as an important and respected company or brand.

Another recommendation to increase impact is to place the brand message in a desirable environment and relevant context. *‘I am working with a brand of watches at the moment that specifically targets high LSM. ... I'm moving immediately away from roads into shopping centres*



because of image; certain products have certain images to uphold and yes, you can put it on the M1 in Sandton, in which you are hitting your broad audience, but not when your aim is an upmarket image. So your product visual or branding must be displayed at the best suitable area, as well as the surrounding environment' (P9). This is in contradiction to the results of Wilson and Till (2011) in the roadside environment. This could be because outdoor advertising boards in more dynamic environments, with the audience driving might lack the motivation or opportunity to process the context; whereas monumental wall murals and building wraps in a central business district or close to malls result in a different experience for pedestrians or shoppers in this context.

Advertisers could also benefit from using new and unexploited media to attract attention create excitement and appeal to the emotions of consumers. *'To re-launch the new Mini, life-size Minis were put up to drive up the sides of buildings, as part of a giant banner campaign. The visual impact was amazing and caused TV news coverage and helped to make people curious'* (P12). Mandler's

Schema Incongruity theory suggest that new and unexpected stimuli are able to surprise consumers when they differ from their existing organized structures of knowledge and expectations accessed to categorize and process received information and new experiences (Mandler, 1982). Thus, consumers expecting conventional forms of outdoor advertising might be surprised and entertained by creative media choices, which break the mould for what advertising typically looks like.

Another suggestion is the use of context-related themes and placement of advertisements in locations that are relevant to the brand or message being portrayed. The participants aimed at obtaining relevant associations in the mind of consumers by placing the brand message in complimentary environments and cultural landmarks. Some mentioned South African brands *'Like near a rugby stadium because they had a rugby player in the message and if so we want to make it more applicable, to create that association with the message'* (P1). Others explained that global brands adopt this strategy in all the countries they are present. *'Clinique only advertise on beautiful architectural buildings or places in high-class malls to reinforce their global and upmarket brand image amongst women. When they go in the mall to browse for something pretty they must have a automatic connection with Clinique making the mall or surrounding beautiful and classy'* (P13).

Conclusion

Based on the literature and findings presented, three general themes seem apparent. The first is the importance of location. The familiar expression associated with real estate 'location, location, location' clearly also applies when assessing outdoor advertising options for a campaign. The findings of this study confirm that the placing of outdoor advertising at specific positions and locations determine the effectiveness of a campaign to reach a mass or targeted audiences effectively (Donthu et al. 1993; Taylor et al. 2006; Wilson & Casper, 2016; Wilson & Till, 2012). Some unique media tactics to target particular audiences at schools, office parks, airports, shopping centres, townships, upmarket clothes and accessory stores, even at schools, sport stadiums or live events and shows in the South African context were also proposed.

The second theme was the principles for creative execution that leads to higher message processing in the contexts and cultural environments in which outdoor advertising is viewed. The principles for designing effective outdoor advertising messages such as visual simplicity, short readable copy and clear brand identification were corroborated in the findings (Bhargava et al., 1994, Donthu et al., 1993, Van Meurs & Aristoff, 2009, Wilson & Till, 2012; Taylor et al., 2006). It also suggests a novel approach where indigenous languages and English are cleverly combined in outdoor advertisements to make consumers feel valued and yet at the same time remain an international brand flavour. Brands can use this approach to facilitate humour, intimacy with the consumer and a local connection (Dowling & Grier, 2015). However, advertisers must avoid using African languages just as token slogans or make other ethnic groups feel alienated.



The last important theme discovered here was the potential impact and image associated with outdoor advertising formats. An interesting finding was that outdoor advertising played an important part in positioning luxury and well as fast moving brands in mind of consumers because it enables storytelling to take place at a large scale. Wilson and Till (2011) suggest that the context in which outdoor advertisements are placed does not appear to affect consumers' attitudes and beliefs about the advertised brand. However, the findings revealed that specialist are relying on qualitative values such as the image of the different media types and the context in which they are placed to promote the image of brands. For instance, Clinique display their eye-catching, international creative concepts on well-designed signs and fixtures in upmarket malls, such as Melrose Arch and Sandton, in order to strengthen their global and upmarket image with their target audience. This is also used by global brands for example, part of L'Oreal Paris' long-term strategy is the iconic OOH-advertising signs in Toronto's premier shopping district – to reinforce the brand's high quality and chic image with the consumer. They are of the opinion that it would help to associate their brand with the image of the medium, and the area in which it is located. This implies that outdoor advertising must be placed where it is relevant to the context or the environment, and placing it in unique advertising formats, such as an unusual shape. Due to the disparity between the practice of relying on these values to promote the image of their brands and the lack of empirical evidence, it warrants more attention from researchers.

This research is not without limitations. Only media specialists in South Africa were interviewed, a valuable future research agenda could therefore be to compare the media tactics to target particular audiences identified in this study with those applied developed countries with more pedestrians and public transport commuters walking in the streets. Specialists might not truly understand consumers' perspective of the images, cultures and languages used by brands or be able to accurately relate their brand associations with advertising on large outdoor structures. Hence, one could add value by examining their experience of brands on super large formats or localised creative executions in *Tsotsitaal*. and lastly, it would be worthwhile to conduct empirical research on the qualitative values of media – such as the image and potential impact of the different media types, the context in which they are placed and the fit between the brand/product image and the context where it is advertised in light of the findings of the study that specialists are relying on these values to promote the image of brands.

Outdoor advertising is the 'Cinderella media' of South Africa, and an area that has received little academic attention. This research contributes towards media planning theory and offers some new insights on industry practices in the South African context. It is especially useful for placement and design considerations for effective outdoor advertising as well as to maintain an awareness of the potential affect and image that is associated with this medium.

From a purely tourism and leisure perspective, is important to promote regional assets since outdoor-related travel as such, is invariably a group activity between friends and family that can promote tourism immensely. By successfully appealing to the community of, for example, outdoor sports enthusiasts, ecotourists and hobbyists such as avitourists, outdoor advertising can do a great deal to drive tourism. The many natural regional attractions in the country must be carefully stressed during digital marketing and communications campaigns. It is important to provide the right message at right time when it comes to connecting with tourists and all advertising should be contextual and demographically explicit. Towards this end, there is a huge potential impact and image associated with advertising on immense buildings and other edifices that can be seen by many on a regular basis.



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