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REGULATIONS AND LEVELS OF COMPLIANCE OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING BILLBOARDS IN UYO URBAN: IMPLICATION FOR URBAN AESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The paper examined the spatial location of billboards in Uyo urban in a view to analysing their impacts on the environment.
Design/methodology/approach: A survey was conducted on four major arterial roads of Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Aka and Oron in Uyo. Data were gathered through observation of 1,321 billboards and interview of 141 road users. Relevant policy documents and literature were reviewed. The data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively using descriptive statistics.
Findings: The nature and spatial location of billboards on the selected roads were characterized by clutter that do not conform to the regulations. The cluttering was pronounced on Abak and Ikot Ekpene roads with billboards distributed between 5 to 12 metres, well below the recommended 20 metres. Majority of the billboards fell short of the recommended height of between 2.2 and 3.3 metres above the ground. Also, many billboards were not properly sited thereby blocking the views of motorists. In addition to these, government agencies responsible for enforcement of billboards regulation are not effective.
Research limitations/Implications: Implications of findings include noncompliance of the nature and sitting of billboards to existing regulations, therefore impacting the environment and enhancement of the character and appearance of Uyo urban.
Originality/value – The study concluded that there is no coordination among road sector agencies in the planning and management of outdoor advertising; and the establishment of a platform for stakeholders for the formulation and communication of outdoor advertising policies.

Keywords: Billboards; compliance; outdoor advertising; regulation; urban aesthetics

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Jared Bell presented and explained a huge poster in the public in the mid-1800, advertising using billboards has become one of the top media for promoting a brand (Thomas, 2015). According to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, Inc., billboards are the largest; with strong and impactful form of advertisement (Bulletins, 2015). If looking at the progress of advertising, roadside advertising had remained very relevant till the existence of land transportation. Outdoor advertising is often referred to as the first method of mass communication. It evolved from early carvings that displayed public messages. In Egypt, hieroglyphics were carved onto stone tablets and placed along road sides to communicate sales messages. In Pompeii and Roman times, paintings

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appeared on walls, in a practice similar to today's use of roadside billboards (Matthew, 1995).

To boost outdoor advertising, the invention of the printing press in the 15th century created new opportunities for communicators (Morris,1998). By the late 1800s, organizations began to realize the potentials for communicating through this channel. Companies began leasing space on wooden boards to display messages. Artists even started competing to create designs used on these boards. The Associated Bill Posters Association (Outdoor Advertising Association of America) was formed in 1891 to set industry standards. Through the 1900s, billboards gained popularity and are now one of the fastest growing channels of communication in the advertising world (Lithgow, 1999).

Physically, billboard advertisements and signage are communication infrastructure which do not only interact with the public commercially but doubling as landscape furniture that add beautification to the overall events happening in outdoor spaces (Khan, 2016). The concept of billboard as a form of advertising media through which products, services and messages are exposed to wider audience is not new in Nigeria as it has once gained momentum prior to independence in 1960. Even after independence, Nigeria like any other nation had developed various forms of billboard designs for various communication and commercial purposes which are regarded as one of the major infrastructure characteristics of an urban environment. Most of these urban environments are adorned with various forms of billboards and sign posts to make life more meaningful to the dwellers (Ogunlade, 2011). The location of billboards in an urban environment is an issue that has effects on the life of every member of the community and Nigerian society at large. The built environment can affect an individual positively or negatively, depending on its friendliness or harshness.

Following this, there have been various studies on urban aesthetics and communication and factors that can enhance its appreciation. In line with this, Carlson (2000) observed that visual pollution is one among other major factors that affect environmental aesthetics and communication development. Visual pollution according to Carlson is a term that refers to all the ways human visual capability is deflected within the environment. Visual pollution can reduce the quality of perception of the people (Carlson, 2000). Haphazard placement of billboards in Nigerian cities constitutes visual pollution which is fast harming the aesthetic perception of urban dwellers in Nigeria.

Placement of billboards for both traffic and commercial activities on day and night basis with their rhythmical arrangement has come to stay in our urban areas but the regulatory aspect appears to be indifferent. This is because many billboards dilapidate, subsumed and besieged by weeds. The beauty of our cities is also destroyed by poor arrangement and maintenance where billboards are carelessly located across various streets and highways (Thomas, 2015).

The city scene as it is today in Uyo urban has been a conflux of many diverse outdoor advertising billboards messages and their untidiness are incomprehensible to pedestrians and even motorists (Oshiga, 1988). The inability to communicate in some cases is very often complicated by the mingling of designs that are contradictory; for many, billboards have contributed to visual pollution in Uyo urban. For example, weak ones are pulled down and destroyed by wind, some are torn into pieces; the peeled ones constitute visual environmental pollution; broken billboards are not replaced for many years, thereby polluting the environment visually. Many have failed to deliver the message due to lack of application of the basic design elements such as system modular rules, letter spacing, type and size of typography, colour scheme and contrast value. They therefore project visual disorder and visual clutter perpetuating visual pollution, visual chaos and visual obstruction which tend to diminish aesthetic sensibility and visual literacy in Uyo urban area.

Environmental pollution by billboards is perceived to be of serious concern as they tend to destroy the aesthetic value of the environment and obstruct the view of motorists. This has also caused preventable accidents especially along arterial and major accesses in the city. If the locations of these billboards are not regulated the negative effect may continue to pose danger to the citizens, motorists and the environment.

It is against this background that attempt is made in this study to examine the effects of billboard location on urban aesthetics using Uyo urban as a case study. This is with a view to bringing to limelight the challenge of haphazard placement of billboards on urban aesthetics in Uyo urban area.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Spatial Locations of Billboards

As the location and number of billboards increase in urban space, of which more are placed on the sides of buildings and sometimes free-standing billboards hanging above buildings (Fulgham, 2015). This results in the state of billboards being cluttered. Clutter is "a state or condition of confusion or disorderliness where audiences are continually bombarded by advertisements" (Shimp, 2010). This scenario has implications on the outlook of the city and road safety (Austroads, 2010). To ensure that the state of outdoor advertising gives balance between road safety and profits for advertising companies there is need to give attention to the number, duration and location of billboards.

In relation to the number of billboards, most outdoor advertising policies have shown that the minimum spacing between billboards must be stipulated and followed (Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2012; Gosford City Council, 2013; Government of Australia, 2014;). The separation of distances promotes the ability of each advertisement to be seen without being impacted by another billboard and thus avoiding clutter of the advertisements (Molino *et al.*, 2009). For example, the spacing between advertisements in South Australia is in relation to speed limit. On an arterial road where speed limit is greater than 80 kilometres per hour billboards must be displayed 500 metres apart. On an arterial road where the speed limit is 60 kilometres per hour the allowed distance is 150 metres (NSW Australia Department of Planning, 2007). In Malta, clear distance of 75 metres is to be left between successive billboards unless otherwise stated, except for advertisements on street light poles and on-premises advertising signs (Malta Environment and Planning Authority, 2016). While in Johannesburg city, a minimum distance of 100 metres must be maintained between advertising billboards or advertisements on the same side of a public street including any provincial motorway, provided that the Council may require a minimum distance exceeding the 100 metres if it considers it necessary in the interest of road safety (Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2012).

In terms of location, billboards should not be placed in a location that will result in visual clutter. For example, placing them on a sharp bend or at an intersection (Wallace, 2003; Crunall *et al.*, 2006). Further, to avoid clutter the location advertisements must take into consideration adjacent buildings and distance from property boundaries. Furthermore, the location and size of billboards should take into account traffic control signs. Otherwise; visual clutter results when billboards are placed with other signage (Wallace, 2003). Particular consideration is required in locating of billboards in some areas, such as at a high pedestrian and traffic volume intersection. In developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand there are locations where particular types of billboards are restricted in order to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the arterial road network. This is to maximize

the safety of the road user by minimizing the risk for driver distraction in locations where a high level of concentration is required. These places include roundabouts, road intersections, pedestrian facility, T and Y junctions among others (Wilcox, 1993).

The lack of adherence of distance between billboards and failure to pay particular attention to location contribute to the state of advertising clutter. In most cities, the majority of cityscape is covered with large size billboards and electric poles that not only create visual clutter but also cause minor traffic accidents (Gokhale *et al.*, 2011; Fulgham, 2015; Amelley, 2017). Clutter is influenced by several factors such as design, size and location of billboard which is a result of lack of planning, management and controlled development of the outdoor advertising industry in several cities (Mc Dermott, 2016).

2.2. Legislative Mechanism on Billboard Locations

The Nigeria Urban and Regional Planning Act (CAP. N138) Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, stipulates that every developer is expected to seek approval for whatever is to be displayed. Also, the local government is mandated by the constitution and decree 21 of 1998 to control and collect levies on outdoor advertisements (Osunbiyi, 1999). However, it appears that the local authorities are only interested in the fees paid leaving out the control and aesthetics of the various elements in the environment. The rules guiding the erection of billboards in Nigeria spell out necessary and acceptable conditions which could be applied to the control and development of outdoor sites all over, a standard of 100 metres must be allowed between billboards. For instance, billboards can be located on the verges of defined walkways, billboards should not, in any way impede pedestrians and vehicular movements, billboards should not be erected in a way to disrupt, endanger or damage drainages and other public utilities, and minimum distance of 100 metres must be allowed for on either side of a T-junction before location for ground surface billboards in order not to obstruct the view of the motorists (Osunbiyi, 1999).

Over the years' various decrees have been promulgated by the Nigerian government to set up regulatory bodies to help regulate advertising practices in the country and erecting of billboards. These bodies include: -Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria, (APCON), Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria, (AAPN), Outdoor Advertising Association of Nigeria, (OAAN), and Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN).

These agencies, according to Estsaname (2007) have formed a monitoring body called the Advertising Standards Panel, whose duty is to monitor the erection of billboards. There is nothing to indicate that the body is effectively monitoring the erection of billboards in conjunction with the development control unit of the Uyo Capital City Development Authority.

2.3. Effects of Billboards Locations on Urban Aesthetics

Billboards can be seen in the light of a structure for display of advertisement information and beautification of the environment (Ogunduyile, 2002). The placement and impact of billboards in Nigerian cities are essential to the understanding of the increasingly complexity in the built environment. They are important because, on the whole, they are permanent and imposing. They force us to look at them precisely because they are part of the fabrics of the environment and such can take on a life of their own. Many older billboards and signs create beautiful effect through chance and time, bits fall off are faded, reflected, cast interesting shadows, become distorted, folded, twisted and so on. Billboards today provide an opportunity for improving and embellishing the environment deliberately and creatively (Howard, 2013). Many billboards in Nigerian cities have a limited lifespan.

Others will last for years and be enjoyed by generations. Actually, they are subtle indicators of attitudes and change within society. According to Broadbent (1998), if a society cares about the trivialities such as either saving or creating, a fine piece of lettering, it will probably care about the buildings and streets they are on.

2.4. The Study Area

Uyo urban, the capital and commercial city of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria is located between latitudes 4°52[1] and 5°07[1] north of the Equator and between longitudes 7°47[1] and 8°03[1] east of the Greenwich Meridian. It occupies a landmass of approximately 187 square kilometres. Uyo urban area conurbates into neighbouring Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Nsit Ibom and Ibesikpo-Asutan in the southern part; Itu and Ibiono Ibom LGAs in the northern section; in the east, Uruan; and Ikono and Abak in the west. The urban area is demarcated by a 10 kilometres radius from Ibom Plaza, the centre of the city where the arterial roads converge as shown in Figure 1. The city is accessed through majorly by four arterial roads namely: Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Aka and Oron Roads. These roads are perceived to have the highest concentration of billboards in the city.

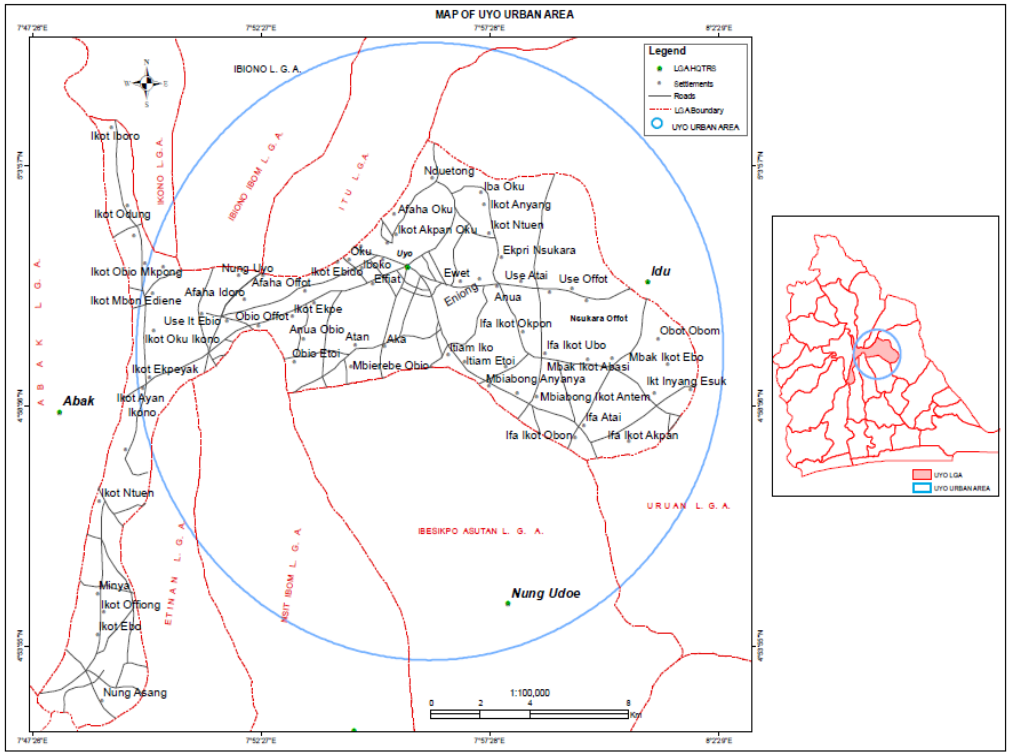

Figure 1: Map of Uyo Urban Area
Source: GIS Unit UNIUYO (2020)

3. METHODOLOGY

The survey design approach was adopted to cover the four arterial roads in Uyo urban area. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Observation and interview methods were used to gather data for statistical analysis. One hundred and fifty-five (155) respondents were also purposively sampled from advertising agencies, companies/ organizations, consumers, and the general public studied. All the four major arterial roads in Uyo urban, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Aka and Oron Roads formed the population of study

Measurable variables adopted in the study were identified. These are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurable variables

Variables	Definition variables	Unit Measurement
Road reserve (placing billboards within road reserves)	A road reserve is a legally described area within which facilities such as utility lines, and for road expansion	Number
Road median (placing billboards within median strip)	A paved or planted strip dividing a highway into lanes according to direction of travel	Number
Roundabout (placing billboards within roundabout)	A circular structure on the road at a place where several roads meet.	Number
Road intersections (placing billboards within road intersections).	An intersection is where two or more roads meet	Number
Traffic light (placing billboards near traffic lights)	A set of electrically operated signal lights used to direct or control traffic at intersections.	Number
Distance	The gap between a given part of the road and a billboard with reference to recommended	Metres
Height	How tall a billboard is from the ground with Reference to recommended height	Metres

Source: Researcher's field work

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Nature of Billboards in Uyo Urban Area

The results of data analysis on the nature of billboards expressed in terms of type, size, height, spatial location and visibility; and effects on Uyo urban are presented hereunder.

The nature of billboard has been considered to include the type, size and height. Table 2 presents the types of billboards found along Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Aka and Oron Roads. It shows that small size/ Directional type of billboards were the most prevalent types of billboards used in the area with 662(62.6%) followed by large cantilever 219(20.7%) The next number is the Large static which is105with a percentage coverage of (9.9%). The Large digital and Flyover bridge types are the least used with only 64(6.1%) and 7(0.7%) respectively. Abak Road recorded 410, the highest number of billboards followed by Oron Road 304, Ikot Ekpene Road 265 and Aka Road 257.

Table 2: Types of Billboards in Uyo Urban Area

Variables	Frequencies				Total	Percentages (%)
	Ikot Ekpene road	Abak road	Aka road	Oron road		
Large Static	32	23	17	33	105	9.9
Large Cantilever	52	49	46	72	219	20.7
Large Digital	17	16	11	20	64	6.1
Flyover Bridge	3	4	0	0	7	0.7
Small Size/ Directional sign	161	318	183	179	662	62.6
Total	265	410	257	304	1057	100

Source: Researchers' Field Survey (2021)

4.2. Size of Billboards in the Study Area

The size of billboards in Uyo urban area is presented in Table 3 which shows that Small approvable size (2x2m) is 271 (22%), Medium approvable size (3x3m) is 168 (13.5%), Standard approvable Size (3x6m) recorded 105 (8.5%) while the percentage of non-compliance to stipulated sizes is 692 (56%). This implies that over half of the total number of billboards were not approvable based on the standards provided by Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Environment and may have been illegally planted. This has some negative implications on the aesthetics of the study area.

Table 3: Size of Billboards in Uyo Urban Area

Variables	Frequencies				Total	Percentages (%)
	Ikot Ekpene road	Abak road	Aka road	Oron road		
Small Size (2x2-3m)	60	98	73	40	271	22
Medium Size (3x3-5m)	39	64	31	34	168	13.5
Standard Size (3x6m)	32	23	17	33	105	8.5
Non-compliance to stipulated sizes	134	225	136	197	692	56
Total	**265**	**410**	**257**	**304**	**1236**	**100%**

Source: Researchers' Field Survey (2021)

4.3. Height of Billboards in Uyo Urban Area

The height of billboards, a key factor in the approval guidelines according to the various agencies of government in the state was also considered in the study. According to Uyo Building Regulations Part VI Section 2(e), the design of public information panel shall be provided by the Authority and shall be documented by location which should between 2.2 and 3.3 metres from the ground. Table 4 shows the various heights of billboards on the major arterial roads under consideration. The highest frequency of Low billboards is 727 (55%) and the least is Recommended height which recorded 114 (8.6%) while billboards above the recommended height are 480 (36.3%). Out of a total of 1,321 billboards, 114(8.6%) met the recommended and approvable height of between 2.2 and 3.3metres.

Table 4: Height of Billboard in Uyo Urban Area

Variables	Frequencies				Total	Percentages (%)
	Ikot Ekpene road	Abak road	Aka road	Oron road		
Low (less than 2.2m)	140	284	113	154	727	55.0
Recommended Height (2.2 – 3.3m)	32	23	17	33	114	8.6
Above Recommended Height	93	103	127	117	480	36.4
Total	**265**	**410**	**257**	**304**	**1321**	**100**

Source: Researchers' Field Survey (2021)

4.4. Spatial Location of Billboards in Uyo Urban

The spatial locations of billboards in Uyo urban are presented in Table 5. It reveals the various locations billboards placed and it also shows the percentage of billboards in those locations. Entry point has 136 (10.3%) of the total billboards within the study area. Markets have 1.9% of the billboards. Motor parks have only 0.6% of the billboards in the study area. Hotel locations have 4.1%, Filling Stations have 8.6%, and Conference centres recorded 2.3%, while Theatres have 0.9%. The Building Regulation also listed places like Stadium, Civic Centre and Museum as approved places for the placement of billboards but findings reveal that only Civic Centres have 2.6% while the other two places have no billboards. Interestingly, the percentage of billboards found outside approved places is 68.7%. Consequently, majority of the billboards are not properly sited.

Table 5: Spatial locations of Billboard in Uyo Urban

Variables	Frequencies				Total	Percentages (%)
	Ikot Ekpene road	Abak road	Aka road	Oron road		
Entry Points	12	20	36	50	136	10.3%
Markets	15	4	7	0	26	1.9%
Motor Parks	0	0	0	8	8	0.6%
Hotels	7	31	14	0	54	4.1%
Filling Stations	19	43	21	30	113	8.6%
Conferences Centres	6	7	4	9	30	2.3%
Theatres	0	3	4	5	12	0.9%
Stadia	0	0	0	0	0	
Civic Centres	0	9	3	12	34	2.6%
Museum	0	0	0	0	1	0.0%
Un-approved locations	206	293	168	190	907	68.7%
Total	**265**	**410**	**257**	**304**	**1321**	**100%**

Source: Researchers' Field Survey (2021)

4.5. Spatial Location of Billboards and Visibility/Aesthetics of Uyo Urban

The findings of the study also revealed some of the spatial locations of billboards that affect the visual aspect of the environment as presented in Table 5. Table 6 shows that 4.1% of the billboards within the area are sited along road reserves. In some areas, billboards are seen on road median of which 2.9% is recorded. The data show that 4% of the billboards are located in Roundabout, 6.7% of the billboards are sited at road intersections while 2.8%

of the billboards are sited near traffic lights. It is also revealed that billboards are seen as constituting obstruction which recorded 31.6%, while, distraction and Night Time invisibility were 35.7% and 12.2% respectively.

Table 6: Spatial location of billboards and Visibility in Uyo Urban Area

Variables	Frequencies				Total	Percentages (%)
	Ikot Ekpene road	Abak road	Aka road	Oron road		
Road Reserves	12	15	12	10	54	4.1%
Road Median	10	9	5	12	38	2.9%
Roundabout	14	12	16	9	53	4.0%
Road Intersection	40	9	15	15	89	6.7%
Near Traffic Light	0	17	0	20	37	2.8%
Obstruction	85	120	72	100	417	31.6%
Distraction	80	200	90	90	472	35.7%
Night Time invisibility	24	28	47	48	161	12.2%
Total	**265**	**410**	**257**	**304**	**1321**	**100%**

Source: Researchers' Field Survey (2021)

Figure 2: Clutter of Billboard along Abak Road, Uyo.
Source: Researcher's field observation (2021)

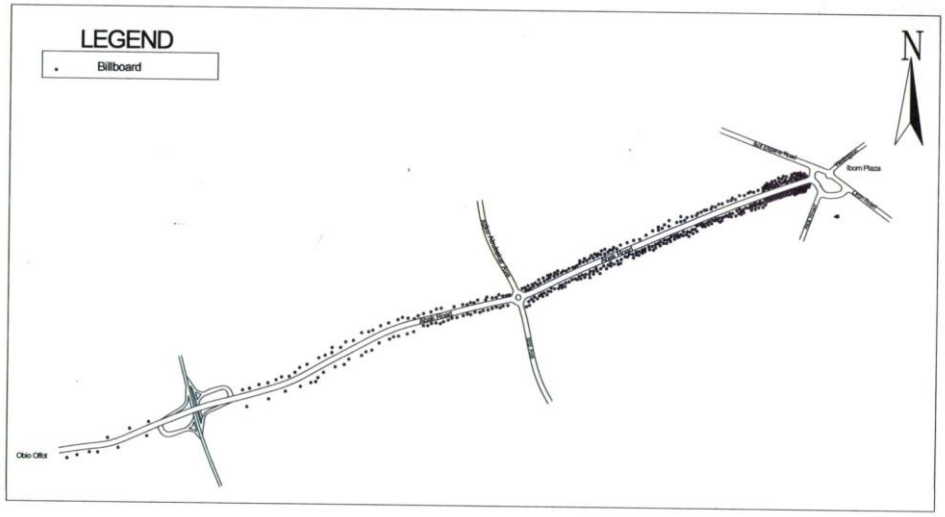

Figure 4: Cluttering of Billboard on Abak Road
Source: Researchers' Field Survey (2021).

4.6. Effects of Billboards Locations on Uyo Urban Aesthetics

When asked about their thoughts on how billboards contributed to the amenity value of the city, 51% of the road users interviewed was of the view that billboards made the city unsightly and untidy as shown in Figure 2. Furthermore, 50 percent of the road users explained that the billboards were too many (cluttered) as shown in Figures 3 and 4, 39% explained that advertisements were not well positioned. The material and designs were not of good quality and lacked maintenance as cited by 48 percent of the 155 road users interviewed. The key informant from Uyo Capital City Development Authority (UCCDA) stated that the scenic urban landscape of the city has changed completely as billboards have become part of the cityscape.

4.7. Major findings

A total of 1321 billboards along the four major selected roads were assessed in terms of their nature and state. The nature has the aspects of type, size and height of billboards while spatial location has aspects of distribution and sitting. Findings revealed that majority, (56%) of the billboards displayed do not conform (adhere) to the aspect of the regulation related to size, while 91.4% have wrong heights and 68.7% had wrong spatial distribution. Results further show that billboards were cluttered. This was because the distances between billboards ranged from 8-10 metres instead of a minimum of 20 metres. The city of Uyo has experienced rapid increase in outdoor advertisement. This is due to increase in population and economic activities. The population of the city has risen from 309,573 persons in 2006 to 501,508 persons in 2020 according population projection.

Uyo urban has a variety of billboards which defy regulations in terms of height and size. As highlighted in the principles of outdoor advertising, billboards in Uyo urban tend to have dominating characteristics. This is because outdoor advertising companies try to make their signs bigger, bolder and colourful with unlimited creative potential to capture consumer interest and give business a competitive edge (Pemberton, 2012). Like Jordaan (2012) postulated, the study confirms that the different billboards on major roads in Uyo urban are competing for the attention of the viewers.

The analysis shows that the billboards that are larger than the allowable size have effects on road safety for drivers and pedestrians. In addition, the huge sizes of the billboards also contribute to clutter of billboards on streets. This concurs with the views of Scenic America (2013) that billboards intrude on the surrounding landscape as their bright colours, lights and large fonts make it difficult to focus on anything else, resulting in a form of visual pollution. Outdoor advertisements reveal a natural tendency for visual disorder. As the new additions to the scene tend to be bigger, higher, lower and closer to the street the displaying colours get brighter than existing billboards. This results in cluttering of outdoor advertisements. With regards to location, the study reveals that most (68.7%) of the billboards are located on un-approvable areas. Only22.3% of them conformed to the regulation of being located at approved areas. On average, most billboards were located one metre from the road which is contrary to the regulation. More than two thirds of outdoor advertisements in the study area are located on road median which was less than half a metre from the road.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outdoor advertising industry in Uyo urban has grown rapidly. It is an important source of revenue for the government. However, the growth of the outdoor advertising

sector in the city has not been without challenges. In terms of the nature and sitting of billboards there is substantially non-compliance to existing regulations.

There is need to balance the requirements of the outdoor advertising industry with the protection of the environment and enhancement of the character and appearance of Uyo urban. In addition, there is a corresponding need to ensure that the spatial location of billboards will not prejudice public safety. To achieve this therefore the following recommendations are made:

i. Need for coordination among road sector agencies. The disjointed planning and management of outdoor advertising by the road sector agencies has been a major setback in achieving a coordinated outdoor sector.

ii. A platform for communication and exchange of knowledge among all stake holders such as Uyo Local Government Council, Uyo Capital Development Authority and Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources and outdoor advertising companies is desirable. This platform and stakeholders would also be useful in the formulation and implementation of the recommended outdoor advertising policies.

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