

Environmental Issues and Bill-Posting as a Pervasive Media Culture in Nigeria

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Indiscriminate bill-postings have become one of the nuisances threatening the ‘health’ and aesthetic credibility of the physical environment in post-colonial Nigerian society. Although the problem is a serious one, it is yet to receive attention from the academia and other concerned authorities in Nigeria. It is within this context that this study examines bill-postings as pervasive media culture, using Edo Central District (ECD) of Edo State, Nigeria as a case study. In doing this, it adopts an evaluative methodology. This is complemented by interviews and random photographic snapshots of posted-bills across the district under examination. This study finds out that the indiscriminately posted-bills are eyesores, which apart from not being aesthetically pleasing, exacerbate the environmental management challenge in the ECD. It also discovers that the problem is a multilayered one, judging from the different kinds of posters that are commonly posted by diverse groups in society. Consequently, this paper asserts that probing the sociological causes and implications of the menace could offer some insights on how to redress the situation. To this end, a number of suggestions are made, with a view to improving the condition of the physical environment in ECD.

Keywords: post-colonial Nigerian society; posters; ECD; government; culture-enhancing symbols; city-beautifying images; physical environment; pervasive media culture

Introduction

There are many media of communication or sharing or exchanging or passing information in contemporary society. In Nigeria, Ibagere (1994) has identified two broad groups, namely, modern media and folk/traditional media. To this we may add the ‘new’ media which are very modern and trendy means of communication. For the purposes of clarity, modern media of communication have been subdivided into the print and electronic media (Tosanwumi & Ekwuazi, 1994; Okoruwa, 2006). While the print media include books, handbills, journals, newspapers, magazines, posters (which in the context of this paper is also referred to as posted-bills or bill-postings), event programme flyers, among others, the electronic media, could be subdivided into the narrowcast media (cinema, satellite transmission, cable TV, video film, etc) and broadcast media (radio and television). However, there is no hair-splitting over these classifications of modern media as different authorities based on different technological criteria have categorised them differently over time. In a similar vein, the traditional media have also been typologised in Nigeria into modes such as the “instrumental, demonstrative, iconographic, extramundane, visual and institutional modes” (Wilson, 1998); “instrumental, demonstrative, iconographic, extramundane, visual, institutional, venue-oriented communication, myths and legends,

names and folktales and proverbs” (Akpabio, 2003). Nonetheless, Ibagere (1994; 2010) collapses the above into “verbal, the non-verbal and esoteric modes”. His classification may have sprung from the fact that advanced technological considerations are not crucial to folk/traditional media typology as they are generally located within what he calls “symbolography” (2010). And, of course, the ‘new’ media which technological advancement has made very attractive and interactive include computers such as the internet, digital video disks (DVDs), iPods, etc (Armstrong-Idachaba, 2010). These various media of communication are actively being put to use in various degrees in different parts of the world, including Nigeria. While the modern and ‘new’ media are commonly used in urban and suburban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, Benin, Ekpoma, Uromi in Nigeria, the traditional media are very much in active use in rural settings across the country, including many areas in Edo Central District (ECD) of Edo State. In any case, all media, whether traditional, modern or ‘new’ media, help to inform, educate, advertise, entertain, mobilize, innovate, socialize, link and survey as the case may be (Dominick, 1996; Adeseye & Ibagere, 1999; Okhakhu & Omoera, 2010). In particular, the print media, especially posters (posted-bills or bill-postings) are a common means of informing, mobilising and educating Nigerians of different economic, social and educational strata as well as cultural, religious and linguistic orientations. In more senses than one, bill-postings have become part and parcel of urban, suburban and rural nuisances that are defacing and reducing the living

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environment to an unsightly sight. It is in an attempt to draw attention to this growing and ugly trend that this paper uses Esan Central District (ECD) of Edo State, Nigeria as a study case of a media culture that has become pervasive as well as dangerous to the 'health' and aesthetic credibility of public infrastructures such as bridges, public schools, hospitals, parks, squares, local government council secretariats as well as private residences. The indiscriminate and reckless manner the bills are posted here and there in the area under study and elsewhere ought to compel government and other concerned authorities to redress the situation but it is only in one or two cases that we have seen this happen in Nigeria. For instance, the maintenance of public infrastructures in Abuja in North-Central Nigeria, which Mallam Nasiru el-Rufai as Federal Capital Territory (FCT) minister pursued with Spartan vigour that earned him the sobriquet 'the bulldozer' while in office some years back. It is however doubtful if the gains of his administration in this direction has not receded because a recent visit to the FCT by the researcher reveals that those things, including the indiscriminate posting of bills that el-Rufai 'bulldozed' out are gradually showing their ugly 'faces' in Abuja, the Nigerian capital city. Perhaps the most consistent case of government paying attention to the issue is found in Calabar, the capital city of Cross River State in South-Southern Nigeria. The present administration there appears to have kept faith with the environmentally friendly policies that Donald Duke championed as a governor some years back and needless to say that the dividends are clear for all to see. Apart from these isolated cases, the nuisance status of bill-postings as well as other environmental challenges in Nigerian villages, towns and cities is crying out to the high heavens for a solution. Besides the defacement of the environment, untidily posted-bills in the long run can contribute to the blocking of natural waterways and constructed drains. This is because most of the bills/posters having been exposed to the elements (rain, sun, etc) for a long time or torn off by one miscreant or the other, get washed away by water and eventually constitute a greater nuisance of heaps of refuse together with processed water sachets commonly called 'pure water', ice cream papers, corn husks, groundnut rinds, popcorn bags and the like, which dot every nook and cranny of cities, towns and villages in the ECD. In fact, the environmental issues facing Nigeria are quite enormous. At one level, noise pollution is captured by the deafening decibels of noise in Nigerian cities and towns where sellers of audio-visuals such as cassettes, video compact disks (VCDs), digital video disks (DVDs), etc, are polluting the environment with so much noise, stripping the towns and cities of their social sanity and making a growing number of Nigerians deaf

without them knowing it. At another level, air pollution and water pollution are epitomized by the indiscriminate gas flaring in the Niger-Delta area, fumes (carbon monoxide) from what Blench & Dendo (2005, p. 26) call *tokunbo* cars (second-hand or used motor vehicles) and other industrial sources as well as oil spillages that have decimated aquatic life across the coastlines of the country. This is a source of worry going by the problems and challenges presently faced in ensuring that urban, suburban and rural areas of Nigeria become functional, liveable, and aesthetically pleasing (Ademiluyi & Dina, 2011). The need to strike a good balance between man's activities and their impact on the physical environment has remained a topical issue among scholars, and other stakeholders alike. The term 'sustainable development' has become a global cliché to describe man's attempt to control and reverse the negative consequences of his domination of the earth. According to Ademiluyi and Dina (2011), the World Conference on Environment Development (WCED) in 1987 defined sustainable development as "the economic and social development that meets the needs of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Such developments involve the orientation of technological, institutional and physical changes to make them consistent with the future human needs as well as that of the present. However, this paper focuses on a little recognized but serious challenge to the environment in contemporary Nigeria. In doing this, it examines the problem of bill-postings as pervasive media culture, using Edo Central District (ECD) of Edo State, Nigeria as a case study. It argues that the indiscriminately posted-bills are eyesores, which are not aesthetically pleasing as far as modern day environmental designing and management are concerned. Therefore, this paper asserts that probing the sociological causes and implications of the menace could offer some insights on how to redress the situation, with a view to improving the condition of the physical environment in ECD.

The Case Study

The ECD is one of the three districts that Edo State is geo-politically divided into in present day South-Southern Nigeria. It is made up of five local government areas (LGAs), namely, Esan-West, Igueben, Esan North-East, Esan South-West and Esan Central (See figures 1 and 2). The inhabitants of these LGAs speak the Esan language, which has also been anglicized as 'Ishan' by the British. Indeed, Esan is one of the dialects of Edo language and the term is also used to designate the people and the territory they occupy (Aluede & Omoera, 2008).

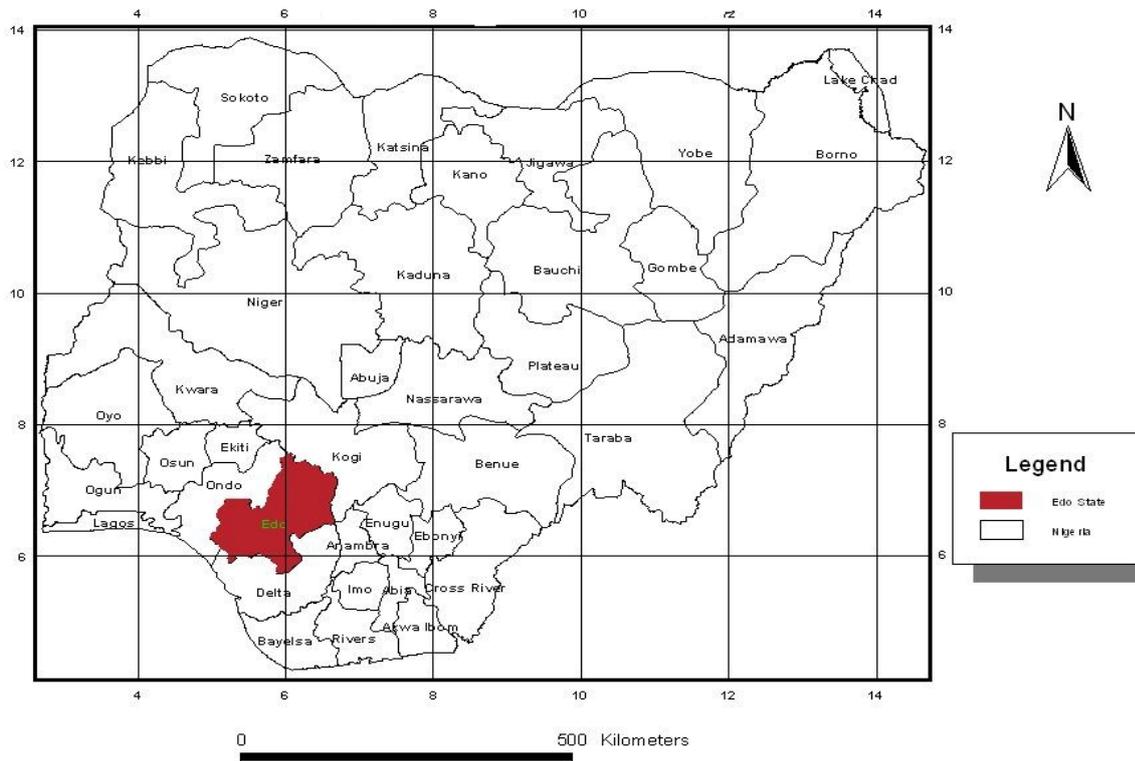


Figure 1 Map of Nigeria showing Edo state.

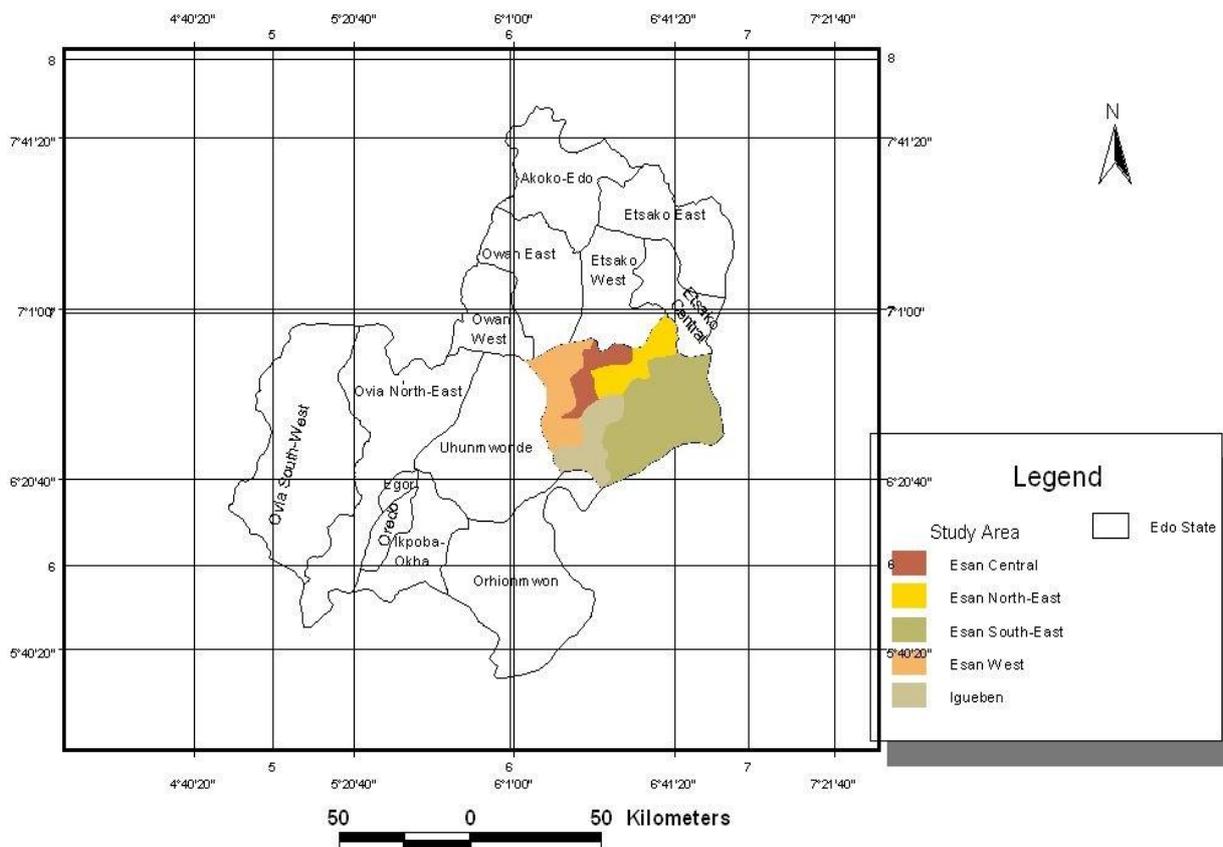


Figure 2. Map of Edo state showing the study area.

Methodology

To achieve the set task this study adopted an evaluative methodology. This was complemented by interviews and random photographic snapshots of indiscriminately posted-bills in the district under examination. Hence, snapshots of public buildings, places and facilities such as Uwen-Dova Primary School, Ukpughele Primary School, Ambrose Alli University, Alli Hall, Anglican Grammar School, Ujoelen, Royal Market Square, Eguare Primary School in Esan-West Local Government Area (LGA); Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, Annunciation College, Irrua Girls Secondary School, Uwenuje Primary School, Idumebo Primary School, Eguare Primary School in Esan-Central LGA; Igueben Local Government Council Secretariat, College of Education, Igueben, Ebelle Commercial Secondary School in Igueben LGA; Esan North-East Council Secretariat, Ogbuje Primary School, Obedu Primary School in Esan North-East LGA; Esan South-East Council Secretariat, in Esan South-East LGA, were taken. Added to these were some private residential buildings and perimeter fencings which were virtually defaced with posters across the district. The whole essence of the random snapshots is to provide a concrete platform for analysing the different kinds of posted-bills under certain categories as a way of putting their pervasiveness in Edo Central District in a critical perspective.

Again, the photographic snapshots provide us with a basis to argue that bill-postings in ECD constitute a set of symbols/images in cultural anthropology which is inconsistent with the sets identified as culture-enhancing symbols and city-beautifying images by Nas, de Groot and Schut (2010). According to them, in cultural anthropology, one of the major contemporary tendencies, which have recently come up, is urban symbolic ecology. It pursues the study of the cultural dimension of the city (including other settings such as towns and villages), oriented towards establishing meaning and ritual in relation to the cultivated surroundings.

In their study, Nas, de Groot and Schut (2010) present a number of case studies from cities such as Jakarta, Cape Town, Tournai, Kortrijk, Kevelaer, Memphis, Leiden, Haarlem, The Hague and Colombo and arranged them according to four symbol bearers, namely material, discursive, iconic and behavioural. In the end, they posited that the symbolic structure of a city/town/village is of great importance for its identity and image. Thus, the cultural symbols/images available in a city/town/village could help beautify it, enhance its culture as well as serve as the foundation for its attraction of tourists and even business men and women, among other well meaning citizens of the world. This paper argues that, the symbols got from the cities/towns/villages in ECD, as represented by scrappily posted-bills, are negative symbol bearers, which in spite of their touted functionality; need to be done away with for the cultural and physical sanity of cities/towns/villages within ECD. Having spotlighted the case study and methodology used in this study the radar of discussion necessarily turns to the identified categories of bill-postings. These are:

Political Posters

These are normally posted by politicians and those seeking political offices at the federal, state or local government levels. The volume usually increases as election time draws near. During periods of electioneering campaigns by various political parties and their candidates all sorts of posters litter everywhere including public places, private properties and other strategic locations where the political aspirants and contestants feel they can get the attention of people. Interestingly, most of these posters contain all sorts of promises which, according to Omoera (2009), “have amounted to building castles in the air in Nigeria”. Here (Figure: 3) are two graphic illustrations to underscore the prevalence of bill-postings of political orientation in Edo Central District of Edo State.



Figure 3. Political posters.

Besides public places such as schools, markets and hospitals these illegal bills are also posted in residential buildings with reckless abandon. An Ekpoma (Esan-West Local Government Area [LGA]) resident, Mrs Roseline Ebo (in an interview with this researcher in 2011) said that “the fear of being beaten will not allow her or any member of her household to accost those who continually post bills in the walls of her residence because politicians see it as a strategic location for reaching out to potential voters through posting of political posters”. She is not alone in this kind of phobia because there is really no enforcement of any law either at the level of Esan-West LGA – Ekpoma municipality or at the Edo State level. And, of course, if she dares to challenge some of these persons she may be given the beating of her life.

Although government agencies/corporate organizations/ private individuals from time to time try to write ‘Please Posting of Bills is Prohibited’ or ‘Post No Bill Here’ in their buildings and other properties, many of these bills are still posted in the night-time under the cover of darkness. Worst, political office holders/seekers, including legislators at the local, state and federal levels in Nigeria who ought to make laws to check some of these menaces even constitute a major block of the problem. It is not uncommon for one to wake up and see a number of posters posted on his/her perimeter fence or building without authorization from the him/her or local authorities. In fact,

political posters constitute the most widespread group of bill-postings in ECD.

Religious Posters

These are posters of religious orientation. In ECD, the Christian faith is predominantly practised when compared to other religions. This view is also held by Isiramen (2006) who asserts that very view people in Ekpoma and indeed in Esan land are Muslims. The African traditional religion (ATR) occupies a rather indeterminate space, which cannot be easily defined but with pockets of adherents and practitioners across ECD. Hence, it is not surprising that virtually all the snapshots surveyed and supplied here (Figure: 4) are Christian related ones. This category of posted-bills usually contains announcements about Christian programmes, events, the need for salvation and evangelism as well as miracles. Pastors and evangelists emboss their photographs, that of their wives and sometimes that of invited /guest pastors for special anointing and ‘yoke’ breaking programmes. It is commonly believed that such programmes and events take the locals (the people) out of religious woods, spiritual poverty and catapult them into material prosperity and spiritual awareness. In terms of pervasiveness, religious posters come second after the political posters in ECD.



Figure 4. Religious posters.



Entertainment Posters

These are posters of entertainment orientation. This category comes third in the ranking of pervasiveness which this study has identified in ECD. Programmes such as musical shows, mobile phone advertorials and talent shows, concerts, campus gigs, among others, fall under this group. Figure 5 is example of a poster with entertainment intent.



Figure 5. Entertainment poster.

Education and Social Cause Posters

These posters mainly treat educational issues as well as social causes such as health, funeral, scholarships, community development and childcare issues. The broad preachments of this category of posters are societal uplift, academic awareness and remembrance of loved ones that

have passed on. Figure 5 are posters that project educational and social causes within ECD. This is the least posted-bills category of posters in ECD. Nevertheless, the prevalence of posters of education/social cause orientation still poses environmental threat to the physical and aesthetic wellbeing of ECD.



Figure 5. Education and social cause posters.

Implications of the Pervasive Bill-Posting Culture in Edo Central District

The ineptitude of local environment and sanitation departments as well as law enforcement agencies has exacerbated the culture of bill-postings by anybody, anywhere and anytime with impunity within the five LGAs under survey. In fact, the pervasiveness is such that if nothing drastic is not urgently done to check these physical environment nuisances, public buildings, school buildings, walls of private buildings and properties, perimeter fencings of electric installations, local council secretariats, among others, in the area under investigation might become permanently defaced and the negative consequences are manifold.

First, it will increase the overhead cost of administering the councils as the money that could have been used for other developmental needs will be committed to remove, renovate and put the buildings and walls in a good shape. Second, a lot of man-hour will be lost trying to restore structures and infrastructures. Third, it will make the cities, towns and villages in Edo Central District look physically unkempt. Fourth, it will worsen the already untidy refuse disposal problem that exists in the five LGAs under investigation

From the data collected, posters of political and religious orientations are the most pervasive in the district. These are followed by entertainment posters while posters of education and social cause

take the backseat in terms of pervasiveness. The content of these bills or posters are not bad symbols, images or communications in themselves, but the way and manner they are posted is environmentally unfriendly and aesthetically and physically reprehensible and ought to be socially condemnable. This is because they are not organised or culture-enhancing in outlook.

While, some persons, both at the public and private levels have tried to inscribe warnings such as 'Post No Bills', 'Bills Are Not Allowed', 'Please Post No Bills Here', etc, as a way of civilly stemming the tide of indiscriminate posting of bills, many instances abound where people who post these bills post new ones even on these civil warnings with impunity. It is largely because of this attitude that this study argues that the wide spread culture of posting bills for informational, educational, electioneering or whatever purposes in ECD are inconsistent with the culture-enhancing symbols, city beautifying images and tourist-attracting historical pictures of modern cities/towns/villages earlier noted by Nas, de Groot and Schut (2010). In fact, Moses Idiakhwa corroborates this assertion when he noted (in an interview with the researcher in 2011) that "in more civilised societies, the placements of posters in public areas are defined in such a way that they do not constitute problem to the environment or community".

Conclusion and Recommendation

In spite of the apparent functionality of the identified categories of posters, there is the need for some kind of reorientation in their placement, application and manner of display in ECD. It is in view of this that this study concludes with the following recommendation, that:

There is the urgent need to enforce existing regulations/bylaws (where they exist) and enact regulations/bylaws (where they do not exist) as a way of clearing Edo Central metropolises and rural settings of the nuisance of indiscriminate bill-postings. Environment centred nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community based organizations (CBOs) and the mainstream media of radio and television must strive to put the issue in the public domain for discussion, mass education/enlightenment and necessary action to make the defacement of public and private buildings in urban and rural centres in Edo Central District and by extension in Nigeria to gradually recede. Any offender caught should be made to offer three to six months community service such as clearing of public drains, disposing off refuse from market places, among others, across Edo Central District of Edo State, Nigeria in lieu of going to the prison or payment.

Local government authorities in the area should make effort to designate locations in public places where individuals and corporate bodies could post their bills for a fee for a given period of time. This could also be an additional source of revenue for local authorities in the Edo Central District of Edo State. Similar studies should be carried out in other parts of Edo State and elsewhere with a view to knowing the sociological implications; finding ways to arrest the trend and make the physical environment safer for all.

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