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The link between Brand Reputation Risk and Outdoor Road Advertising

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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Abstract

Brand reputational problems are legion and in the age of the rise of social media and easier access to information, management of brand reputation risk is becoming increasingly critical especially in outdoor advertising where problems can easily go viral. Outdoor roadside advertising has played a critical role in the past century in building and supporting organisations' brands, identity and reputation and forms a critical component of marketing strategies. However, there are issues in outdoor advertising, particularly public safety on South Africa's roads. Issues of public safety could potentially damage brands and therefore it is critical to manage brand reputation risk in outdoor advertising.

Potential reputational problems to a brand comes in many forms and from many stakeholders, but not all problems affect the essence of a brand. In all instances, organisations must be able to identify and manage risks to the brand, in particular, those emanating from corporate communication strategies. A number of researchers have confirmed that outdoor roadside advertising can cause accidents on roads, although there are no studies that have been done in South African conditions. The essence of outdoor advertising as an attention grabbing distraction likely to cause road accidents, warrants attention.

This study assessed the link between potential brand reputational risk and issues concerning outdoor roadside advertising, with the aim of determining the level of awareness amongst marketing professionals in South Africa regarding this issue. It found that there is a link between brand reputational risks, potential brand crisis and problems associated with roadside advertising particularly accidents, and that marketing professionals are not aware of the risks to motorists associated with outdoor roadside advertising.

The study was exploratory in nature and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposefully selected sample of experts. The data was analysed using direct content analysis.

The research found that there is potential link between brand reputational risk and road safety issues. However, the study is inconclusive in terms of what effect heightened awareness would have on marketing strategies particularly the choice of where advertising signs should be placed.

Declaration

I, Freeman Nkululeko Masuku, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Freeman Nkululeko Masuku

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 2016

Dedication

I dedicate this research to life. In pursuit of the abundant potential of every life form, in its journey to significance, the individual is just but a part of the whole, which is life. Without life I would have never had the opportunity to make my contribution in a small way but as a necessary part of the whole.

I also dedicate this research to my son Thabo Chris, he too is on a journey to significance and watching him grow in the past three years has only been but a blessing.

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I would also like to express gratitude to my family and friends for the patience, love and care during one of the most trying times of my journey, this degree would never have materialised without them.

Last but not least I would like to thank my mother for her unconditional support, this journey would not have been possible without her constant intercession.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the link between brand reputation risk and outdoor roadside advertising in relation to public safety on South Africa's roads and the potential damage to Brands if such advertising could be associated with detrimental impact on society (Jordaan, 2001). The study aimed to determine marketing professionals' awareness of possible detrimental public health effects of outdoor roadside advertising and the risks to brand reputation in today's informed and demanding public. It sought to provide an understanding of outdoor roadside advertising, its potential contribution to negative public health issues and to contribute to scholarship on the discourse of brand reputation management in general. The focus on brand reputation will serve as additional literature informing best practice in brand management, self-regulation of the outdoor advertising industry and ultimately to enhance sustainability of the industry.

1.2 Context of the Study

Advertising plays an important role in commerce through informing consumers about goods and services, and is a critical component of organisations' marketing strategies (Molina, 2006). Advertisements (to be called adverts henceforth) by their nature seek to promote the interests of any persons, products, services, ideas or political viewpoints, and are deeply embedded in strategies of increasing market share. Brands are increasingly becoming a key element of any marketing strategy and business model, and adverts consist of brands and what the company seeks to communicate. As such, brand reputation – which refers to how a brand is viewed by others – is a critical and

integral part of the success of any business. How brands are communicated through adverts in a world where consumers have been given greater access to information through the ever increasing prominence of social media, demands a more critical analysis of risks associated with advertising, in this case, outdoor road side advertising (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

The medium in advertising that has risen to prominence because of its ability to reach millions of consumers, is outdoor advertising (Iveson, 2012). Outdoor advertising which has proliferated in almost every urban space in cities throughout the world, reaches millions of consumers everyday as they travel to work, places of recreation, congregation or educational institutions without the usual options of consent. Outdoor adverts are placed in areas that are meant to maximise visibility, attracting as much attention of the target consumer to stimulate responses. (Molina, 2006) traces this phenomenon to the 19th century. Beginning in the 1890s advertisers began to exploit the vast opportunities in public space to reach an unrestricted passive audience through mass attention grabbing creative messages. These messages and their medium have caused controversy around issues of content, placement, social responsibility, decency and morality. The power of outdoor advertising has seen the saturation of public spaces with a litany of all types of adverts which are fast evolving into more dynamic forms like electronic displays showcasing presentations that are designed to invoke emotion and attention (Wachtel, 2009). It is the same power of reaching a mass audience that can easily turn into a crisis and reputational damage if a negative issue associated with the advert arises.

The behaviour of corporations in the public space has become a critical component in maintaining corporate reputation symbolised by brands. Brand reputation is a concept that depends on users' beliefs and observations of past behaviour (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993) and corporations that fail to manage their brands lose credibility through irresponsible advertising and pay a high price in

trying to regain lost reputation. Rising competition in advertising has challenged advertisers and agencies to devise attention grabbing methods which include outspending the competition by running more and larger adverts than rival brands (Pieters, Warlop, & Wedel, 2002) consisting of sometimes, material offensive to certain sections of society. At times, adverts are located in dangerous and undesirable public places (Molina, 2006).

The pressure associated with competition in advertising and the demands to outmanoeuvre rivals results in oversight regarding some of the critical issues that could result in damage to brands during advertising. These issues which are described by (Dalton, 2011b) as problems or concerns at individual or group level, have the potential to influence brand reputation and therefore constitute risks to organisations. This has been witnessed when individuals and activists exploit social media, turning issues into campaigns against corporations and forcing them to change certain behaviours (Dalton, 2011b) which has at times left serious reputation damage to brands. Consumers, especially in the 21st century where information is easily available, no longer consume goods and services because of their utility only, but because of wider aspects such as their symbolic meaning and characteristics which include how the brand is expressed (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

Brand reputation is associated with the signals that corporations send to the market through the strategies employed in communicating the value proposition (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Brands are perceived by consumers as characters (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009) and the image or reputation of the brand should be maintained and defended in a highly competitive environment with a knowledgeable audience. Brand risk should be managed critically just as all other risks pertinent to a firm.

The content and location of adverts have become highly contentious issues resulting in movements that have successfully challenged governments to ban adverts containing objectionable material and/or located in undesirable public places (Molina, 2006). Nonetheless, subversive material still proliferates into the public domain and the brands associated with such adverts have suffered reputational damage. Consumers are now more empowered to share their thoughts about brands and adverts in general through the use of social media and new communication tools and technologies (Barnes et al, 2008a). This situation is an emerging challenge for advertisers who have to familiarise themselves with all potential risks to brands.

Studies have been done on the placement of adverts in the public domain particularly in the vicinity of schools, places of worship and heritage sites (Yancey et al., 2009). The impact of the content of adverts is particularly objectionable in the vicinity of schools if it is viewed as having an inherent potential to impact on public morals and evokes the need to protect, especially children. Studies have shown the impact of adverts on minors as they promote lifestyles that are based on consumption of products, services and propagation of ideas that can easily corrupt the innocence of novice minds (Yancey et al., 2009). This may lead to social problems which include alcohol and drug abuse, vandalism and crime, and outbreaks of violence. The placement of adverts in the vicinity of places of worship and heritage sites which include sacred places destroys the “sense of place” of these places and obscures the associated visual resources, something that could be offensive to some consumers (Jordaan, 2001). These are some of the issues that have motivated movements throughout the world to protect minors, the environment and certain freedoms and have put the spot light on certain brands and what they stand for.

In a paper, *Outdoor advertising and commercialisation of public space in New Zealand* Molina (2006) states that studies that show the negative impacts of

outdoor advertising have not been easily accepted because outdoor advertising has been constructed as a medium that contributes significantly to “public interest” through the creation of wealth and dissemination of information. The author goes on to question the notion of creation of wealth in the “public interest” which is predicated on employment creation and “progress” and does not account for the negative effects to the same public. This shows the subordination of public interests to the superiority of private interests in the person of corporations. Publicising negative stories about corporations’ contribution to negative health impacts and other social issues now takes little effort, consequently causing crisis for brands, especially in the context of a postmodern society where individuals share common subcultures and vision of life (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993).

The purpose of business is to fulfil a human need within society. As such, business should take interest in securing and protecting consumers as a way of securing its future prospects (Dalton, 2011b). This can be done through managing the reputation of a brand as part of a continuous process and proactively addressing issues that can be perceived as detrimental to consumers and society in general, before they become crisis (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Efforts have been made in the advertising industry to codify standards that ensure that consumers are protected from the whims of private enterprise. These standards have translated into guidelines that seek to govern and guide the behaviour of industry stakeholders to ensure that *“advertising complies with the law, is truthful, not misleading or deceptive and is socially acceptable* (New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority, 2013)”. The system of guidelines forms what is known as the code of ethics for the advertising industry, an internal process not driven by law(Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). However, the power of private interests especially outdoor advertising as epitomised by the billboard, often overshadows the “inner voice” of caution

which is supposed to be the premise of ethics, because of the personal benefits derived from increase in market share which is sometimes short lived.

Content and placement in the vicinity of undesirable locations have constituted some of the critical issues that have dominated discourses on outdoor roadside advertising for the past century. At times, some of these discourses have been risky to brand reputation especially those brands and adverts that objectify women (Molina, 2006). Movements across the world that seek equality for women have strongly objected to gratuitous sexual depictions of women in adverts with some objections ending in public spats and litigation.

In addition to content and placement objections in recent times, studies have shown that roadside advertising can contribute to traffic accidents (Farbry, Wochiner, Shafer, Owens & Nedzesky, 2001). It has been proven that over 90% of accidents are caused by human error which could be as a result of spatial relationships between the road elements and the road user (Theewus & Godthelp, 1995). Driver distraction is estimated to be one of the leading causes of motor vehicle crashes especially distractions of an emotional cognitive nature (Chan & Singhal, 2013). In a study by Farbry et al. (2001) it was shown that a variable sign increased side swipe and rear end accidents on a section of roads by 35% after a variable message sign was installed. The study also revealed that two demographic groups (the over sixty-five and under twenty-four age group) were more susceptible to these accidents, aggravated by route familiarity.

The impact of outdoor advertising on traffic safety has been surrounded by controversy because of some of the difficulties associated with accurately estimating causes of crashes. What has not been disputed though, is the distraction of the motorist, which is one of the objectives of outdoor advertising. In essence, it pulls the eyes of the driver off the road to roadside displays

(Wachtel, 2009). These adverts are placed in locations that obviate the attention of the driver from the demands of navigating a vehicle, which is critical especially at demanding places such as bends and intersections. In their study, (Lang, Wise, Lee, & Cai, 2003) showed that the presence of sexual appeal on a billboard increased resource allocation from male participants which lends credence to the possibility of distractions. If not managed effectively, the proliferation of outdoor adverts that are mutating into very eye catching images may confuse or awe drivers, overriding critical traffic signs and signals.

The Road Traffic Management Corporation which is mandated to research and report on crash statistics in South Africa, estimated in 2011 that there were on average, 10 845 fatal crashes in the country resulting in 13 925 fatalities. These statistics bring to the fore questions on what the real costs (considering the effects of content and issues of public safety) of outdoor advertising are to the individual, the community, the private sector and the economy at large. The fields of psychology and social science have concentrated on the potential negative effects of advertising messages. In spite of these effects being well documented, there has been a massive proliferation of outdoor advertising globally, lining roads and posing the immediate risk of causing accidents (Molina, 2006).

There is massive competition for a few well-placed sites that guarantee attention. The question that arises from this situation is whether risks are considered when companies advertise on these “lucrative” sites which are potentially hazardous locations for motorists. The question of awareness regarding issues related to road side advertising is linked to whether the advertisers are aware of brand reputation risk and the potential loss of revenue if brands are associated with negativity such as aggravating the “burden of disease”.

1.3 Problem Statement and Sub–Problems

Problem Statement:

To determine and evaluate the link between potential brand reputation risk and issues in road side advertising, and awareness amongst marketing professionals of the potential of roadside advertising to cause accidents.

Sub-Problem 1:

To determine the link between potential brand reputation risk and issues in roadside advertising.

Sub-Problem 2:

To determine the awareness of brand owners, advertising agencies and marketing professionals regarding issues pertaining to roadside advertising, particularly hazards posed to the motoring public.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Brand reputation has become a critical component of any firm and reputation is an aggregate composite of transactions and associations over a prolonged time. But brand reputation can be irreversibly damaged over a very short period due to overlooked issues in advertising (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Advertising is regulated throughout the world through codes of standards and ethics which focus mostly on content, for example, alcohol and tobacco adverts. The standards also focus on location, in terms of the target audience. The standards have been lacking with regard to the accident hazards that these adverts can

potentially cause (Iveson, 2006). Potential road hazards related to roadside adverts can threaten brand reputation.

This study assesses the link between potential brand reputation risk and outdoor roadside advertising, focusing particularly on awareness in the industry, of the hazards of locating adverts on roadsides and the potential that the association of brands with potential and real accidents could result in loss of market share. This should lead to a deeper understanding of the additional mechanisms required to assess roadside advertising as part of brand management.

Advertising in South Africa is a multi-billion rand business and the emergence of the captive audience in a motor vehicle has grown the outdoor advertising industry by leaps and bounds throughout the world and with it more eye catching visual technology (Wachtel, 2009). The effects of adverts at a global scale have seen the glorification and promotion of stereotypes based on the dictates of corporate objectives (Molina, 2006). These stereotypes however, have become objectionable to modern society. This study provides awareness on some of the negative effects of roadside advertising that could develop into reputational risks for brands and companies.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

This research will investigate marketing professionals' awareness of the hazards caused by roadside advertising to the motoring public and the potential risk to brand reputation. The study also explores the potential effects on market share if brands are associated with these hazards as a result of the effects of their advertisements on the roadside. This study will not examine the impact of road side advertising on roads in South Africa.

1.6 Assumptions

The following assumptions will be made during the study:

- The information used in the research methodology and analysis will be truthful and accurate and as such, the study will be credible.
- The sample interviewees will be knowledgeable about roadside advertising due to their experience in the profession and will respond truthfully. Lack of knowledge will negatively affect the credibility of the study.

1.7 Definitions

Advertising

Advertising is a form of marketing communication used to persuade an audience to take or continue with some action, usually with respect to a commercial offering , political or ideological support.

Brand Reputation

Brand reputation refers to collective assessment of a brand's character over a long period of time

Mass media

Refers to media used to communicate to mass audiences. Examples include newspapers, magazines, radio, television, billboards, and advertising in public places.

Outdoor advertising

This refers to mass media used to communicate to mass audiences and includes outdoor media including billboards, neon signs, tn-vision displays, electronic displays, and all other forms of outdoor displays.

1.8 Abbreviations

ASA	Advertising Standards Association
SAMOA	South African Manual for Outdoor Advertising

CHAPTER 2.

2.1 Introduction

Outdoor advertising has risen to significance in recent times as marketers scramble to occupy the new frontier of advertising that has been proven to be more effective than the traditional mediums which include television and radio. Outdoor advertising has proliferated throughout cities in developed areas of the world like the United States, Europe and Japan, as well as in developing countries like Brazil and South Africa. This upsurge in outdoor advertising has brought with it, renewed challenges around ethical considerations in marketing and advertising to a captive audience. Outdoor advertising has exploded not only along major highways and streets in cities but also in rural areas, raising the same concerns of its impact on public safety, the appropriateness of content, effects on the environment and risks to companies due to issues associated with such advertising. These challenges have sparked controversies that have seen a number of studies and counter studies being presented to justify and/or discredit certain discourses on roadside advertising.

In attempting to link the issues associated with outdoor advertising and brand reputation, considering the potential hazard outdoor advertising poses to the public particularly the motoring public and the emergence of an informed social media active audience, literature on outdoor advertising, brand reputation risk, and the potential hazards of outdoor advertising to the motoring public is reviewed. This literature review begins by critically analysing outdoor advertising and the technological evolution in the industry, and why it is important in this century to pay more attention to this medium as it grows in significance in the marketing industry. The review then explores issues around advertising and marketing in outdoor advertising especially since marketing (of which advertising is a single component) is the cornerstone of building credible

brand reputation. This analysis attempts to link the general issues surrounding outdoor advertising to Brand Reputation Management and the risks that these issues could evolve into if not critically considered. Finally, the literature review analyses body of work on issues concerning public safety, particularly driver distraction and accident causation.

The body of literature presenting the advantages and versatility of outdoor advertising far outweighs the critical studies that analyse the environmental, social, cultural and public safety issues that outdoor advertising presents (Molina, 2006). There is evidence in literature of lobbying by particular interest groups to downplay the impacts of outdoor advertising which has manifested in sponsored academic papers resulting in disputed results and controversy. Most studies on the effects of marketing or in this case outdoor advertising, have been on alcohol and tobacco and the location of the adverts which has resulted in regulation of alcohol and tobacco advertising (Taylor & Franke, 2003). However, the analysis of public safety, particularly to the motoring public, has been shrouded in controversy. Studies and counter studies have been done, disputing each other's findings concerning whether outdoor roadside adverts directly cause accidents. Much as that is the case, what has remained indisputable is that adverts cause distraction to drivers (Wachtel, 2009). The emergence of an informed public with access to social media has introduced a new dimension in fostering transparency and accountability and corporations should identify potential risks to brands before the public consumer grassroots campaigns cause crisis for a brand.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 *Brand Reputation Risks*

Brands are symbols that consumers have learned to trust. They represent not only the product attributes but also an embodiment of a firm's past marketing strategies and behaviour (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Consumers form relationships with brands based on several characteristics of the brands and the certain behaviours associated with the brands, which is collectively known as reputation (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Companies used to build and maintain their brand reputations with ease through traditional advertising. The rise of social media has introduced certain risks to brands which has made it possible for an issue to destroy a brand within seconds.

(Wood, 2000, p. 664) defines a brand "as a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate from those of competitors". Brands are perceived as characters, celebrities with a character of their own (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Brands are also thought of by consumers as having a personality of their own and it is this personality that consumers develop a relationship with (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). The character and personality of a brand over a period of time then develops into reputation which is a combination of the attributes of the brand and what the brand is associated with and how it is marketed to the public.

Brand reputation is the aggregate perception consumers have on its characteristics built over a period of time (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Reputation is a collective assessment of past actions and results delivered by products and services symbolised by brands (Dalton, 2011b). Brand reputation is built over time and customers associate with brands whose reputation is in synch with their own beliefs and value systems. Brand reputation is built through signals

that organisations send to the market and the tactics employed in sending the signals (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Consumers expect consistency in brand value systems as a character of the brand, and they share experiences both bad and good of the brand, which builds the reputation of the brand into a character worth relating to or repulsing.

Reputation depends on the audience's beliefs and value systems, and in a post-modern society with a highly informed and demanding consumer, it is becoming increasingly important to manage brand reputation. A brand with a good reputation is a valuable asset to a firm but according to (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993), it takes seven to ten times effort to restore a damaged reputation and this damage can happen in seconds from issues that can be avoided. Reputation is a form of assessment of the image of the brand and the firm's corporate behaviour. Understanding and identifying risks that may at a stage damage a brand's reputation should be an active part of reputation management (Dalton, 2011b).

Post-modern consumers expect firms to act in a responsible manner when conducting business, both in delivering products and services that meet customer expectations and in how these are produced and sold. Throughout the world, brands have been boycotted because of different problems ranging from working conditions, child labour to production in countries with oppressive regimes and environmental issues. Postmodern consumers use Brands to define who they are and express their identities in society through choosing the brands that best suit their value systems (Lannon, 1996). Concerns that arise because of an identified cause emanating from how a brand is marketed or what it is associated with, can turn into a major crisis within a short space of time (Dalton, 2011b).

Issues are problems or concerns that have the potential of influencing a brand positively or negatively. Issues are critical in organisations not only because they may be unsettled or uncomfortable but more so because they may have

serious repercussions if they are not properly managed (Dalton, 2011b). Issues fall into several different categories depending on the impact to society, intensity and location. Identifying issues before they spiral into crisis is a critical component of managing brands and should be given adequate attention. Reputational issues can emerge in many different forms, from a wide variety of causes and a variety of groups or individuals (Balmer, Greyser, & Greyser, 2009). Identifying the issues, risks and the threats to the brand and the people involved is critical in managing the reputation of the brand.

Risk is the combination of the probability of an event and its consequences. Public opinion demands transparency and accountability in the assessment of risks and their impact on society (Regester & Larkin, 2008). Advertising is a primary function of persuading consumers to appreciate a brand or product (Balmer et al., 2009). How firms advertise a brand is a critical component of managing the character of the brand. Therefore in advertising, the agencies and firms should investigate and gather intelligence on the issues around their marketing strategies and work out whether these issues have the probability of occurring and what the consequences would be (Dalton, 2011b).

Issues have arisen in roadside advertising that could have potential reputational damage to brands if they are not identified and incorporated into marketing strategies. (Waide, 1987) in a paper entitled "*The Making of self and world in Advertising"* contended that advertisers' main objective was to get people to buy their products and this was independent of any sincere desire to improve the people's lives. Similarly, to increase sales, advertisers associated goods with deep-seated non market goods such as sex, friendship and esteem. This same objective of maximising sale of goods sometimes at the expense of the general public, could present major risks to brands if these brands end up being associated with the negative public health issues presented by roadside advertising (Nwachukwu, Vitell, Gilbert, & Barnes, 1997).

2.2.2 *Roadside Advertising*

Outdoor advertising is defined as “the act or process of notifying, informing, making known or any other act of transferring information in a visible manner which takes place out of doors” (SAMOAC, 1998, p. xii). It is generally considered as the oldest and one of the most pervasive communication forms in media (Kam & Lau, 2005). (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009) identify outdoor advertising as a growing and very critical medium of communication because it fulfils an essential function in modern society, of communicating information to the public and therefore contributing to economic growth. The success of outdoor adverts has been based on exposure to the passing public which in turn depends on placement and location (Kam & Lau, 2005). It is the placement, location, the ability to captivate and exposure maximisation that has resulted in both high economic returns and high negative impacts to society with reference to outdoor adverts.

Keith Powers (2001, p.1) in a study on increasing efficiency in outdoor advertising stated that “outdoor advertising was the most rapidly expanding segment of the whole advertising industry”, growing at an exponential rate because of several factors which included the inherent ability to reach a captive travelling public. The growth in outdoor advertising was motivated by profitability, beginning in the 20th century when living patterns changed and people began using cars and public transport along well defined transport corridors on a daily basis (Molina, 2006). These defined corridors became lucrative and the traditional advertising inventory which includes space along highways, became scarce, further increasing the profitability of outdoor advertising and cluttering the corridors, forcing municipalities to begin regulating the industry (Powers, 2002).

One of the roles of the media industry is to deliver adverts to as many people as possible with high frequency, and a lasting impression in the minds of the target audience (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). In a study to determine

perceptions of business on the role of outdoor advertising (in this case billboards) on the US economy, (Charles R Taylor & Franke, 2003) found that business clearly indicated that users found billboards to be cost effective in delivering messages and reaching their audience. In a survey to determine reasons for the use of billboards, (Charles R Taylor, Franke, & Bang, 2006) found four primary reasons: visibility, media efficiency, local presence and tangible response. All these advantages have superseded advantages of traditional advertising through television, the print media and broadcast radio. The most lucrative locations where visibility is high, presence can be seen and efficiency can be measured, has been on the roadside where measurement of exposure can be correlated to the traffic passing by.

However the proliferation of outdoor advertising has come with many negative effects which include environmental effects, content in-appropriateness, and location issues leading to public safety problems. Outdoor advertising has multiplied throughout the city, occupying public spaces and changing the whole landscape into commercialised private space with a global outlook (Molina, 2006). Outdoor advertising has been observed to be growing at a very fast rate and threatening to overpower natural landscapes and architectural landmarks to the detriment of society and the environment (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). The advertising industry in some countries even collects data every year and publishes books showing the effectiveness and a cost per impression of outdoor adverts on selected locations (Powers, 2002) which places the few spots on busy traffic junctions, or freeway on and off ramps under considerable pressure (Kam & Lau, 2005) .

The monetary benefits that have come from this lucrative business have motivated the industry to be oblivious of the consequences of this form of advertising. Some industry players have gone further and caused controversy in academia by sponsoring studies and surveys to produce results showing benefits of outdoor advertising outweighing the costs to the public (Molina,

2006). This then brings into question the ethical considerations that the industry applies to its decision making processes when outdoor advertising is chosen as a means to market products and services, considering the litany of inappropriate content and locations detrimental to society and the environment in the world generally, and South Africa in particular.

It cannot be denied that roadside advertising fulfils an essential function in modern society of transferring information on product, activity or service and has a positive contribution to increased sales of products, services and therefore economic growth. However, according to Collins, 1995 the most authoritative works on the South African industry are all based on work done outside of South Africa. (Collins, 1995) compares the roadside advertising industry to the property industry because what is primarily sold is space for a known period of time and affixed to a property. A substantial income is derived through the commodity of marketable space, wherein interested parties who wish to access a certain market approach advertising agencies with a marketing strategy. The advertising agencies, after creating the artwork and identifying the target areas in turn approach media owners for a contract to advertise on the available locations. The choice of the location and content of the advert are both decided from the firm or public entity down to the owners of the space (billboards, signposts, gantries).

The roadside advertising industry is regulated by municipal bylaws, which regulate the placement of outdoor adverts. Municipalities across the country have unique sets of bylaws which have at times frustrated outdoor advertising media firms. Recognising the disparities, the Department of Environmental Affairs produced a framework and guideline document for the standardisation of assessment criteria and the application of control measures in South Africa. The guideline document was consolidated and updated in 2010 to what became known as the South African Manual for Outdoor Advertising (SAMOA) which sought to enable decision making authorities and advertisers alike to approach,

control and regulate with equal understanding, issues in outdoor advertising. Local municipalities were then expected to give legal status to the principles and conditions contained in the SAMOA.

2.3 Issues in Roadside Advertising and Marketing

2.3.1 *Content*

Advertisers have gone to great lengths to make more eye-catching and captivating adverts, targeting their customers with sheer persistence both overtly and covertly, and in the process stretching the limits of the law. This has seen the increased targeting of particular groupings with adverts that promote the use of certain products, using depictions that have longer lasting effects that may be detrimental to the public especially vulnerable members of the community such as children (Kam & Lau, 2005).

In a study by (Reichert, 2003), it was found that while an estimate of 10-20% of mainstream US advertising contained cognitive, consciously depictive sexual information, 80-90% of advertisements inputted sexual material into the brain. The increasingly sexualised advertising has been subject to criticism from as far back as the 1960s when feminists bemoaned the sexist portrayal of women in adverts, a trend that has continued up to date with only subtle restrictions. The audience of outdoor advertising has also remained captive (Rosewarne, 2005). In contemporary mainstream media, sex and sexual information has been used in promotional messages for a wide range of products and research shows that adverts with sexual information produced better results than those without (Reichert, 2002). (Reichert, 2002, p. 255) asserts that "*sexual information in advertising attracts attention but typically to the detriment of the sponsoring organisation*". In an era where human rights and the right to dignity and equality before the law have intensified, emphasising on the right to receive ethical treatment and to be valued, it is imperative to rethink the use of sexy exhibits

which can be viewed as objectifying women in outdoor advertising (Boddewyn, 1991).

Alcohol and tobacco advertising has been one of the most contentious issues in advertising. It has been featured on roadside advertising for the better part of the 20th century until countries began to regulate the advertising industry. Alcohol advertising has been found to be particularly influential to children (Austin, Chen, & Grube, 2006). In a computer aided self-administered study of 9 – 17 year olds, it was found that media portrayals of alcohol influenced children's drinking habits through a progressive decision making process (Austin et al., 2006). Longitudinal studies have also shown that continued exposure of youth to alcohol adverts increases the likelihood that they will drink above average (Chen, Grube, Bersamin, Waiters, & Keefe, 2005). In spite of this evidence, alcohol advertising is still directed at influencing underage drinking (Austin et al., 2006).

Advertising is an important competitive advantage method in highly concentrated industries such as the cigarette industry. Be that as it may, it has been found that tobacco advertising ban can reduce consumption and reduce deaths (Saffer & Chaloupka, 2000). The Tobacco industry continues to oppose the ban on advertising and violates some of the regulations as reported in a study by (Scott, Cohen, Schonlau, Farley, & Bluthenthal, 2008) with reference to Los Angeles and Louisiana. It is these violations and disregard for what is ethically acceptable in society that continues to present deep-seated unethical behaviour in the advertising industry.

2.3.2 *Location of adverts*

Advertisers carefully select the location of their adverts in transport corridors to maximise exposure and to obviate the drivers' attention from the demands of navigating a vehicle (Molina, 2006). The proliferation of outdoor adverts has been seen to follow most major routes throughout the world. Similarly, this can

be seen on major South African roads leading to cities, for instance, the M1 and M2 routes leading to the Johannesburg Central Business District, which provide opportune spots to attract the attention of potential customers (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). The selection of the location is continuously studied by advertisers through household surveys correlated to traffic counts and published by some advertising agencies showing the best location for adverts (Charles R Taylor et al., 2006). During the selection of the location however, critical factors that require ethical considerations are not considered, which results in adverse effects to the community.

(Yancey et al., 2009) in a study on the location and prevalence of "adverse" adverts in minority and poor areas, found that advertisers targeted certain groups depending on their demographics and these adverts were likely to contribute to socio-demographic differences in obesity and disease. In a study on *"the prevalence of harmful content on outdoor advertising in Los Angeles*", (Lowery & Sloane, 2014) found that the proportion of harmful advertising content was found to be proportionally high in traditionally poor and minority areas of Los Angeles than in rich neighbourhoods. The proximity to places of worship and schools has been found to be particularly problematic. Advertisers have been found to violate laws that ban the proximity of adverts to these places (Scott et al., 2008).

Outdoor advertising depends on maximising exposure which makes busy traffic junctions, freeway off and on ramps, shopping centres, subway stations and public places the most opportune places for locating adverts (Kam & Lau, 2005). Outdoor advertising has increased exponentially especially along major highways and streets in cities and rural areas and with this growth, challenges around the impact on public safety, the appropriateness of content and effects on the environment have risen. The location on highways and streets has caused controversy as it has been identified through studies as one of the distractions that causes accidents and fatalities (Crundall, Van Loon, &

Underwood, 2006). There have been counter-claims by other studies sponsored by the advertising industry, claiming that roadside adverts do not cause accidents (Young et al., 2009).

Outdoor advertising along highways and freeways has been in existence since late 19th century, becoming prevalent and lucrative in the beginning of the 20th when the motor vehicle became one of the major modes of transport (Molina, 2006). Throughout the 20th century, outdoor advertising thrived on major routes throughout places in developed countries like the United States, Europe and Japan, as well as developing countries like Brazil and South Africa. With the growth of these adverts also grew continuous conflict between the public, advertising companies, and conglomerates (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009).

2.3.3 *Advertising Technology Evolution*

(Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009) traced technological developments in outdoor advertising from the time low quality images printed on vinyl and glued to posts dominated the urban landscape through to the digital print and large Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) and Light Emitting Diode (LED) screens that are littered around cities displaying instant and changing film messages. Outdoor advertising has evolved into high resolution coloured adverts first seen in 1993 when Super Graphics Inc., a silicon valley company, wrapped an entire bus with digital imagery (Powers, 2002).

Improvements in print and digital imagery and state of the art electronic display units has introduced flexibility and variety in advertising, enabling advertisers to change content remotely, which has in turn increased the effectiveness of outdoor roadside advertising (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). With the introduction of these variable message signs that flash information throughout the day, new challenges have emerged which include the effects of this technology on the environment, sense of place, distraction to drivers and to health, especially those affected by epilepsy where no warnings are given as to

the effects of the medium (Molina, 2006). These challenges affect certain proportions of the population which are not catered for by advertisers in their considerations and their strategies to reach as many customers as possible.

Electronic road side adverts have become pervasive after the introduction of digital screens that allow an endless series of images to be projected in a short space of time. Sony and TCI introduced Field Emission Display in 2007 which promised even better resolution of images, further attracting attention to the adverts (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). As the world moves further into connectedness and consumers have options on television and radio to skip through adverts, roadside adverts will become more attractive to advertisers offering not only guaranteed attention but also a quantifiable method that enables billing. The improvements in the display technology will fuel growth of the roadside advertising industry, as has already been seen in New York's Time Square and along some of the Roads in Sandton City South Africa.

2.3.4 *Public Spaces and the Environment*

Environmental preservation has become one of the most critical issues throughout the world and preservation of natural landscape, water bodies, ridges and forests is now highly regulated. The proliferation of outdoor advertising throughout cities has invaded the natural landscape, cluttering the environment with sometimes unsightly adverts. Landscape sensitivity and the degree of sensitivity which includes visual sensitivity, is not considered during placement of adverts as maximum exposure is the criterion for location (Molina, 2006) . (Molina, 2006) also contends that urban, architectural and historical areas should be protected from the infringements of outdoor advertising.

The struggle between outdoor advertising and the general public has been taking place as far back as the beginning of the 19th century in the United States, often ending up in courts primarily on the unsightliness of billboards. In a court case in the early 19th century, as cited by (Burnett, 2007) quoted below,

the public already felt the intrusion and erosion of the natural beauty in public spaces by the proliferation of outdoor advertising in public spaces and along highways that necessitated the enactment of laws:

> The signboards upon which this class of advertisements are displayed are constant menaces to the public safety and welfare of the city; they endanger the public health, promote immorality, and constitute hiding places and retreats for criminals and all classes of miscreants. They are also inartistic and unsightly.
>
> In cases of fire they often cause their spread and constitute barriers against their extinction; and in cases of high wind, their temporary character, frail structure and broad surface, render them liable to be blown down and to fall upon and injure those who may happen to be in their vicinity. The evidence shows and common observation teaches us that the ground in the rear thereof is being constantly used as privies and the dumping ground for all kinds of waste and deleterious matters, and thereby creating public nuisances and jeopardizing public health; the evidence also shows that behind these obstructions the lowest form of prostitution and other acts of immorality are frequently carried on, almost under public gaze; they offer shelter and concealment for the criminal while lying in wait for his victim; and last, but not least, they obstruct the light, sunshine and air, which are so conducive to health and comfort.
>
> — *St. Louis Gunning Advertisement Co. v. City of St. Louis* (1911)

The same issues cited in the above statement in a St Louis Court are still relevant today as these attention-compelling structures and messages alter the urban landscape. Laws have been enacted that protect certain areas from the unsightly and sometimes intrusive billboards through zoning regulations and structural design requirements. That notwithstanding, advertisers and the public are still found in constant court battles over what the public views as intrusive,

unsightly, ugly, overbearing and even immoral and dangerous advertising and what the advertising industry views as lucrative opportunity (Juergensmeyer & Roberts, 2013).

Highways and streets are public spaces which should be designed to blend with the natural environment, exhibiting an aesthetically pleasing scene. The placement of adverts along busy highway corridors, on and off ramps, should also adhere to the principles of highway designs under which the scenery is given critical consideration and the public are given opportunities to decide on whether they would accept adverts or not. The fact that outdoor advertising especially along streets and highways is inescapable and swallows public space for its own interests, necessitates public participation in the decision to allow the adverts and strict laws to protect the environment from degradation because after all, these are public spaces (Molina, 2006).

The form that roadside advertising has taken recently, especially billboards, presents an unusual challenge to travellers and the environment. Static displays are making way to the flashing lights on LED and LCD screens which have brought a new challenge to the public in terms of the visual pollution during the night in the form of flashing screens present (Iveson, 2012). The night time landscape has been virtually turned into displays of flashing lights lining up streets in some of the major cities in the world, changing the personality and identity of these places (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). The “sense of place” has adversely been altered, in as much as the environment has been obscured by the proliferation of outdoor adverts and outdoor advertising is slowly but surely overpowering the natural landscapes of cities (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009).

Outdoor advertising fulfils an important role in informing the public in modern society. However, authorities and the advertising industry should strive to strike a balance between economic development on one hand, and environmental protection and public safety on the other (Molina, 2006). Natural, rural and

urban landscape should be protected and the environment as a silent shareholder should be considered in the decision making about advertising mode. Environmental protection which has become a major interest throughout the world and the proliferation of billboards throughout the 20th century have both given rise to the discourse around outdoor advertising and the environment, resulting in appeals for the regulation of the industry considering its environmental impact.

2.3.5 *Public Safety*

The concerns around outdoor advertising have been centred around the effects of the adverts on the target population and other collaterals in terms of promotion of increased risky behaviours such as increased tobacco use, alcohol consumption and novice immoral behaviour (Austin & Knaus, 2000). The effects caused by the persuasive media messages promoting these products are well documented with studies in the target communities showing high burdens of disease associated with the advertised products. Outdoor advertising poses other dangers to the public which include danger from collapsing physical structures that support the media and adverse technology used for delivering the message.

As pointed out already, in contemporary times, outdoor adverts line highways and streets on almost all the busy roads and the risk of injury to travellers has increased considerably. Protection of the public from the possibilities of omissions by the outdoor industry in erecting and operating roadside advertising should be of paramount concern to authorities and the motoring public. The dangers posed by outdoor advertising signs and billboard construction, maintenance and operation has been a continuously scrutinised area since the explosion of the business in the 20th century, and has been improved through laws and regulations by cities and states protecting the public from substandard and dangerous structures (Burnett, 2007). However, the advertising industry

has the ultimate objective of reaching out to as many people as possible. The objective has been to attract as much attention to their goods and services as possible and creating a lasting impression on their targets. That being the case, other issues of public safety such as the effect of flashing adverts on epileptic travellers and the effect of outdoor roadside adverts on drivers and their potential to cause accidents, are at the periphery of the outdoor advertising discourse. From the literature reviewed on outdoor advertising, the discourse has mainly been centred on the effects of content and dangers to public safety posed by falling structures. What is of major concern in this century, as the outdoor advertising industry moves to even more captivating technology like electronic displays, is the danger facing the motoring public through the ever increasing driver distraction (*New York Times*, March 2010).

2.3.6 *Driver Distraction and Accidents*

The effects of outdoor advertising on drivers has been surrounded by controversy as studies and counter studies have shown conflicting results. Much as that is the case, what has consistently been proven is that outdoor advertising causes driver distraction (Wachtel, 2009). What has also been shown is that starting from the 20th century, billboards have met resistance and courts have had to intervene to protect public interests against the excesses of industry (Molina, 2006). The advertising industry has also fought to continue advertising on roadsides. The case of the 2007 study from Virginia Tech Transportation Institute which found that digital billboards did not change driver behaviour compared to ordinary billboards, is one example of research sponsored by the advertising industry. The findings of this study though, were subsequently rejected by the Transportation Research Board in 2008 showing that there is persistent opposition to the interests of the public (*New York Times*, March 2010).

Transportation experts have studied the effects of outdoor advertising on drivers and have established the effects of these adverts and their potential to cause accidents (Crundall et al., 2006). Reaction times on roads have increased over the last decade especially after the advent of social media and the invention of electronic devices such as GPS which have caused an increase in driver distraction, worsening the attention of the already burdened driver navigating through roadside activity and advertising (Bendak & Al-Saleh, 2010). Studies have shown that 90% of road accidents are caused by human error and a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) showed that distraction was found to be a factor in 78% of crashes and 65% of near crashes (Dingus et al., 2006). The percentage caused by distraction forms a considerable proportion of the accidents caused by human error, with external distractions estimated to be up to 10% (Young et al., 2009).

Road adverts comprise a competing activity which by its nature is meant to divert attention from other activities. In a study using simulated driving by (Edquist, Horberry, Hosking, & Johnston, 2011) the presence of roadside advertising was shown to change drivers' patterns of visual attention and increase the number of errors in driving. Young et al. (2009) conducted a study to "quantify the effects of billboards on driver attention, mental workload and performance in Urban, Motorway and Rural Environments" and found that roadside advertising had clear adverse effects on driving activity and concluded that authorities should regulate the outdoor advertising industry and protect the public. In a study on the role of roadside advertisements on river distraction, half of the drivers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they had at least more than once been distracted by roadside advertising and 22% indicated that they had actually been put in dangerous situations by roadside adverts (Bendak & Al-Saleh, 2010).

The positioning of roadside advertising is a critical component in maximising exposure of the advert to travellers, but less acknowledged is the potential of

the positioning and attention grabbing to cause accidents (Crundall et al., 2006). The advertising industry, through studies that measure exposure and reach to potential customers identify junctions, freeway off ramps and on ramps and other traffic-dense locations as favourable spots for advertising and compete for these spots which leads to high concentration of adverts in these areas (Kam & Lau, 2005). These areas are also stretches where the maximum concentration of the driver is required to navigate the vehicle as they are more complex than straight sections where the driver has less input to process (Castro & Horberry, 2004). A study by (Wachtel, 2009) concluded that roadside advertising particularly at demanding sections, could lead to an increase of accident rates at those sections.

The advertising industry's association of goods with non-market related goods such as sex and emotion has considerable influence on the attention and judgment ability of drivers. In a study on "The influence of image valence on visual attention and perception of risk in drivers", it was found that adverts containing emotional images altered the sensitivity of drivers to potential hazards (Jones, Chapman, & Bailey, 2014). A study by Chan & Singhal (2013) concluded that distraction that is emotion based can alter attention and decision making abilities and ultimately cause accidents. From the studies it is apparent that the combination of roadside advertising, especially at critical sections, with heightened driver attention demand and emotional content in adverts, increases the probability of accidents especially in the vicinity of demanding sections.

Sex is used extensively in advertising in overt and covert ways and it is generally acknowledged that it is eye-catching , attracts attention and motivates consumer interests and sales (Reichert, 2002). It has been shown in a study (Lang et al., 2003) that the presence of sexual content in a billboard increased the demand for resource allocation from male participants which in turn increased the probability of distractions and accidents but had little or no effect on female participants. An estimate in advertising in the United States of

America showed that 80 to 90% content of sexual material in advertising had a probability of causing heightened emotional activity and arousal in men which increased the probability of accidents and also caused revulsion in some sections of the community that considered some sexual depictions as immoral and objectifying women. It was concluded that such roadside adverts affected the driving competence of motorists (Reichert, 2003).

The presence of roadside advertising is mainly to increase attention by increasing fixation to the adverts. To achieve this objective, advertisers have devised ways to attract the attention of commuters and to increase the duration of that fixation. A study on eye movements of drivers by (Regan, Young, & Johnston, 2005) showed that 20% of drivers glanced at adverts, taking attention away from the road for more than 2 seconds. Studies have also shown that anything that takes the attention of a driver's eye from the road for more than 2 seconds increased the chances of an accident (Dingus et al., 2006). The implication of the 2 second threshold is that road side advertisers can take away the natural reaction time needed to respond to hazardous obstructions or critical road signs (Castro & Horberry, 2004).

The evolution of technology in the advertising industry has produced the electronic display units that now include high resolution LCDs and LEDs that are fast replacing the traditional static billboards (Iveson, 2012). These high resolution displays have reignited the popularity of billboards and they are growing in size throughout the world (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009). The new large high resolution display technologies have come with prolonged message durations, brightness and long video adverts with the ability to be deployed closer to the roadway, presenting a new challenge to the public (Wachtel, 2009). These adverts, employing the form of video advertising, are multiplying and their attention grabbing short films have been shown to cause accidents (Bendak & Al-Saleh, 2010). The design of the outdoor advertising displays especially along freeways and streets, is meant like its predecessors,

to attract maximum attention and therefore it can only follow that drivers will take their eyes off the road.

2.4 Outdoor advertising regulation

Regulation is used by governments or a grouping of individuals or organisations to curtail the excesses of individuals and corporations in the interest of the public. The regulation of advertising is a particularly controversial issue and has proven over the years to be a difficult process. There are two types of regulation by. The first is by the state, which derives its mandate from laws enacted to protect the public against unacceptable advertising. The second is self-regulation, which usually takes place when industry members come together to regulate the behaviour of their members.

2.4.1 *Legislated Regulation*

One of the most important events in the history of advertising was in 1964 when the United States Surgeon General warned of the relationship between tobacco smoking and related diseases such as lung cancer which encouraged a wave of regulations and legislations throughout the world (Saffer & Chaloupka, 2000). From then on, governments throughout the world started regulating the advertising and promotion of cigarettes through restricting advertising and imposing requirements for warnings against health effects on all adverts and levying taxes to discourage smoking. This single landmark warning brought to the fore the dangers of some of the products on the market and the need to protect the public from marketers who only promoted a product and did not tell the consumers of the dangers associated with the use of certain products. In South Africa, the government enacted the Tobacco Products Control Act which provides for health warning signs to be placed on tobacco adverts. The Act does not call for the total banning of tobacco (Yach & Paterson, 1994).

Advertisers typically hold the view that they should be allowed to promote goods and services as they wish, provided that they do so within the confines of the law and do not breach the privileges of free speech (Harker, Harker, & Volkov, 2001). From literature it can be concluded that left to their discretion, advertisers have no inclination towards considering public interest and safety regarding the content and physical location of advertisements. Studies that have shown need for regulatory interventions have faced stiff resistance from the advertising industry, which shows that wealth creation is more valued by advertisers than public interest (Molina, 2006).

Millions of people throughout the world are bombarded by hundreds of millions of advertisements through all sorts of media which could be intrusive, pervasive and mischievous (Harker, 1998). Governments have enacted laws and regulations to curb the levels of unacceptable advertising and to penalise those who transgress against society. Regulation comes in many forms, through a ban or imposition of certain rules on advertisements of certain products like tobacco, and the restriction of certain adverts in selected locations which include those in the vicinity of schools, places of worship and places of historical importance (Scott et al., 2008).

Laws and regulations have also been passed to regulate advertising along highways and freeways, which saw in the United States the enactment of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 whose goal is to make highways more scenic and gives local government departments the authority to remove signs that do not conform to the law (Harker, 1998). In South Africa, zoning requirements govern the location of adverts throughout cities and along freeways and streets. In order for one to erect an advertisement board, local authorities have the mandate to check the conformity of the advert to zoning regulations and issue a permit. Section 3a of the City of Johannesburg by law on outdoor advertising states the following:

> No person may erect any advertising sign or use or continue to use any advertising sign or any structure or device as an advertising sign without the prior written approval of the Council: Provided that the provisions of this subsection do not apply to any advertising sign exempted in terms of section 8.

This section is then followed by the stipulations on the types of structure, size and location of these adverts. However the bylaws fall short in their extent of protecting the public as technology is evolving and new studies are showing challenges to public health caused by outdoor roadside advertising. Regulation seeks to correct market failures caused by advertising when conglomerates' advertisements overstep acceptability by protecting people who are exposed to these excesses and cannot protect themselves (Harker et al., 2001).

2.4.2 *Self-Regulation*

The advertising industry has developed a proactive engagement strategy to control the excesses of its members. Self-regulation is when advertising industry players opt to regulate the conduct and behaviour of their members (Harker et al., 2001). In New Zealand, growing government controls and consumer criticism prompted the advertising industry to establish the National Review Board which is independent and seeks to promote high standards of advertising and truth in the advertising fraternity (Taylor & Taylor, 1994). This is generally the norm in most countries where industry has come together to form self-regulatory bodies promoting acceptable advertising. However, critics have voiced concern over self-regulation saying the purveyors of the art of advertising have been known to be mischievous and therefore self-regulation is just a knee jerk reaction to stave off government regulation perceived as interference (Harker et al., 2001). On the one hand, advertisers have strong beliefs in the freedom of expressing themselves and promoting their products and on the other, consumers' interest groups strongly contend that boundaries

should be drawn. Self-regulation if constituted with the participation of a broader stakeholder group could be effective in curtailing the excesses of the advertising industry.

2.5 Conclusion

From the literature review it is evident that the outdoor advertising industry and the marketing industry at large have built a reputation of untruthfulness and mischief, with a very strong bias towards self-interests. It is also evident that the influence of social media in fostering accountability and transparency presents a particular challenge to firms in terms of brand management as it is now easier to access information and create movements against firms on particular causes. Brand reputation risk is fast becoming a critical component in the success of products and services and the identification and as such, management of issues should be given strategic importance in firms.

It is crucial to acknowledge that outdoor roadside advertising plays an important role in the economy and that while the advertising industry has the protected interest to communicate information about their products, customers have an interest in receiving such information (Yach & Paterson, 1994). However it is also significant that the industry understands and fully appreciates the issues and risks associated with outdoor roadside advertising and the consequences of inaction if the issues become public concern. Equally paramount is for the industry to realise that information is fast being readily available to consumers and a single complaint by a customer could go viral and cause considerable damage to brands, especially in instances where fatalities are involved and the companies are found complicit.

2.5.1 *Research proposition 1*

Marketing firms strengthen their issue and risk identification processes in outdoor roadside advertising in order to better manage brand reputation.

This is based on the fact that postmodern society has access to information and social media and issues that are not adequately addressed can easily spiral into reputational crisis for brands (Dalton, 2011b). Outdoor roadside advertising has several issues which include subversive content, undesirable location of adverts, environmental effects of adverts, and negative public health issues which include accidents which can easily turn into brand reputation crisis if individuals or groups identify them as issues and decide to act on social media (Molina, 2006).

2.5.2 *Research proposition 2*

The roadside advertising industry familiarises itself with risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising and incorporates those issues into their marketing and brand management strategies.

This is based on the fact that roadside advertising has been proven to cause distractions (Crundall et al., 2006) which can lead to accidents (Young & Mahfoud, 2008). Owing to appetite for space that gives maximum exposure to advertisers, it is critical to curtail this appetite before it becomes an issue and risk for brand reputation.

CHAPTER 3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the principles and ideas that will be used as a basis for the research strategy and procedure. The chapter begins with the research methodology followed by research design and the sampling method. The research instrument, data collection, analysis and interpretation methods are proposed. The limitation of the study is outlined, followed by the validity and reliability parameters.

3.2 Research Methodology

The study will use a qualitative approach to explore the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of professionals in the outdoor roadside advertising industry with respect to the core values that motivate their actions. This method is suitable as it is line with the following definition by Denzin and Lincoln as cited by (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013):

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices ... turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The research involves exploring the knowledge and understanding of marketing professionals, firms that provide advertising space and agencies on some of the public safety issues associated with outdoor roadside advertising and possible reputational damage to brands if these issues are not considered. Literature shows that outdoor roadside advertisements cause adverse public health issues which include accidents and yet the industry has grown by leaps and bounds and technology is getting more and more intrusive (Molina, 2006). Literature also shows that the advertising industry and the broader marketing industry have a high percentage inclination towards unethical behaviour which could lead to brand reputation damage and in some cases, has led to the demise of companies such as Enron and Lehman Brothers (Yoo & Donthu, 2002). Studies have also shown that outdoor roadside advertising causes distraction which can lead to accidents (Crundall et al., 2006) although other studies primarily sponsored by the advertising industry have attempted to present results to the contrary (*New York Times*, March 2010).

Marketing professionals and companies make conscious decisions when devising their marketing strategies which include where to advertise, the content of the adverts and the target customers. These decisions are made on the background of available data on the numbers of the target audience, the maximum impact and the costs thereof, amongst other parameters. However, issue and risk identification seem to be at the periphery of these decisions as evidenced by the existence of adverts that are contrary to postmodern society values which include accountability and transparency and could easily spiral into issues and crisis. Since the study will take an exploratory approach, the qualitative method has been determined as the best suitable approach to tackle the research.

3.3 Research Design

The research will follow an exploratory approach using a cross sectional analysis and an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivists believe that reality as we know it is a construct of an understanding developed socially and experientially and that what we are and how we understand the world are central in understanding the world and ourselves (Ritchie et al., 2013). It is therefore an appropriate paradigm for this study as the research seeks to understand the core values that determine the decision making in outdoor roadside advertising. The research will examine a subset of marketing professionals' views at a specific point in time within a specific context and therefore the results will only be applicable to a particular context and for this reason, a cross sectional approach was found to be appropriate (Olsen & St George, 2004).

3.4 Population and Sample

According to (Coyne, 1997) in qualitative research, sampling has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research. This research seeks to explore the link between brand reputation and outdoor roadside advertising in South Africa. In line with this aim, an information rich source was selected to enable generalisability to be possible.

3.5 Population

The population was drawn from professionals in the marketing industry and professionals in advertising agencies involved in outdoor roadside advertising. The population was composed of individuals who worked for advertising agencies, marketing companies and regulatory companies and were registered or affiliated to professional bodies in their fields.

3.6 Sample and Sampling

A selective and purposeful technique was used to determine the sample for the research population. Selective and purposeful selecting is a sampling technique that uses pre-determined criteria to select a proportion of the population that provides the information relevant for the study (Coyne, 1997).

Marketing professionals with expertise in outdoor roadside advertising from the advertising and marketing industry were approached. They were from various organisations but affiliated to certain professional organisations. Professionals in any field are expected to uphold the highest ethical conduct in their areas of work, and considering that the study is on ethical considerations it was seen as most beneficial to explore the issue where the highest standards were expected. A sample of 14 individuals was approached (7 marketing professionals from the users and 7 from firms that provide the advertising space) and these were drawn from recommended or suggested individuals by professional organisations. This enabled the research to compare and contrast the results from the surveys by users, that is to say, marketing professionals seeking space and the providers of the service who won the advertising space.

3.7 Research Instrument

Semi- structure interviews were used firstly to fit the discussion into the pre-determined framework based on the literature review and open ended questions to allow the discussion to generate new ideas (Drever, 1995). The framework focused on the awareness of industry experts regarding some of the ethical issues around outdoor roadside advertising and the fact that roadside outdoor advertising is a distraction to drivers which may result in accidents and fatalities. The framed set of questions ignited discussions around brand management, sustainable development, public health and how these are related to the health of a company.

3.8 Data Collection

The interviews were conducted between December 2015 and January of 2016 and the short time frames were meant to reduce the effects of external influences and ensure the reliability of the data. The target participants were contacted and consent forms signed. Appointments and subsequently interviews, were held. Two interviews were used as a pilot study to refine the interview strategy and thereafter the body of the interviews conducted.

3.9 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The transcripts from the interviews were analysed using the content analysis method. The content analysis method is a systematic and objective means of describing a phenomena and involves distilling words into fewer content related categories and classifying them into categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The basis of the method is that phrases and words share the same meaning and therefore can be condensed into a phenomenon. The data was classified into pre-determined categories. Content analysis enables researchers to sift through large volumes of data with ease in a systematic fashion (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). It is a systematic and replicable technique that allows many words to be compressed into fewer words. It allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection (Stemler, 2001).

The study used inductive content analysis because of the fragmented nature of previous studies on the subject matter. In deductive content analysis, the categories are derived from the data using a process which includes open coding, creating categories, and abstraction. In open coding, notes and headings are written in text while reading and the material is read through and as many headings are written down on the margins to describe all aspects of the content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The interviews should be read as many times as possible to apprehend the necessary features (Stemler, 2001).

3.10 Limitations of the Study

The findings from this study may not be transferable to a bigger population and location because the sample size is small compared to the overall population. The study is cross sectional and therefore is a dissection of the phenomenon at a point in time, and is situational because it concerns conditions in South Africa. Therefore the findings would have to be treated with caution as behaviours may change with time.

3.11 Validity and Reliability

3.11.1 *Validity*

The data collection exercise was done over two months to ensure that the respondents were not affected by external activities which could have changed their perspectives on issues. The sample consisted of a diverse population selected from various organisations but sharing common professional affiliations. The data collection process was conducted rigorously following a pre-determined process that will was refined through the pilot study.

Validation of inferences in content analysis is critical as data from one analytical approach demands the use of multiple sources (Stemler, 2001). To validate the inferences, marketing professionals from the advertising agencies and firms, together with those from the brand owners, were interviewed. Cross-validation was therefore between those who sell advertising space and with those who require the service.

3.11.2 *Reliability*

According to (Merriam, 1995), reliability is concerned with the extent to which findings and conclusion from one study will produce the same repeated

measures of a phenomenon. Reliability is about consistency, stability, repeatability and the ability to collect information accurately (Brink, 1993). In order to ensure reliability, data was collected using reliable technology and analysed concurrently. The participants in the research were a sample of marketing professionals in South Africa, and the researcher followed a rigorous process of collecting data and analysing it. The validity of the interpretations of the interviews was checked against other sections of the interview and follow up questions were asked to clarify inconsistencies.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the semi-structured interviews which were categorised into themes and related to the two research propositions. The interviews were analysed using the inductive content analysis method from a total of 14 interviews. The participants were drawn from both the demand and supply side of outdoor roadside advertising. No major trend was found in the answers to deduce a correlation between the common themes from either side.

4.2 Research Proposition 1

Marketing Firms strengthen their issue and risk identification processes in outdoor roadside advertising in order to better manage brand reputation.

The proposition is founded on the fact that because of the rise of social media and easy access to information through the internet to the general citizenry, issues in outdoor advertising can easily spiral into crisis for brands, possibly causing irreparable damage to brands and ultimately affecting market share of the offering. Consumers form relationships with brands based on several characteristics of the brand collectively known as reputation and this reputation is the aggregate perception consumers have on its characteristics (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993).

Studies show that issues that arise because of the manner in which a brand is marketed can easily turn into major crisis within a short space of time. Given that the audience for roadside advertising is captive, the messaging reaches

millions of commuters, and if an issue arises, a negative message can equally reach millions of people in a very short space of time. That being the case, it is therefore critical for marketing professionals to strengthen their issue and risk identification criteria in order to manage brand reputation (Dalton, 2011a).

This part of the interview guide was designed to establish the appetite for roadside advertising and the respondents' awareness of issues in outdoor roadside advertising that could affect brand reputation.

4.2.1 Factors that attract Marketers to advertise on the roadside

Nine of the fourteen respondents said that outdoor roadside advertising was an attractive means of communicating because the audience was captive and this enabled the advertisers to reach millions of people. Thirteen of the fourteen respondents believed that this form of advertising plays a complementary role to other media according to advertising spend after television, radio and the internet.

With regards to factors that attract marketers to outdoor roadside advertising, three main themes emerged:

- Outdoor roadside advertising is a very effective medium of communication because it has a captive audience; it cannot be turned on or off by the public unlike the other modes which include television, radio and the internet.
- Prime spots for outdoor roadside advertising are on busy roads and close to intersections in urban areas.
- Outdoor roadside advertising can negatively affect the social fabric, the economy and the environment.

Table 1 and 2 below document the responses related to the attractiveness of outdoor advertising to marketing professionals.

Table 1: Outdoor advertising attractiveness and positioning as a medium of communication

Outdoor roadside advertising is a very effective medium of communication because it has a captive audience; it cannot be turned on or off by the public unlike the other modes which include television, radio and the internet.
• Outdoor advertising is permanently out there, you can't turn it off from the viewer or recipient, that's why it is one of the oldest forms of advertising and one of the most effective, it's always on and you can't hide or block it. • ...whether you are in a car or whether you are in a taxi a lot of people spend time on the road so that point automatically makes or creates an opportunity for people like myself to communicate with an audience. • Well you can't stop it in a sense, if you look at the internet or radio, you can turn it off, TV you can turn it off, internet you can get pop-up blockers. • People are using roads more than ever, there is more cars on our roads and you cannot just turn off the roadside advert, you can't just flip to another channel. • You gonna ascribe to it [outdoor roadside advertising] being the following: first of all, it is seen from the roadside by the motorist, it's a visual collate that is positioned there. • It's a maze in which marketers drive a point and or a message to their clients who will be driving most of the time. • It's things [that are attractive in roadside advertising] like its absorbed within an instance and you have got a captive audience • You going to sit there and look at this thing because it is right in your face • ...but if you go to work via the road where there is a billboard, the

message has been sent home, when you sit here you are not watching TV, you are on your laptop, you leave work you see a billboard. • You don't choose to see a billboard, it chooses you on the road. • …one is to try to capture audience within various places and space where they may be and commuting is still quite a big part of everyone. • Allows advertisers to use out of home to ensure that the routes they travel to work everyday offer an opportunity to communicate commercial messages • Well it is there in your face, it is right there you can see it, I mean if you are watching TV you can go out the room and miss the ad, if you driving along the road you are going to see the ad.

Table 2: responses to the location prime spots for outdoor roadside advertising

Prime spots for roadside outdoor advertising are on busy roads and close to intersections in urban areas.
• The overhead gantry positions or overhead gantry signs, those are prime, those are in demand on the freeways within the busy road, say [the] ring road of Gauteng • Obviously along the freeways, the freeway systems within urban areas. • It is critical also to look at traffic or the population within that particular area where you want to advertise and make the message relevant to that, so location is critical in terms of choosing where you put your message. • People tend to want to advertise near the intersection, reason being they want to maximise the exposure of their product, in intersections you actually have more exposure to road streams and people tend to want to

advertise also on busy streets. • Leading into the traffic light is prime because traffic slows down, on freeways it's against the law, and the guys who have the contract on freeways have been fighting council for many years. • Typically Sandton, everybody wants to be in Sandton, so Sandton is a hot spot and then your arterials – William Nicole, Rivonia...on the outskirts there is less demand. • Well, obviously depending on where the roads are situated, closer to intersections that are a convergence area where traffic converges and you have high visibility and the traffic comes to a standstill so you have a lot longer viewing time to view the board. • Obviously you know just pure logic to say we are at a spot where the traffic backs up, near traffic intersections. • Go to Sandton… there are Billboards on every corner, Rivonia Road, actually those nodes such as Rivonia, Sandton, Braamfontein, and Jan Smuts. • Look for the conversion points, because we can't put a billboard on every street, so we will see like streams that flow into a river, we see where we put up the dam wall • As I have mentioned, they [clients , advertisers] are actually looking more on the freeways, busy arterials, busy intersections

Table 3: Outdoor advertising role in the marketing strategy

Outdoor advertising plays a complementary role in the advertising space, supporting TV, radio and print.
• Outdoor advertising sits at 10% of the media universe, TV and radio still

take up 60 to 70% of the advertising space, it is more to drive recall awareness and then when we want to drive things like consideration you use platforms where you have longer appearance like your radio, your TV

- Any business to survive must go to marketing and roadside advertising becomes the most effective tool than all, it surpasses your TV ads, newspaper ads, magazine ads and any other because that one in most cases is in your face.
- The biggest would be your TV of course because of reach and ease of communication, secondly is radio and third is print, newspapers and fourth is outdoor advertising.
- Outdoor media is the smallest, it's quite ironical because it's the oldest media [sic] in the world but from a revenue perspective the pie is dominated by television and then radio and then print and now of late digital coming forth.
- Total ad spend is over 20 billion in South Africa and outdoor advertising is about 1,2 to 1,3 billion of that, which gives you 6-7% which is half of many places in the world. So it is not insignificant but it has room for growth. In America, that percentage is about 12% and about 7% is on roadside advertising.
- It's more of the complementary to other advertising space in a sense that it actually captures people that are actually doing other things.
- Outdoor advertising in perspective as I said, we only command as an industry approximately 4.5 to 5% of total advertising expenditure, the tops being television, radio, print, etc. etc.
- Outdoor advertising gets around 4.5 to 5% of ads spend, so ads spend referring to radio, television etc. , television obviously getting the most. I think print is second or third and radio of course, so it is really a small percentage of the total ads spend.
- Well, it takes up about 5% of the total advertising investment, so

compared with other forms of advertising it's not the largest category. • It is very big, as far as outdoor compared to other media obviously your TV, radio and print are a lot more. They have a lot more share of spend for advertising. Outdoor at the moment, officially I think it is only about 4% of the ad spend.

4.2.2 The effect of outdoor advertising on the social fabric, the economy, the environment and health.

All the participants expressed a belief that outdoor advertising has risks and issues that could be detrimental to society, which gave rise to the theme that outdoor advertising, can negatively affect safety, the environment and social fabric.

Table 4: Responses to whether outdoor advertising possess any risks and issues to the general public.

Roadside outdoor advertising can negatively affect the social fabric, public safety, and the environment.
• We want to make sure that when they do put up the advertising that there is certain specifications that they abide by because you do not want a [name of mobile communication company given] billboard falling over and hitting people or cars. • I think minimising clutter which will then probably address the issue of distraction especially along the roadside where you have demarcated areas in terms of the distance between advertising billboards…. • Definitely, there is nothing that is straight forward positive, everything has got pros and cons and in this case the negative part of advertising is that

if it is not well managed it is extremely distractive to motorists.

- …its space pollution in the form of clutter because if it's scattered all over, not in a managed manner, you can have a situation where your space looks funny and it can deface your city.
- Again they are distractive in that manner to motorists and also can cause visual pollution….
- The risk of those structures are huge, they are big and in case they fall or are wrongly placed or engineered wrongly, if they fall they are fatal.
- The risk to the motorist, traffic engineers will say it is a distraction, which if anything it's quiet logical, anything that takes away attention from driving is a danger.
- There isn't really conclusive evidence that outdoor advertising causes worse traffic safety conditions. It's sort of a generally accepted notion that if it was true, why is it that municipalities have got different rules?
- If you drive past a big billboard you look at it, you absorb it and in an instance you drive on but these things on the island are sequential you must read this one and that one, I mean that's really dangerous.
- But sometimes yes people complain about the content displayed on the advertising signs especially if it's controversial or something like that.
- ...you would look at it from a safety issue, that is obviously a concern to us because we don't want anything to happen to commuters.
- You find that key locations tend to be cluttered which diminishes the value of the sites… that's a problem.
- Clutter is a problem and roadside advertising must be safe and not blocking the roads
- ...the LED might be a different scenario, especially if done incorrectly because they have video feeds, I will commit to say these are distracting because you end up watching it.
- …advertising liquor in close proximity to a school.

4.3 Research Proposition 2

The roadside advertising industry familiarises itself with risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising and incorporates those issues into their marketing and Brand Management Strategies.

This proposition was founded on the fact that any marketing action has the potential to affect brand equity positively or negatively because it represents the effect of accumulated marketing investments into the brand (Collins, 2005). Research suggests that marketing decisions and market conditions affect brand equity and therefore brand name investments should be directed to enhance the reputation and image of the brand name (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). Careful consideration should be made in the crafting of marketing strategies in order to avert crises that can possibly threaten the “essence of the brand”. If the marketing communication evolves into crisis, a company’s market place position and its brand meaning can seriously be challenged. It is therefore imperative to afford attention to marketing communication activity to preserve the value of the brand, an intangible asset.

This part of the interview guide was designed to elicit responses related to awareness of issues in outdoor roadside advertising that could be risks and issues to the brand and strategies to manage the brand reputation.

4.3.1 Awareness of the contribution of roadside advertising to accidents

Nine of the fourteen respondents believed that outdoor roadside advertising did not contribute to accidents. Five of the respondents believed that roadside advertising did contribute to accidents but the placement should be managed to minimise the probability.

Two themes emerged from the responses:

- There is no evidence to correlate accidents and roadside advertising although common sense suggests that billboards do take away attention from the road.
- Authorities should legislate regulations for outdoor advertising and enforce the regulations.

Table 5: Awareness of the contribution of roadside advertising to accidents

There is no evidence to correlate accidents and roadside advertising although common sense suggests that billboards do take away attention from the road.
• No, if you ask my opinion I would say not at all, although a certain percentage might be disputed. • I think it would be difficult to correlate between, it was you were watching, you were looking at the bill board and not concentrating on the road, I think science is yet to prove to us that there is a correlation between the two. • I think it probably has, off the record we will always say it doesn't but you know logic suggests that at some point someone looked at the billboard too long and he crashed but I have never heard of an official report. • I would say yes and no. The yes part being lack of concentration at key sections of the road, and the no part is when it's correctly placed in a less vulnerable section of the road.

- It has a financial spin to it and it has its positive but it's negative. It's more detrimental to safety of roads and in actual fact there was a research that was done overseas in terms of whether outdoor advertising, the linkage between outdoor advertising and accidents….
- I have to say to some degree it might but I really believe that it is not near the top of the list in terms of hazards.
- You know that debate [adverts causing accidents] has been going on for so many years, to give you an answer there, the following, I have not one report that has come to my attention.
- I know there's an argument to be made about digital advertising and in that respect… I agree with certain points that you cannot show moving images like video on digital screens.
- Over 60 years in this country at least, outdoor advertising has been operational without it being adverse to motorists, so there should [just be] be proper regulation and observation of rules….
- I understand it might draw your attention but it is minimal, the LED might be a different scenario, especially if done incorrectly because they have video feeds. I will commit to say these are distracting because you end up watching it.
- There are those arguments where people are saying yes it contributes to accidents, which have never been proven.
- Right now it is difficult to correlate the two together, and you know that you notice that and we joke about it sometimes and say no, no, no amongst the industry that… that bill board will cause an accident.
- No I don't think so because if your ad is in the right position, it should not obstruct the driver.

Table 6: The industry response to what should be done to minimise excesses of firms

Authorities should legislate regulations for outdoor advertising and enforce the regulations.
• As long as brands are careful and brands today are very conscious of their responsibilities and the blow out of being irresponsible. You don't need tighter regulation…. • Any business out there is profit oriented on the one hand making profit, the other hand is also responsibility to ensure that your product out there meets various requirements be it regulatory or self-responsibility. • We should have legislation that actually governs outdoor road advertising because at present there is somewhat manuals which really doesn't really have a bit in terms of what is happening. • If you just consider the money you could make, these things can be bigger but you would block traffic because now you have a massive board but you would start blocking traffic so we are constrained by that. • First, the authorities must have a proper framework for the operators to abide by and to operate through and then enforcement of that, once it's been published, it's accepted, working documents with legal imperatives. • You find people doing thumb suck, coming up with a size and pulling it up and its facing oncoming traffic and or it's parallel to the highway, you find currently people doing as they please. • What I think should be done firstly is to fully regulate them [advertisers]. They are being regulated but not as highly as other property developments… they have lots of loose ends, and that's why it is so easy for lots of players to take advantage of any loopholes in our current legislation. • I do think that the marketing association could do more in terms of providing guidelines 'cause most is based on self-regulation. The marketing association can play a role by providing guidelines in terms of

demarcating areas, and also spacing, in terms of how do you deliver the message, in terms of font, the visuals.

- I would not rely on the industry creating its own internal regulatory… self-regulatory body....
- We have got an organisation, a self-regulatory organisation called Out of Home Media of South Africa OHMSA. It consists of the larger outdoor advertising industry players... it's been around for many years and a large percentage of outdoor advertising companies do belong to it but its self-regulatory, it's not aah… but if you want to buy into rules you can and if you don't want to but most of the guys, yes they do….
- There is too much, numbers must come down. They must be self-regulating but that is never going to happen so Government should intervene.
- You cannot blind a guy at night, that's the regulation I would have appreciated because that's being responsible, not shutting us down, you are regulating us how we should operate.
- I think regulators have very clear responsibilities to the tax payers and as such, should set very clear grounds as to how much clutter is enough so they don't put up other billboards. There is no single party responsible, everyone is responsible and everyone is at fault at the moment.

4.3.2 The effect of issues in outdoor roadside advertising on brand reputation

Twelve respondents believed that risks and issues in roadside advertising could damage brand reputation and should be managed. Two respondents believed that issues and risks in brand management had very little to no bearing on the reputation of the brand, because the brand plays a complementary role. Nine respondents believed that brand reputation would not be affected by claims of

accidents caused by billboards because there was no correlation between accidents and an outdoor advert.

Two themes emerged from the analysis:

- Adverse issues in outdoor roadside advertising can damage brand reputation.
- Brand reputation would not be affected by claims of accidents caused by billboards because there is no correlation between accidents and roadside advertising.

Table 7: Responses to whether adverse issues in outdoor roadside advertising can affect brand reputation.

Adverse issues in outdoor roadside advertising can damage brand reputation
• Brand owners are sensitive about his reputation etc. etc. that's his livelihood… the brand is his livelihood, so anything out there that can create public criticism or public discontent in outdoor advertising be at whatever element he [brand owner] will get out of it very quickly. • Someone driving along will take a picture of this topless woman with a chicken on her head whatever it is next to the school, next second it is on Face book and next second everyone says look what [name of grilled chicken franchise given] does by our schools, bang just like that. • Definitely big time, if for instance somebody erects a billboard without making an application, it is not an approved one. If we find out about it we speak about it, it's on paper, it's wherever, then their reputation is gone because then we associate them with bogus deals. • It's very seldom that a brand has to do damage control because of an

outdoor campaign, you more often hear complaints about TV ad or radio ad that gets pulled.

- It does damage the brand because as a matter of interest, the liquor industry is precluded from advertising within a certain distance to a school and church.
- It could well be. Imagine a sign being here saying [mobile communications company name mentioned] is advertising and there are accidents on that very site every day for some reason or another.
- If the owner of [name of grilled chicken franchise given] running a very controversial campaign say one that is linked to sex , he sticks it up on my [advertising agency owned] poles outside the schools, I am sure that his brand will be damaged
- … if there is proof that the billboard or sign in question was the root of the accident, then possible it could be, whether it will affect the brand of the advertiser or the brand of the media owner, and it will probably be a joint scenario.
- I think it will affect both. Number one, the brand has the potential to be damaged and I will compare this to the brand on a taxi and a taxi driving recklessly is in a sense indirectly bringing the brand into disrepute 'cause you're saying this is how this brand is driving recklessly around me.
- In my opinion I don't think so. Like I mentioned before, it's complementary to other means of advertising and it's… I don't think it will reduce their market share in terms of what's happening but maybe a little in terms of people knowing them [the brand] and people actually deciding whether to go with the brand.
- Everybody out there is brand sensitive.... That's our brand, we will be sensitive to any criticism out there about our company which could negatively influence or impact on the image or the business.
- The company can suffer litigation that can lead that company into liquidation because if the company gets sued for 20 million and the

company isn't worth 20 million then that company can go under immediately. • Yes, although it's a quick answer the examples are obvious. A sign that falls into disrepair affects the stature of the brand, if the creative reflects bad taste it results in brand damage, if the billboard location is inappropriate then it can affect the reputation of the brand. • If they are controversial about what they put in there then they must expect backlash, whether it is TV or anywhere.

Table 8: Responses to whether accidents caused by outdoor roadside advertising can affect brand reputation.

Brand reputation would not be affected because there is no correlation between accidents and roadside advertising.
• No no because motorists are very fickle by their nature, they wouldn't link accidents and the advert. • It depends to what level is taken and how you know, a huge accident on N1 versus a little bumper bashing on a minor road, it could have an impact. • Nobody knows until someone says I had an accident because of that sign, you not going to have a link between the brand and the accidents, so that is never going to happen. • It could well be absolutely, can you imagine a sign being here saying [name of mobile communications company mentioned] is advertising on it and there is accidents on that side every day for some reason or another and over the radio, you know [you will hear an announcement saying] the accidents happened where the [same mobile

communications company name mentioned] sign is, hypothetically yes.

- If a particular advert caused accidents, yes absolutely it would affect the brand reputation.
- Let's take traffic signals where you were exposed to a traffic signal the colour scheme on the advert. I would use [different mobile communications company name mentioned] as an example because of their unique [main colour on the company's logo mentioned] and it actually clashes with the colour coding on the traffic light.
- Brand reputation would not be affected because there can be no correlation between the brand and accidents.
- We can't talk of a billboard being an adverse item in an exclusive manner as though we don't live in an area that is prone to accidents.
- I don't think so because it is funny when certain people have an accident [how they] try and blame it on the advertising but in the mean time they were not concentrating.
- It [the advert] has the potential if it was very good. I don't believe that outdoor advertising is particularly good. If it was very good then I would say it can potentially impact on accidents yes, but I don't believe it is that good.

4.4.0 Summary of the results

Issues and risks in outdoor roadside advertising have the potential of greatly affecting brand reputation as a substantial asset of the company and a differentiator that leads to competitive advantage. The following are the themes that emerged from the analysis:

- Roadside outdoor advertising is a very effective medium of communication because it has a captive audience, it cannot be turned on

or off by the public unlike the other modes which include television, radio and the internet.

- Outdoor advertising plays a complementary role in the advertising space, supporting TV, radio and print.
- Prime spots for outdoor roadside advertising are on busy roads and close to intersections in urban areas.
- Outdoor roadside advertising can negatively affect the social fabric, the economy and the environment.
- There is no evidence to correlate accidents and roadside advertising although common sense suggests that billboards do take away attention from the road.
- Authorities should legislate regulations for outdoor advertising and enforce the regulations.
- Adverse issues in outdoor roadside advertising can damage brand reputation.
- Brand reputation would not be affected by claims of accidents caused by billboards because there is no correlation between accidents and roadside advertising.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the interviews held with marketing professionals from the advertising industry and brand owners. Interview results are compared and contrasted with extant literature, some of which was discussed in Chapter 2. The intention of the analysis is to show the state of business in the outdoor roadside advertising industry and the risks and issues that could affect brand reputation in a postmodern society.

The following were the research propositions (as listed in Chapter 2) that sought to be answered by the research:

Research Proposition 1

- **Marketing firms strengthen their issue and risk identification processes in outdoor roadside advertising in order to better manage brand reputation.**

Research Proposition 2

- **The roadside advertising industry familiarises itself with risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising and incorporates those issues into their marketing and brand management strategies.**

5.2 Issues and risks that could affect brand reputation

Brand equity is a substantial asset to any company and it can increase the cash flow of a business substantially if managed well and can at the same time lead to the demise of a company. The marketing mix elements can create, maintain, expand the dimensions of brand equity and any action has the potential to affect

brand equity (Collins, 2005). Respondents believed that outdoor roadside advertising was an attractive means of communicating offerings because of the ability to reach millions of captive commuters every day, giving an opportunity to maximise the visibility and recollection of the brand. This maximisation is characterised by prime location identification and attention grabbing methods which include outspending the competition (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993).

Respondents believed that outdoor advertising played a complementary role to television, radio, print and recently, the internet with percentage share per advertising spend ranging from 4.5% to 7%. (Bernstein, 1997) states that outdoor advertising as a medium possesses qualities that other media types do not, which makes it the most powerful medium available because it offers size, location, flexibility, continuity, simplicity and the ability to cover all socio-economic groups. This importance is not however reflected in the advertising spend share in the marketing mix. The advertising spend is also reflective of un-accounted externalities that are of consequence to the environment, persons or entities which may not be intentional (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 1989). As the supply of locations increases at a diminishing rate worldwide, primarily due to restrictive legislation, outdoor advertising spend will increase as the demand for scarce space increases.

The respondents also believed that there were issues and risks in outdoor roadside advertising that could have a negative impact on brand reputation which include social, environmental, health and safety issues. (Molina, 2006) states that outdoor roadside advertising has several issues which include subversive content, undesirable locations for adverts, environmental effects and negative public health effects, which is consistent with issues identified by some of the respondents in this study. Based on a postmodern society which has access to information and social media (Dalton, 2011a) postulated that un-addressed issues could spiral into reputational crisis for brands.(Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998) stated that brand equity should be managed over time by

protecting the sources of brand equity, making appropriate decisions between fortifying and leveraging the brand and fine-tuning the supporting marketing program which should include careful scrutiny of risks and issues in the outdoor roadside advertising medium.

The respondents also believed that the prime spots for outdoor roadside advertising are busy roads and places close to intersections. In the outdoor advertising industry, success is primarily a function of position; price is a function of position and the market determines the value of a specific position (Collins, 2005). The proliferation of outdoor adverts has been seen along most major routes leading to cities and cluttering mostly intersections (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009), consistent with the appetite of these positions as also expressed by respondents in this study. Advertisers select the location to maximise exposure and to obviate the drivers' attention. Coincidentally, these are the same places and reasons that transport experts have identified as high risk areas, correlating the causes of accidents to the presence of adverts (Molina, 2006).

The effects of outdoor advertising have been surrounded by controversy as studies and counter studies have shown conflicting results (Wachtel, 2009). Transportation experts have studied the effects of roadside outdoor advertising, particularly the nature of the advertising to attract attention and have correlated the presence of adverts with the potential to cause accidents (Crundall et al., 2006). The controversy in the literature is reflected in the contradictory nature of responses by the respondents in this study. On the one hand, some were of the opinion that it was common sense that the nature of their advertising activity diverted attention and was thus likely to cause accidents whereas on the other hand, some of the respondents said the probability of roadside adverts causing accidents was almost nil. A study conducted by (Mark S. Young et al., 2009) found that roadside advertising had clear adverse effects on the driving activity

and concluded that authorities should regulate the outdoor advertising industry and protect the public.

The results of the interviews were found to be consistent with literature reviewed. It can be concluded that there are issues and risks which can affect brand reputation if they are not managed as part of a broader brand marketing strategy.

5.3 The awareness in the industry of risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising and incorporation into brand management strategies

Respondents believed that adverse risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising could affect brand reputation. (Dalton, 2011a) describes issues and risks associated with outdoor advertising which are consistent with those identified by the respondents of this study. Dalton (2011b) further postulates that these issues and risks are worsened by the pressures of competition in advertising and the demands to outmanoeuvre the opposition, which may result in oversight of critical issues that could in a postmodern information society result in crisis. Potential brand reputational problems are legion. They come in many forms and from many stakeholders (Balmer et al., 2009).

The majority of respondents in this study said that although statements had been made to the effect that outdoor roadside advertising causes accidents they did not believe this was the case and therefore a link could not be drawn between roadside advertising, accidents and brand reputation. This is contrary to some studies by transportation experts who have established the effects of these adverts and their potential to cause accidents (Crundall et al., 2006). Movements have successfully challenged governments to ban adverts

containing objectionable material and those positioned in undesirable locations, and brands associated with such adverts have suffered reputational damage(Molina, 2006). In this modern information age, consumers are now more empowered to share their thoughts about brands on social media and any issue that may arise could end up in crisis (Barnes, Cass, Getgood, Gillin, & Goosieaux, 2008b).

Respondents believed that authorities should enact legislation and regulations to manage outdoor advertising and devise means to enforce the regulations. Respondents believed that self-regulation alone would not work as the competition for prime spots and the attention of the consumer could spiral into adverse issues. (Harker et al., 2001)) observe that critics have voiced concern over self-regulation saying the purveyors of the art of advertising are known to be mischievous, advancing their self-interests at any costs and therefore regulation is in the industry. The observations of the respondents are consistent with the findings in literature.

5.4 Conclusion

Brand name investments should be directed to enhance the image and reputation of the brand consistently over time and marketing communications should be designed incorporating risks and issues that could threaten brand equity. Awareness of the existence of risks and issues and incorporating risk and issue Identification into the design of the outdoor advert should be a critical component of the brief to the advertising agent.

Respondents believed that there are risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising that could potentially damage a brands reputation. Respondents also believed that although it bordered on common sense, there was no evidence of a link between roadside outdoor advertising and accidents. The majority of respondents also believed that with the competition for the attention

of the consumer in the market, self-regulation would not work and authorities should step in to regulate the industry recognising both the advantages and disadvantages of outdoor roadside advertising while catering for externalities.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the link between brand reputation and outdoor roadside advertising, to understand the stakeholders' awareness of the detrimental public health effects of roadside advertising and to understand the level of consciousness in brand management of risks and issues during marketing communication. Marketing action has the potential to affect brand equity and brand name investments should be directed to enhance the reputation and image of the brand name (Eagle, Kitchen, Rose, & Moyle, 2003). Researchers also believe that marketing communication activity on brand equity or the value thereof is now receiving significant attention as a result of changes to international accounting standards particularly the reporting of the value of intangible assets.

This chapter summarises the findings and conclusions of the research and implications thereof from both an academic and business management perspective. The study aims to provide insight to brand owners, advertising agents and future students on the risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising that could potentially damage the brand of a company and to assist business understand the importance of issue identification at the early stages of brand name investments.

In an effort to gain market share, operators in the outdoor roadside industry pay little attention to the adverse effects of the industry and erect adverts that have an impact on the environment, society and health and there is a general belief that self-regulation will not work in a highly competitive environment. The study also aims to assist authorities to understand value creation in the outdoor roadside advertising industry through regulation that will improve quality in the advertising space and cater for externalities.

6.2 Conclusion to Proposition 1

Marketing Firms strengthen their issue and risk identification processes in outdoor roadside advertising in order to better manage brand reputation.

The results of the interviews are consistent with the literature. The majority of respondents believed that roadside outdoor advertising is a very effective medium of communication with access to millions of captive consumers that could neither turn on nor turn off the communication at their discretion. (Molina, 2006) traces this phenomenon to the 19th century when advertisers began to exploit the vast opportunities in public space to reach an unrestricted passive audience. The majority of respondents in this study believed that outdoor roadside advertising plays a complementary role to television, radio, print media and the internet, based on the advertising spend. Literature places the industry in a unique position as a historically dominant medium that has pioneered the rise of some of the most successful brands throughout the world (Bernstein, 1997). The level of importance attached to the medium is critical in the assessment of the amount of damage that can be done to brand reputation if issues arise.

The majority of respondents identified prime spots for outdoor roadside advertising as busy roads, especially close to intersections in urban areas. (Collins, 2005) insists that the primary success of an advert is a function of position and is a similar vein, (Molina, 2006) states that advertisers select the location of their adverts to maximise exposure and to obviate the drivers' attention to their offering. (Kam & Lau, 2005) identify busy traffic junctions,

freeway off and on ramps, subway stations and public places as opportune places for locating adverts.

The majority of the respondents believed that there are risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising that could negatively affect brand reputation and ultimately equity. Consequently, the proposition that risk and issue identification should form a critical component of the planning stage is accepted. The positioning of roadside advertising should be re-evaluated considering the advantages it possesses and the externalities that are not included in the pricing and the impact regulation could have on the market should be investigated .

6.3 Conclusions to Proposition 2

The roadside advertising industry familiarises itself with risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising and incorporate those issues into their marketing and brand management strategies.

The majority of respondents believed that issues in roadside advertising can damage brand reputation, a view that is consistent with research in the field. (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009) argued that the image or reputation of a brand should be maintained and defended in a highly competitive environment that also has a knowledgeable audience. The influence of social media in fostering accountability and transparency is presenting a new challenge to firms in terms of brand management as it is now easier to access information and organise mass movements.

Brands are symbols that customers are conditioned to trust to represent a product's attributes which include quality, the firm's past marketing strategies

and behaviour, consistency, and the accumulated marketing investments into the brand (Eagle et al., 2003). (Balmer et al., 2009) state that potential reputational problems are legion and come in various forms from many publics. What is critical is for corporations to identify what could cause a brand to undergo a crisis, how seriously the crisis could affect the brand's reputation and to enact behaviour or action within the company that examines at the planning stage, the likely impact.

Nine respondents out of 14 believed that there is no evidence that correlates the presence of roadside advertising with accident occurrence, although some believed that the very fact that adverts are meant to attract attention presented a common sense argument that they could lead to accidents. In a simulated study conducted by (Edquist et al., 2011) the presence of outdoor roadside advertising was shown to change drivers' patterns of visual attention and increased the number of errors. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of America, also showed that distraction was a factor in 78% of crashes and 65% of near crashes (Dingus et al., 2006). There is a litany of studies that have been done to determine the negative impact of outdoor roadside advertising and the push back has been the fear of a total ban that has happened in other countries, which could probably be the reason for the conflicted denial from the majority of the industry participants.

The majority of the respondents believed that although there were attempts at self-regulation, it was highly unlikely that it would work and therefore there was a need for authorities to enact laws that would level the playing field and protect the public from the excesses of the industry. The respondents felt that the fierce competition in the industry was fertile ground for cutting corners and engaging in illegal activities that could worsen the externalities of the industry. Collins (2005) argues that just as the law regulates the property industry in that it limits development to certain areas and also their extent, the law should regulate outdoor advertising in terms of positioning of billboards and their formats.

From literature it can be concluded that left to their discretion, advertisers have no inclination towards considering public interest and safety in erecting advertisements (Harker et al., 2001). Although the advertising industry has developed self-regulation bodies, Harker et al. (2001) report that critics have voiced concerns that the purveyors of the art of advertising have been known to be mischievous and therefore, self-regulation is a reaction to stave off government regulation which they consider as interference. The respondents felt that any form of self-regulation could disadvantage them in the competition for the attention of the consumer. The prospect of the risks and issues becoming a crisis for a brand is however a motivation for the advertising industry to incorporate risk assessment into their communication strategies.

6.4 Summary

A summary of the conclusions of the study is as follows:

- Roadside outdoor advertising is a very effective medium of communication and its importance is derived from the ability to reach millions of commuters per day and that it cannot be turned on or off by the audience, which is consistent with literature and therefore accepted.
- Marketing professionals believe that outdoor advertising plays a complementary role to television, radio and the internet based on the advertising spend. This however is in contrast to literature which suggests that outdoor roadside advertising has for decades been at the forefront of advertising as it heralds brand recognition, although the cost has been low.
- This study found that outdoor roadside advertising can negatively affect the social fabric, the economy and the environment, which is consistent with literature and therefore is accepted.

- Prime spots for advertising are busy roads, and close to intersections and urban areas. This is consistent with literature and therefore accepted.
- The interviewed marketing professionals believed that there is no correlation between roadside advertising and accidents. This belief however, is disputed by Traffic Engineering literature on the subject.
- Authorities should enact regulations for outdoor advertising and enforce the regulations as self-regulation was suspected to be ineffective. This is consistent with literature and therefore accepted.
- Adverse effects of outdoor roadside advertising can damage reputation which is accepted.
- Marketing professionals believed that brand reputation would not be affected by claims of accidents caused by billboards because there was no correlation between accidents and roadside advertising. This is not accepted as literature presents evidence to the contrary.

The study shows that there is a link between potential brand reputation risk and issues concerning outdoor roadside advertising and that there is moderate awareness amongst advertising professionals on issues regarding outdoor roadside advertising, particularly hazards posed to the motoring public. In spite of this, there is evidence of reluctance to self-regulate as there is belief that other industry competitors would not adhere to “in principle” agreements which could affect competition.

6.5 Recommendations

In a post-modern society that has access to information highways, it is critical for brand managers to relook the activities of marketing communication and safeguard their brands by carefully scrutinising the projection and association of their brand. It is equally critical for authorities to manage outdoor roadside

advertising space, which will increase the quality of the space and cater for unaccounted externalities.

The literature reviewed highlights risks and issues about outdoor roadside advertising and the potential these could have on brand reputation in a highly connected urban setting (Molina, 2006). The literature reviewed also highlights studies that have been done that linked outdoor roadside advertising and the potential to cause accidents as advertisers compete for the attention of the driver (Edquist et al., 2011). The risk to a brand comes from many directions and different publics, and literature shows that if brand investments do not consider risk and issues, there is a very high potential for crisis which could threaten the organisation involved (Balmer et al., 2009).

The current study established a link between potential brand reputation and issues in outdoor roadside advertising. The study also confirms the potential for brand crisis if issues and risks are not considered during the planning stage of brand investments. The marketing professionals in South Africa represented by the research sample also proposed that tighter regulations be enacted to level the playing field and to protect the public from the excesses of the industry. It is therefore recommended that in order to preserve brand reputation and protect the organisation from crisis, the advertising industry should familiarise itself with the risks and issues around outdoor roadside advertising and incorporate those issues into their marketing and brand management strategies. In a postmodern society that has access to information and mass communication, issues associated with roadside adverts could easily spiral into crisis which could seriously affect the essence of a brand.

The impact of marketing communication activity on brand equity or value is receiving significant attention as a result of changes in international accounting standards relating to reporting of the financial value of brands or intangible assets and therefore it is in the best interests of organisations to protect their brands (Balmer et al., 2009). It is recommended that marketing firms

strengthen their issue and risk identification processes regarding outdoor roadside advertising in order to better manage brand reputation. Public sentiment is becoming ever less tolerant of any appearance of preventable errors and inappropriate practices, especially in areas to do with public safety (Molina, 2006) and so it is critical for firms to deepen their understanding of risks and issues in roadside advertising.

With advances in technology that have seen the increased use of LEDs showing motion pictures, it is recommended that firms find more innovative ways of communicating their brand offerings which do not require added attention of motorists. The introduction of variable message signs that flash information presents new challenges which include effects on the environment, sense of place, distraction to drivers and health (Molina, 2006).

It is recommended that authorities broaden and deepen regulation in the outdoor roadside industry to mitigate the excesses of the industry and to apply such costs to cover for externalities of the industry. The outdoor roadside industry is a very important contributor to the commerce of a country. However, as the industry is highly competitive and has unaccounted externalities, regulation and enforcement is necessary to strengthen the industry and for sustainability (Collins, 2005).

6.6 Suggestions for further research

The study was exploratory in nature and a follow up study would be required on the following:

- The impact of broader and wider regulation on competition in the industry.
- Quantifying externalities in outdoor advertising.

- Bylaws governing outdoor advertising, with the view of strengthening the incorporation of externalities.
- The impact of regulation on outdoor advertising cost structure and market size in comparison to other modes of communication.
- Weighting of the various risks and issues in outdoor roadside advertising that could affect brand reputation and prioritising these in the order of severity.
- The study focused on marketing professionals, and a further study with other professionals could be of value to contrast the findings of this study.
- The effect of heightened awareness on the selection of locations for outdoor roadside advertising.
- The adequacies of SAMOA in addressing issues concerning roadside advertising.
- A comparative study of regulation in outdoor advertising by major municipalities.

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Appendix 1: Research Instrument

Establish awareness of issues in outdoor roadside advertising

1. Why is outdoor roadside advertising an attractive means of reaching customers?
2. Are there any issues you consider as adverse in outdoor roadside advertising?
3. What are some of the risks associated with outdoor roadside advertising?

Determine the awareness of hazards caused by outdoor road side advertising

4. What are some of the prime spots for roadside advertising?
5. Do you ever get complaints about hazards of some of the adverts from motorists or authorities?
6. In your opinion, does outdoor advertising contribute to accidents?

Determine possible risk to brand reputation of not considering issues in outdoor roadside advertising (if issues in outdoor roadside advertising are not considered)

7. Which risks do you consider in outdoor roadside advertising?
8. In your opinion, can issues in outdoor roadside advertising damage brand reputation?
9. In your opinion, if a particular advert caused accidents, would it affect a brand's reputation?

10. Do you think the public could attach a certain brand to the effects of its adverts on motorists?
11. What would happen to a company's reputation if people found out that its adverts have caused so many fatalities over the years?