

Using bill boards as medium of communication, projection, and expression of African cultural values: the case of Ghanaian “sign boards”

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Abstract The function of any sign is to communicate the information written on it. Bill boards are well-established media of communication used to convey a broad range of different kinds of messages. The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of how bill boards are used to project and express cultural values in Africa. Using content analysis, this study compiled and analyzed written signs (words) on selected storefronts, buses, cars, homes, and businesses in Ghana, West Africa. Relevant conclusions and implications of the findings were drawn from the analysis projecting and expressing African (Ghanaian) cultural heritage and values.

Keywords Communication · Bill boards · Sign boards · African cultural values · Moral values · Gratitude/appreciation · Outdoor advertising

1 Introduction

The growth of outdoor advertising has witnessed a considerable increase in the use of non-traditional formats, like store fronts, kiosks, bus shelters, and bill boards (Taylor et al. 2006). There are uncountable different types of media used for advertising as presently nearly every possibility is

used for advertising and advertisers are becoming more and more creative in finding advertizing platforms. There are posters around lamp posts, walls, empty shops and any available medium people can find to put a message across. Posters targeting young people, especially those inviting them to parties can be found anywhere, especially in the medium referred to above Bill boards, be it written, symbols, graphics, corporate, government or individuals remain the most common form of outdoor advertisement. However, despite numerous discussions of factors associated with bill boards' advertising success (Taylor et al. 2006), and in spite of the fact that African societies are organized around important cultural traits which project the principles and values which they hold dear, there is dearth in the literature about how bill boards could be used as expressions of African cultural heritage. The African world view is tempered with the general guiding principles centered on religion, spirituality, harmony, collective responsibility, oral traditions, sexuality, respect, appreciation, humor, advice and, to some extent, politics (Belgrave et al. 2000; Inglehart et al. 2004; Pettersson and Esmer 2008).

The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of how bill boards, known in Ghana as “sign boards”, are used as tools for projecting and communicating African cultural values. As Ghanaian nationals, we can speak as insiders with tacit knowledge about the socio-cultural landscape of the country. This tacit knowledge about the country was the rationale for selecting Ghana as the site for this study. This rationale is illuminated by Spindler (as cited in Uchendu 1965) when he stated that “the description of the thinking and feeling of a people are not frequent in anthropological literature, for it is difficult for an observer from outside to penetrate beyond manifest behavior to the inner patterns of a way of life” (p. vii). The issues addressed are as follows:

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