

# The Study Of Visual Elements In Outdoor Advertising And Its Effect On Audience Engagement

*Alok Laxmikant Katkar*  
*Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth Pune-37*

## Abstract

Brands and advertisers across the globe have mastered the art of using visual elements in their advertisements to create interactive and engaging campaigns that resonate with consumers. Outdoor advertisements have great visibility and thus can reach a wider range of audiences in less time. Due to this, many firms, both local and global, still rely on outdoor advertising for their campaigns. The purpose of this research is to analyze how visual aspects in outdoor advertising impact audience engagement.

For this study three visual components are considered; color, imagery, and typography. Color is known to grab the viewer's attention and to influence human emotions based on the effects of color psychology. Imagery on the other hand is a visual representation of the product and can visually communicate the product's features to the audience. Typography is an element of brand identity that makes the brand's message easier for the viewers to understand.

The study utilized a quantitative research design to meet its objectives. The study's theoretical foundation was established by a careful evaluation of current literature. A survey has been conducted which intends to gather data about which visual elements are most appealing for the viewers as well as whether they remember the advertisement for its visual appeal and take action based on this engagement. The questionnaire uses a reference image of one of the billboards from the "Privacy. That's iPhone." campaign to gather the relevant data.

The key findings from the thesis conclude that visual elements like color, images and typography play a crucial role in outdoor advertisements to attract viewers' attention as well as increase their engagement with the advertisement. The analysis of the survey also concludes that Color is the most effective visual element that influences the overall appeal of the advertisement. This attribute is followed by Images which are the visual representation of the product that is being advertised. The analysis also suggests that the combination of all these visual elements can significantly affect the overall visual appeal of an ad.

Outdoor advertising is evolving with new technologies such as digital billboards, AI, and 3D holographic projections, making it more interactive and immersive. The findings of this study can aid in understanding the importance of visual elements in outdoor advertising, as well as the recent trends and perceptions in visual communication and advertising.

**Keywords:** Advertising, Brand, Color, Outdoor advertising, Photography, Typography, Visual communication

## Introduction

In today's hyper-connected world of digital marketing, outdoor advertising still plays a vital role. To keep updated with the rapid technological advancements and changing consumer behaviors, outdoor advertising also continues to evolve itself; not only to maintain a competitive edge in the rapidly transforming markets but also to create more distinctive and visually appealing content across its large number of mediums.

Outdoor or Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising is experienced by consumers when they are outside the home. The advertisements are displayed in public places like roads, public squares, airports or at particular commercial locations. Even in today's digital world, OOH advertising still plays a crucial role as a medium of communication in multimedia advertising campaigns. As per the findings from the "Solomon Partners' 2023 U.S. Major Media Advertising Effectiveness Analysis", "out-of-home advertisements; both printed and digital, produce much higher ad recall with consumers

than live and streaming television, podcasts and radio, print, and online executions” (Out of Home Advertising Association of America, 2023).

For decades, outdoor advertising has been a prominent marketing medium for a large number of brands to promote their products and services. Due to its high visibility and high attention span, outdoor media have an important place in the brand’s marketing strategies. These outdoor ads usually focus on strong and attractive visual content instead of making it text-heavy, to make it more attention-grabbing for the viewers passing by the ad.

One of the essential elements of today’s advertising is its visual content. Visual components like as photos, color, and typography can effectively communicate a brand's identity and highlight distinctive product qualities. Though online mediums are preferred widely now, numerous brands still rely largely on outdoor advertising to create innovative campaigns that reach a large audience.

“For viewers, visual influences are more understandable and effective than verbal ones” (Stathakopoulos, Theodorakis, & Mastoridou, 2008). Visual elements effectively transmit marketing messages and create engaging experiences for audiences.

## Color

Color is a powerful visual element that evokes emotions, conveys meaning, and creates visual interest. Colors can attract attention and affect user engagement. Bright colors with high contrast can draw the eye, while muted colors may have a more subtle impact. “Like a carefully chosen brand name, color carries the intrinsic meaning that becomes central to the brand’s identity, contributes to brand recognition” (Abril et al., 2009), “and communicates the desired image” (Bottomley and Doyle, 2006). “Brand loyalists thus become attached to a brand’s visual identity and may complain in response to changes in a brand’s color scheme” (Kahney, 2003).

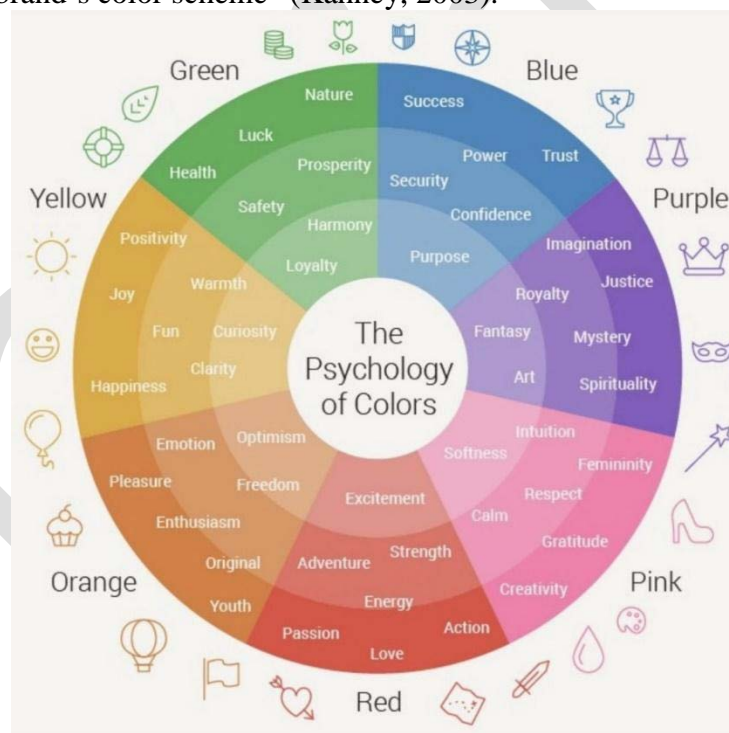


Figure 1: The psychology of colors

Color psychology explores how colors can impact human emotions, moods, and behaviors. Though colors and their meanings can vary among individuals, cultures and countries, there are certain general associations of the colors with the emotions they influence. For instance, Blue denotes calming and soothing effects and it’s often associated with trust, stability, and reliability. Brands usually choose colors for their branding to convey specific values and associations. Logos and the marketing collaterals follow the pre-decided color palette which maintains consistency across its mediums. Consistent use of colors helps to build brand recognition and loyalty.

## Images

Images have been playing a crucial role in the advertising industry ever since the start of the 20th century. Photography, as a medium of visual storytelling, has become an important tool for communicating with audiences. Brands use visually appealing imagery to tell stories about their products, services, and beliefs.

Research by Nelson, Reed, and Walling (1976), suggests that “we are far better at learning and remembering content we have seen in pictures than in text, a phenomenon known as the picture superiority effect”.

“The average time spent looking at a magazine advertising is about 1.65 seconds and 70 percent of that time is spent with the picture.” Percy and Elliott (2005, p.215). Best-quality product photographs create a lasting impression on the audience, making them engage more with the advertisement.

Another significant role played by images in advertising is building and maintaining brand identity. Consistent use of a particular image style in outdoor advertising helps consumers recognize and connect with a brand. Impressive images usually go beyond the boundaries of space and time, making them prominent even after years.

## Typography

“Typography refers to the visual design of language in the form of the selection of type font, size, line, and spacing. It is also the art of creating and visually arranging text.” (Sjaerodji & Desi, 2022).

As the advertisements are placed in front of the consumers, it is essential to use type in a manner that grabs the audience’s attention and also gives them important information in an easily readable format. Typography conveys numerous textual information like the product’s name, features, pricing and other essential details. It also contributes largely to brand identity, as each brand consistently follows a set of typefaces to maintain recognition among customers. Selecting the right type of advertisement requires careful consideration of legibility. Outdoor advertisements require clear and readable typefaces with proper size, color, and spacing due to their vast audience.



Figure 2: Psychology behind typeface choice



## Literature Review

### **Visual Image in Outdoor Advertising as a Way of Reaching a Potential Customer (Peszko, 2016)**

This study article examines how visual messages in outdoor advertising are perceived and how successful they are. The researcher argues that outdoor advertising targets customers when they are not at home. Strategic placement in public spaces provides high coverage and continual exposure. The study discusses 7 visual attributes – Balance, Distribution, Color, Color Saturation, Brightness, Sharpness and Shape and their characteristics.

The methodology used in this study is qualitative research in the form of individual interviews and focus groups. The responders were asked about their perception of outdoor advertising and the visual elements that should be present in outdoor advertising to draw attention. The study also analyzed billboards and city lights located in various cities in Poland and its surroundings. The content analysis technique is used to analyze the visual elements that can make the message in outdoor advertising more appealing. The analysis of studies shows that global companies mostly base their messages on images. Another research quoted by the author also showed that “80% of respondents get attracted by visuals part of outdoor, 10% by color, 8% by text and 2% by all” (Kamboj, 2012, p. 381).

Some of the significant conclusions from the study were: 1) Respondents identified billboard elements but found it difficult to respond due to clutter from other outdoor advertisements. 2) The visual aspects in outdoor advertisements should attract attention and should appeal to viewers. Ensure the message is clear and includes a few words to accompany the image. 3) The responses suggested that the most appealing attributes of outdoor advertising are elements like photographs, colors and the message. Some of the responders also remarked that the message attracts them only if they feel the need to purchase that particular product.

The study concludes that consumers appreciate the aesthetics in visual communication and imagery is a vital part of it, along with a minimalistic presence of the verbal part. It also underlines the need for deeper analysis of the needs of potential customers to increase the appealing nature of visual attributes and in turn, increase the efficacy of outdoor advertising.

### **Color psychology and its application in advertising (Caon, 2021)**

In this study, the author intends to study color psychology and how it can be employed in advertising. In the marketing, “color has been demonstrated to affect customer perceptions of advertising” (Gorn et al., 1997). Colors can evoke emotions in viewers and serve as emotional communicators. Several of the researchers have also concluded that three fundamental components of color; hue, saturation and luminance also influence the color emotion responses.

Color's psychological impact varies based on its hue, saturation, and brightness. Brands can utilize color to affect consumers through strategic associations, likeability, and familiarity.

Colors also have cultural and regional differences in the way they are perceived and used in advertising. This is essential for brands to be aware of these cultural differences when designing their advertising campaigns.

The study concludes that colors elicit particular moods and affect potential buyers to link those feelings with a particular brand. Thus, the strategic use of color in brand design can have a significant impact on shaping consumers' perceptions of brands and their buying behavior.

### **How Smartphone Brands Have Maximized the Use of Billboards (Villegas, 2019)**

This online article elaborates on how smartphone brands are using out-of-home (OOH) media for their advertising. The article takes examples of several global smartphone brands that have creatively used outdoor advertising to reach their consumers.

In 2018, Huawei won a Guinness World Record for the world's largest outdoor billboard (5673 sq. meters), placed at Plaza De España in Madrid, Spain. The advertisement was for Huawei P20 Pro and the brand intended to highlight the collaboration of modern technology and the Renaissance era. They placed billboards in historic locations across Europe, including Rome and Prague. In February 2019, Samsung used digital billboards to release teasers for their Galaxy

Unpacked event. Digital billboards were installed at locations worldwide, including New York Times Square and Madrid's Callao Square. The campaign highlighted the innovation and future of smartphones through the usage of digital billboards.



Figure 3 & 4: Samsung Galaxy Unpacked 2019 Teaser displayed at New York Times Square and Callao Square, Madrid.

Apple's award-winning Shot on iPhone campaign, which began in 2015 and continues today, moved iPhone customers' images from their smartphone screens to billboards. In 2019, Apple introduced the Shot on iPhone on Tour campaign, featuring photographs from renowned music photographers and touring with musicians.

All of these OOH media; the article concludes, whether digital or static often feature not only the product but also its various features like camera quality, display and results. The smartphone brands, despite their digital presence, also invest greatly in creative OOH media to attract their customers.

## Research Methodology

The researcher conducted this study using an online survey as the quantitative research approach. The questionnaire aims to gather data on outdoor advertising frequency, audience perceptions, and effectiveness in driving action. The poll aims to collect data on the most enticing visual components for viewers, as well as whether they remember the commercial and take action based on it.

For this research study, an example of an Apple iPhone advertisement is taken. Apple Inc., known for its innovative and iconic marketing campaigns, utilizes outdoor advertising extensively to promote its flagship product, the iPhone. Apple's outdoor advertising campaigns are not only about promoting a product; they are carefully crafted visual narratives designed to convey a message, evoke emotions, and establish a strong brand identity. Campaigns like "Shot on iPhone" and "Privacy. That's iPhone." dominantly rely on visual elements like images, logos and colors.

For the questionnaire three attributes have been considered; imagery, color and typography. The questionnaire also uses a reference image of one of the billboards from the "Privacy. That's iPhone." campaign and is to gather the data about which of the above-mentioned visual attributes make the advertisement more intriguing.

## Research Analysis

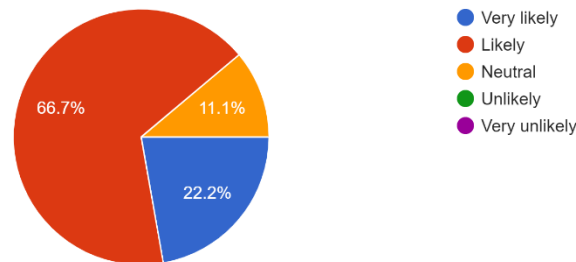
The respondents of the survey were among the age group of 20 to 45 and had varied fields of education and work including students, professionals and academicians. Below are the key factors collated from the analysis:

- 1) 78% of the respondents frequently or very frequently come across outdoor advertising while the rest 22% occasionally or rarely see outdoor ads. The majority of these outdoor advertisements appeared in urban areas, as well as on highways and roads. Second to this, they were seen in public places like shopping centers and malls.

- 2) While determining the visual elements in outdoor advertising that are most appealing to the audience, the respondents voted Colors as the most appealing visual element followed by the Images and the Ad layout.
- 3) Nearly 97% of respondents believed that visual features are important for engaging with advertisements, and 89% remembered the advertisement based on its visuals.

How likely are you to remember an outdoor advertisement based on its visual elements?

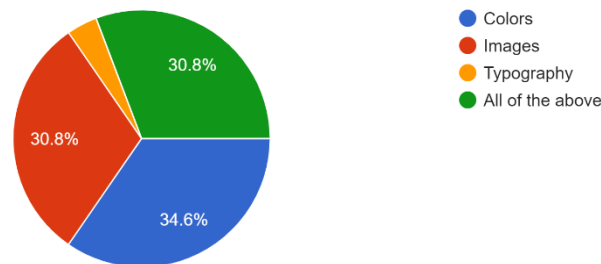
27 responses



- 4) Nearly 52% of the respondents engage with an outdoor advertisement through actions such as visiting a website, making a purchase, or seeking more information, followed by nearly 37% who have taken a neutral view on this and 11% of the respondents who are unlikely to interact with the outdoor ad.
- 5) Referring to the provided image of Apple's Privacy. According to an iPhone marketing billboard survey, 34.6% of respondents regarded color to be the most appealing aspect of the ad, followed by images (30.8%) and typography. 30.8% of respondents voted for All of the Above, indicating that these components enhance the advertisement's appeal.

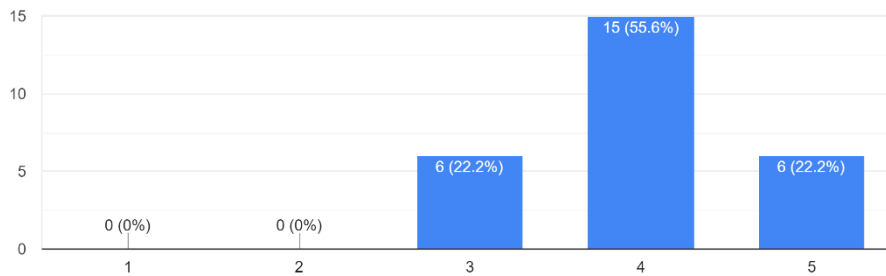
Which of the visual elements from the following advertisement are more intriguing to you?

26 responses



- 6) The Likert scale analysis is performed to understand the overall effectiveness of outdoor advertising in capturing the respondent's attention and encouraging their engagement with the brand. The examination of overall replies suggests that outdoor advertising is a successful medium.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall effectiveness of outdoor advertising in capturing your attention and encouraging engagement? (1 being least effective, 5 being most effective)  
27 responses



Rating	Dataset	Range	No. of responses	% of responses
1	Least effective	1.00-1.80	0	0%
2	Effective	1.90-2.60	0	0%
3	Unsure	2.70-3.40	6	22.20%
4	Effective	3.50-4.20	15	55.60%
5	Most effective	4.30-5.00	6	22.20%

## Conclusion

### Key findings

This research aimed towards studying the role of visual elements in outdoor advertising and their effects on audience engagement. For this purpose, three visual elements were considered; color, imagery, and typography. Based on the literature review and the analysis of the survey's responses; it can be concluded that all these elements play a crucial role in outdoor advertisements to attract viewers' attention as well as increase their engagement with the advertisement.

The analysis of the survey also concludes that Color is the most effective visual attribute that influences the overall appeal of the advertisement. This is closely followed by Images which are the visual representation of the product that is being advertised. However, the analysis also suggests that the combination of all these visual elements can significantly affect the overall visual appeal of an ad. Scope of the research and future trends.

### Scope of the research and future trends

The analysis also points to a factor that the audience tends to interact less with outdoor ads; like visiting a website, or seeking more information. This could be due to the limited dwell time and the ad clutter across the urban areas. However, this can be mitigated by integrating the OOH with rapidly evolving technologies.

Outdoor advertising is rapidly upgrading itself to keep up with the newer trends. Digital billboards, 3D Holographic Displays, and Augmented Reality (AR) integrations are widely used globally. Augmented Reality (AR) displays can provide a more immersive experience for audiences, such as virtual product trials through billboard scanning. Digital billboard is another dynamic way which uses interactive infographics, videos and animations instead of static pictures and logos to make the ad more interactive.

As the world is stepping into the era of Artificial Intelligence, advertising agencies are syncing their concepts with the latest trends. Generative AI is rapidly spreading across the creative



fields like photography, video creation and designing. With AI upgrades in software like Adobe Photoshop and Midjourney, it can soon be used to optimize the overall advertising workflow to create interactive layouts.

Outdoor advertising could assist organizations adapt to shifting customer preferences and communicate with their target audience through interactive, visual storytelling.

## References

- P. S. Abril, A. M. Olazbal, and A. Cava (2009). Marketing and law. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3): 375-377.
- Bottomley, P.A., and Doyle, J.R. (2006). The interactive effects of colors and products on perceptions of brand logo appropriateness. *Marketing Theory*, 6(1), 63–83.
- Chaudhuri, A., & Buck, R. (1995). Media differences in rational and emotional responses to advertising. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 39(1), 109–125.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838159509364291>
- Gorn, G. J., Chattopadhyay, A., Yi, T., & Dahl, D. W. (1997). Effects of color as an executional cue in advertising: they're in the shade. *Management Science*, 43(10), 1387–1400.  
<https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.43.10.1387>
- Kahney, L. (2003, September 26). Apple Doin' the Logo-Motion. *wired.com*. Retrieved September 29, 2023, from <https://www.wired.com>
- Kamboj, T. (2012). Outdoor advertisements: attracts or distract. A study on commuters while travelling from highways. *Research Expo International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.researchjournals.in>
- Nelson, D. L., Reed, V. S., & Walling, J. R. (1976). Pictorial superiority effect. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 2(5), 523–528. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.2.5.523>
- Motwani, B., & Tilak, G. (2021). Interactive Learning through Visual Communication-A Multimedia Tool.
- Out of Home Advertising Association of America.(2023, January 4). Solomon Partners' 2023 Benchmark Report Estimates for the U.S. Out of Home Advertising Association of America show that out-of-home advertising has the highest levels of consumer recall compared to other media channels. Retrieved September 29, 2023, from <https://oaaa.org>
- Percy, L, and Elliott, R. (2005). *Strategic Advertising Management* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press.
- Sjaerodji, Y. S., & Indrawati, D. (2022). Semiotic Analysis of Typography in Apple Virtual Advertisement. *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 6(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v6i1.136>
- Stathakopoulos, V., Theodorakis, I., & Mastoridou, E. (2008). Visual and verbal rhetoric in advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 27(4), 629–658.  
<https://doi.org/10.2501/s0265048708080177>

## Bibliography

- Figure 1: The psychology of colors. (2021, September). Retrieved from <https://howtoartist.com/colors-and-emotions/>
- Figure 2: Psychology behind typeface choice. (2015, July). Retrieved from <https://blog.cws.net/2015/07/cws-infographic-the-psychology-of-font-type.html>
- Figures 3 & 4: Samsung Galaxy Unpacked 2019 teasers placed in New York Times Square and Callao Square, Madrid. Samsung (2019, February 13). Samsung Galaxy Unpacked 2019 Teaser Features: All Around The World.



## Appendices

Questionnaire for the survey:

- 1) How often do you encounter outdoor advertising in a typical week?
- 2) In what locations do you most frequently encounter outdoor advertising? (select multiple if applicable)
- 3) Which visual elements in outdoor advertising do you usually find most appealing? (select multiple if applicable)
- 4) Do you believe that the visual elements in outdoor advertising impact your attention and engagement with the ad content?
- 5) How likely are you to remember an outdoor advertisement based on its visual elements?
- 6) How likely are you to engage with an outdoor advertisement through actions such as visiting a website, making a purchase, or seeking more information?
- 7) Which of the visual elements from the following advertisement is more intriguing to you?
- 8) On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall effectiveness of outdoor advertising in capturing your attention and encouraging engagement? (1 being least effective, 5 being most effective)