

## Bad signs of the time

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It needs no survey to establish that almost everyone who is a somebody in this country is hell bent to proclaim himself, his profession, his business, his institution, his product, his service, his building, his image... the list goes on.

This is most obvious in capital Dhaka and other larger cities where buildings facades are needlessly painted only to be covered from head to toe by signboards, often as hideous graphically as in content. Open parks, street shoulders and hillsides have also not escaped the onslaught of the commercial advertisers and individual enthusiasts.

Boundary walls, electricity poles, trees, benches, fences, railings, foot over bridges, rooftops... everything that stands still is either painted or covered with a printed advertisement material. Those that move buses and trucks, three-wheelers and rickshaws have not escaped their scheme.

While such endeavours are practised globally, albeit in a different scale, the difference here is that there is no concern for aesthetics, safety and legal implications. Certain areas of the city have been rendered ugly, advertisement debris can injure and kill, and in most cases permission of the owner of the property (public and private) that they use is not sought.

The hillsides of Chittagong city are taken over by billboards, giant name posts are mounted atop the AHQs building in Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka University TSC area is surrounded by monster hoardings, boundary walls have become the property of different

political parties, bus backs are plastered with election posters, lamp-posts are encircled with concert news, and foot over bridges are happy hunting grounds of ad firms.

Contentious architect Robert Venturi tutored the world to enjoy "Learning from Las Vegas" but even there the three-storied cola bottle or the Gulliver's burger did not make the boulevards look cluttered. Advertisements are essential message carriers, but their design, dimensions, configuration and location should not jeopardise physical movement or visual tranquillity.

Md. Yousuf Iqbal Chowdhury and Maharina Jafrin in their piece today bring to the fore some of the issues related to outdoor signage. In particular the rules of the Dhaka City Corporation and their rampant violation both from within and otherwise are notable.

Let us hope for proper use of signs in the future.

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Fig 1



Fig 3



Fig 5



Fig 6



Fig 2



Fig 4

# Outdoor advertising sign and its impact on society

MD. YOUSUF IQBAL CHOWDHURY AND MAHARINA JAFRIN

ADVERTISING is a powerful communication force and a vital marketing tool, helping to sell goods, services, images, and ideas (or ideals) through channels of information and persuasion. (Sandage et al, 1983)

Advertising is one part of the marketing and communication processes. It interacts with numerous other marketing concerns, including personal selling, product development and servicing, branding of merchandises and research. Advertising is also forever intertwined with the social and psychological needs, wants and background of consumers.

Outdoor signs allow us to see ourselves as a culture and how we respond to their influence. Our advertising reflects products and services available to a consumer society. Outdoor advertising no longer means billboards on the side of a highway, but now it is found as advertising on different places like trains, buses, aeroplanes, buildings and even on vending machines.

The function of advertising can be viewed in three basic ways: marketing, communication and education.

### Users of outdoor advertising

Early users of outdoor advertising were manufacturers of automotive, petroleum, tobacco, food, and beverage products. These product categories are still featured on outdoor posters but many more items have been added to this list.

It is common for outdoor advertisers in developed countries to feature products, which are associated with highway usage. Their message is delivered while the prospect is the process of buying and making decision. Oil companies, tyre manufacturers, battery makers are prime examples. Hotel, motel and restaurants use outdoor boards on traffic leading into the city, airlines by poster showing and painted bulletins on highway approaches to airports.

In recent years outdoor has come to fill a new need with the growth of self-service merchandising. Advertising has been called upon to fill the gap by prescribing the customer and the advertiser has a better chance of being remembered. Thus, they now try to place outdoor messages near big supermarkets in an attempt to make an impression on potential customers. Outdoors can be a relatively low-cost form of advertising, and small-budget advertisers may select the medium.

### Location of outdoor advertising

Not only is the graphics important to attract passers-by, but also the location of the display. Advertising should be located in places where traffic passes, people gather and where they can be clearly seen. However, excessive deployment of advertising signs can make the entire environment hazardous.

The advertiser must study his location area constantly in order to be aware about shift in population, changing traffic patterns, new road and street construction and such other matters. An advertiser must lease or buy sites for structures that can provide the exposures desired

by their clients.

A pertinent question is what constitutes a good location for a poster or painted display. The formula has many variables. The value of a particular location as a site for an outdoor advertising panel depends mainly on the overall visibility of the site. Factors that affect this visibility or space position include:

- 1. The length of approach:** The longer the panel is visible, the more effective the location, other things being equal.
- 2. The speed of travel:** The slower the traffic passing the spot, the greater the opportunity to see and read the message.
- 3. The angle of the panel:** The closer to head-on the approach is to oncoming traffic, the better the site. The worst location is one parallel to traffic.
- 4. The proximity to other panels:** Preferably a panel should be alone. If joined with others, the one closest to the road has the best chance of being seen. Too many panels too close together lead to viewer confusion.

### Basic types of outdoor advertising sign

**Poster panel:** Illuminated or regular (not illuminated). These may be inflated with extensions that overhang from the top, bottom or sides. Where night traffic is relatively high, it is often desirable to expose the outdoor message for several additional hours every single day. This is done by providing light on the poster until around midnight. It is necessary in metropolitan areas and the ratio of regular and illuminated posters in a community depends upon the night-time activities of its residents and visitors. (Fig.1)

**Painted displays:** Instead of

being printed on paper sheets, the message is painted on rectangular panels (usually measuring 4.25m by 13.6m). They are commonly illuminated and like posters, may also be inflated. (Fig.2)

**Transit Advertising:** This is similar in function and method of operation to standardized outdoor advertising. Instead of relying on passing traffic for its principal circulation, transit advertising depends upon consumer usage of commercial transport facilities, such as buses, airlines, trolleys, subways and commuter trains.

**Car Cards:** The cards are placed by an advertisement firm as per a contract with the transportation companies on a vehicle. Usually the standard time period agreed between the advertiser and the transport union is the same as in outdoors advertisement (Fig.3)

**Travelling Displays:** This form of transportation advertising is really a hybrid between the car card and the outdoor poster. It is an advertising message placed on the exterior of a bus or streetcar. As the vehicle makes its rounds about the city, the message is exposed to motorists, pedestrians, and persons waiting for buses and streetcars. (Fig.4)

### Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) rules and regulations

To install any outdoor advertising sign, the advertiser has to maintain some rules and regulations of DCC.

- These rules**
- indicate clearly the place, manner, size and other necessary matters of signage
  - require the advertiser to seek permission of the traffic engineer for signs on footpath and sur-

rounding area, and median bars signs which hide important structures such as hospital, government office, educational institution, masjid, temple, church, museum, structures of national and/or historical importance

### General conditions

- Maintenance of public safety (accident prevention), security and health
- Signs which are harmful to traffic safety are banned
- Rights of property, pedestrians and vehicular traffic
- Protecting footpath and road from damage
- Lighting display

Restrictions apply to the following

- Flashing advertising sign which may disrupt the view of drivers or pedestrians
- Advertisement of any colour, size or lighting which may obstruct or reduce the quality of traffic lights

### Projection over property

- Sign or any part of it cannot be projected on to public passages or on any private land without any contract between property owner and the sign owner
- In case of projection in government planned areas, there are some regulations, such as

### Technical advice

Design, installation, connection system and construction has to follow the 'Bangladesh National Building Code 1993'

### Prohibited sign

Height above finish grade (m)	Maximum projection(m)
Less than 4 m	No projection
4 m. to 5 m	0.3 m.
More than 5 m	0.6 m.

These include

- Vulgar, ugly, irritating, radical, dangerous and obscene sign
- Sign with any statement that goes against national interest, have a bad effect on the public or any specific group of people, or attack the religious sentiment of any group of people

### Special rules for sign near the road or over the road

- A sign cannot hide a traffic signal or a zebra crossing
- If there is no footpath, a sign cannot be installed on any side of the road within 3m
- Sign cannot create obstacle to nodes, intersection or vehicular movement
- No sign can be installed within 50m of a bridge, a railway level crossing or an intersection
- No sign can be installed on a median that is less than 1m wide

### Classification of outdoor advertising signs in Dhaka city

**Balcony sign:** advertisement sign hung on or attached to a building's veranda or balcony. (Fig.5)

**Bell sign:** A sign stands on a certain height of straight pole. (Fig.6)

**Vehicular sign:** The sign that is printed on vehicles. It should not jeopardise traffic movement. Mainly public bus, private van and trucks have this sort of sign to carry the advertisement. (Fig.7)

**Bus stoppage sign:** Located at bus stoppages this is a popular mode of posting a sign. (Fig.8)

**Mega sign:** "F" or "Flag" size sign that stands in mid road island or footpath. (Fig.9)

**Neon sign:** These are characterized by form and fonts that are lit by neon light, blinking or continuous. (Fig.10)

**Tri-vision:** These are continuously changing signs operated electro-mechanically by rotating several metallic triangular strips along their vertical axis. Three types of product can be advertised at the same location. (Fig.11)

**Foot over-bridge sign:** The beam of the foot over-bridge provides space for this sort of advertisement. (Fig.12)

**Overhead sign:** Similar to the foot over-bridge sign, this type of sign can be located every few kilometres of distance one after another. (Fig.12)

**Manual billboard:** Hand painted, low cost and less glamorous, and has lost usage in recent years.

**Digital billboard:** Digital screen print is pasted on a panel or hung by a frame. May be illuminated or not. The non-illuminated form can be of two types, backlit in a box (Fig.13) or front-lit on a steel board (Fig.14)

**Wall sign:** This type of sign is placed on a blank wall of any roadside building or even boundary wall. It may be manually painted or digitally printed.

**LED sign:** It is a recent development and most popular of modern digital signs. Its use can be seen on the buildings of Lalmatia Aarong and Farmgate Ananda Cinema hall. (Fig.15)

**Impacts**  
Outdoor advertising signs have both positive and negative impacts on the people of a society.

According to Architect Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed of BUET, positive impacts include, for instance,

- Increasing social awareness about child and adult education,

crime, health risks, birth control, road safety, etc.

-As a democratic tool of introducing a product, an idea or a service to a people of different age group and economic backgrounds

-Providing employment to many people of different trades: design, construction, marketing, production, installation, lighting, maintenance, etc

Negative impacts include, but not limited to, for instance,

- Excessive, ill-planned and overdone advertisement can adversely affect safety as well as sensibility
- Encroachment of private property and public property
- Nuisance to neighbourhood by size, lighting, blocking view and ventilation of a window, etc

Analyzing some important nodes and roads of Dhaka city, some abrupt uses are found, which are totally a nuisance to our society. Forexample

- Location 1: Farmgate**  
-Farmgate is one of the major intersections of Dhaka city, and outdoor advertising signs are seen in plenty, but most of them do not maintain the DCC rules and regulations.
- Here the most popular one is a LED sign which is installed on the Ananda Cinema hall's north wall. Programmes on the rather attractive LED sign causes gathering of people not only on the footpath, but also slows down vehicular traffic (Fig.15)
- In other cases, there are many outdoor advertising signs that are placed in front of building windows (Fig.16 & Fig.17), which block airflow, natural light and view of the dwellers. So, building occupants are forced to use mechanical ventilation, electrical lighting throughout the day. This unbearable situation occurs because of the small gap between the advertisement board and the window.
- Use of balcony sign is excessive, almost covering entirely the openings of buildings, which hides the building's fenestration. (Fig.18)

**Location 2: Bijoy Sarani**

-In case of the situation where the gap between the board and building's window is more, the dwellers are not greatly affected. Light and ventilation is possible to some extent but view is blocked partially. (Fig. 19, Fig. 20 and Fig.21)

-At night the blinking neon light affects the apartment dwellers due to its brightness and absence of any light guard.

-The blinking neon signs of ASSET and ANZ beside the road cause disability glare that affects not only the vehicular driver but also the passers-by. (Fig. 22)

**Location 3: Lalmatia, Aarong's node**

Another prominent LED sign is placed on top of Lalmatia Aarong at the critical intersection of Manik Mia Avenue and Mirpur Road, which distracts drivers and passers-by. It has also received complaints from the adjacent Dhanmandi Government Boys School authority but to no avail. Its attractive programmes divert the driver's attention and causes accidents. (Fig.23)

**Location 4: Science laboratory**

-According to DCC rules fluorescent, deep yellow or red colour should not be used near any traffic signals, but this has been done at this busy intersections, causing obvious confusion. (Fig.24)

-The front lit billboard of Starship is so eye-catching that the police box as well as its public awareness message is lost. This type of outdoor sign is prohibited according to DCC rules. (Fig.25)

Again the tri-vision ad of Grameen phone is obstructed by Starship, which is in violation of DCC rules (Fig. 25)

The rule that no sign can be located within 50m of a bridge has been violated at the Science Laboratory intersection.

**Location 5: Asad Gate, Mohammapur**  
-Here a large number of different outdoor advertising signs are within 50m of the traffic signal, which is in violation of the DCC rules.

-Illegal fluorescent or deep yellow/red colour ads near the traffic signal are also seen here.

-A mega sign encroaches on the footpath

Some typical problems in different areas:

- Location:** Dhanmandi Sat Masjid Road.

**Problems**  
- sign encroaching on the footpath

- not enough height clearance Near Aarong, Lalmatia (Fig.26)

**Location:** Dhanmandi R/A Road No.7

**Problem:** Hospital patients are disturbed by sharp light of sign at night

**Location:** Dhanmandi Lake. According to DCC rules advertising sign should not be placed in a park, lake and recreation place, but an advertising sign is seen in the restricted Dhanmandi Lake area. (Fig. 27)

### Concluding remarks

Nowadays, advertising sign has become part and parcel of this civilized (!) commercial world. These signs represent the often exaggerated publicised quality of a product and the goodness of the corresponding company. These signs create a great deal of problem for the common people because of improper use.

There is argument in favour and against of these outdoor advertising signs adding to a city's beauty and character. Their careful presentation and colourful appearance can break the monotony of a journey through the city. But this should be done by maintaining the rules and regulations.

Outdoor signs are basically used for commercial advertising and occasionally for creating public awareness. If planned, they can enhance the cityscape. In setting up a sign consideration should be given to the public, the people impacted upon, and the neighbouring structures. A sign must not hamper the traffic, the movement of people and vehicles, the architectural and structural value of buildings and the comfort of the dwellers. But, in reality, in most of the cases in Dhaka city, the placement, size, colour, quality, lighting as well as the structure of the advertising sign is in violation of the rules and regulations of DCC. This situation reflects badly on the image of our capital city.

The relevant people involved in public advertisements should consciously play a more meaningful role so that a safe, healthy and pleasant city life can be ensured.



Fig 7



Fig 11

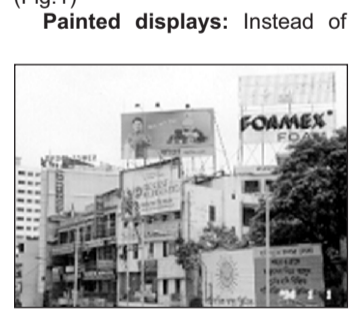


Fig 16



Fig 20



Fig 24



Fig 8

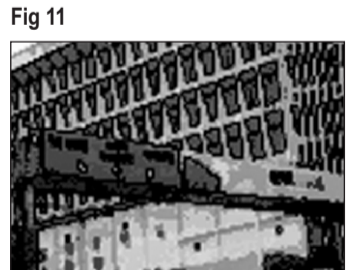


Fig 12

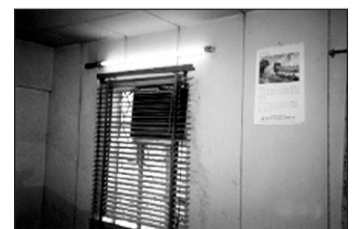


Fig 17



Fig 21

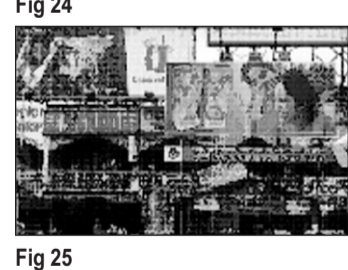


Fig 25



Fig 9



Fig 13

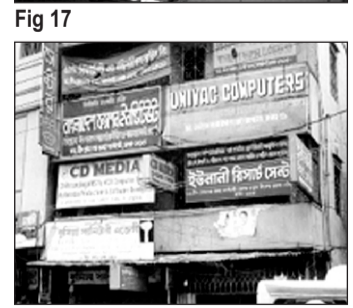


Fig 18



Fig 22



Fig 26



Fig 10



Fig 15



Fig 19



Fig 23



Fig 27