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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Visual hierarchy, billboard advertising, outdoor advertising, visual communication, graphic design, Gujrat, Pakistan	This study examines the role of visual hierarchy in billboard advertising in Gujrat, Pakistan, with particular attention to how design elements are organized to attract attention and communicate messages effectively. Billboard advertising functions within a limited viewing time, making visual order, readability, and emphasis essential to successful communication. The study aimed to evaluate the use of visual hierarchy in selected billboards by analyzing key elements such as focal point, typography, color contrast, image placement, spacing, layout balance, and message clarity. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining a structured questionnaire, billboard observation checklist, and qualitative responses to provide both numerical and descriptive insight into viewer perception and billboard composition. The findings indicate that viewers strongly value clear focal points, prominent headlines, readable typography, effective contrast, and simple layout in billboard design. However, the analysis also suggests that many billboards are perceived as cluttered, text-heavy, and lacking a clear visual sequence, which reduces communication effectiveness. The study concludes that visual hierarchy is a critical determinant of billboard success and should be treated as a core design principle rather than a secondary aesthetic concern. The research contributes to the fields of visual communication and advertising design by offering a localized evaluation of billboard practices in Gujrat and by highlighting the need for more disciplined, hierarchy-based design strategies in outdoor advertising.
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Introduction

The billboard advertising is one of the most apparent types of external communication since it implants brand messages in common movement paths like roads, crossroads, trade areas and travel

areas. A billboard often only has a few seconds to capture attention, create meaning and leave a trace of memory, unlike the social media, print or long form digital advertising. According to the recent eye-tracking and field-based advertising studies, outdoor advertising is effective in the circumstances of selective and extremely limited attention in which exposure, gaze behavior, and memory are interrelated closely. This means that the design of billboards will be fundamentally different compared to slower media: the message cannot just be made attractive, but immediately structured so that it can be perceived quickly (Madlenak et al., 2023; Schmaelzle et al., 2023). Even in the Pakistani environment, the issue of billboard communication is still regarded as an effective tool of affecting attention and brand response, which proves that outdoor advertisement still has high communicative potential in modern cities (Hasan et al., 2022).

The main element of this fast communication process is the visual hierarchy. Visual hierarchy is the systematic arrangement of visual elements in a manner that viewers can at a glance know which visuals should be seen first, second and third. It is developed by the intentional application of size, contrast, color, spacing, typography, image dominance, proximity and composition. Recent design studies still view visual hierarchy as a principle of visual communication but not a decorative option. According to Saw and Gatzke, visual hierarchy is the foundation of key decisions regarding information display and assists users in processing information of a complicated nature with greater clarity due to the controlled emphasis and layering. Likewise, a 2025 Gestalt-based investigation of Ma reveals that the perception of hierarchy is closely influenced by the structural relationships that include size disparities, propinquity, and layout relations, implying that the visual order is not accidental but a system generated by design choices (Saw & Gatzke, 2024; Ma, 2025). In the case of billboard advertising, this translates to the fact that a headline, image, logo, price or even call to action should not be equal in the eyes of the viewer rather each of these elements should be in its proper perspective in the visual path of the viewer.

This is particularly crucial in billboard design whereby viewing a billboard is usually short, mobile, and distracted. A pedestrian, rider or driver will not read a billboard the way a reader reads a magazine page. The design is subjected to time pressure, environmental noise and rival stimuli of traffic, signs, shops and the surrounding architecture in the eye. Immersive virtual reality and eye-tracking research studies have demonstrated that the retention of the message is varied based on gaze behavior and attentional demands at the moment of viewing the billboard. Similar research on digital billboards also indicates that advertising signs are effective specifically due to the ability to attract attention, but this ability to attract attention may also become overwhelming or distracting in case the visual message is not effectively arranged (Schmaelzle et al., 2023; Sheykhfard et al., 2024). In practice, a billboard with poor hierarchy might include the correct elements but still fail since the viewers are unable to make a decision immediately about the primary message. Thus, the question of billboard effectiveness is not whether or not a billboard is viewed, but whether the visual structure of the billboard leads perception in an effective and obvious sequence.

The other reason why this topic should be subject to scholarly study is that billboard design influences not only the advertising performance but also the aesthetics of the city. Outdoor

advertising is involved in the creation of urban visual culture: it defines the appearance of the streets, the experience of commercial districts and the visual perception of the public space. According to Adam et al., visual comfort and appreciation of the urban streets can be significantly affected by color content and cumulative area of billboard advertising and that the improper regulation of billboard design can cause visual pollution and deteriorate the quality of the environment (Adam et al., 2022). The present study considers this insight significant as it expands the concept of visual hierarchy. Not only does a well-ordered billboard make the advertisers more convincing; it might also contribute to a better visual environment within the urban environment. On the other hand, crammed compositions, harsh juxtapositions, exaggerated text blocks and conflicting focal points may undermine the clarity of message besides contributing to visual clutter in the urban space. In this way, the research on visual hierarchy in billboards connects the graphic design, the efficacy of advertising, and the visual experience in the city to a single analysis.

The case of Gujrat, Pakistan provides a valuable, under-researched, context within the context of this wider debate. Being a living city-business neighborhood, Gujrat has billboards that target mixed audiences with messages about retail, education, health, telecom, real-estate, political, and service-oriented messages. However, the quality of design of such billboards is seldom considered systematically based on the principles of hierarchy, composition, and visual organization. The most recent Pakistan-based study that identified this topic was on attentiveness of billboards using strategic ambiguity and tagline decoding in Karachi, where message design could be used to affect consumer attention, yet it lacked a visual audit of hierarchy in billboard composition itself (Hasan et al., 2022). This leaves a clear gap of a study that shifts off general advertising effect to formal visual analysis. That is, the question is not merely that billboards do attract attention but how they combine images, text, color, contrast and layout to focus attention meaningfully in a particular local context. Gujrat thus offers a suitable location to investigate the premise of billboard design as per the principles of visual order or that visual clutter undermines the effectiveness of communication.

In this context, the present study aims to evaluate visual hierarchy in billboard advertising in Gujrat, Pakistan, by examining how visual elements are organized to guide viewer attention and communicate messages effectively. More specifically, the study seeks to identify the major design elements used in selected billboards; to analyze how size, color, contrast, typography, image placement, spacing, and composition contribute to visual hierarchy; to assess whether the selected billboards establish a clear focal sequence for viewers; and to highlight the major strengths and weaknesses of billboard design practices in the local urban environment. Through this focus, the study intends to contribute not only to advertising research but also to visual communication and design practice by showing how the art of visual order operates, or fails to operate, in real billboard settings in Gujrat.

Literature Review

Visual Hierarchy as a Core Principle of Visual Communication

Visual hierarchy is commonly known as the systematic organization of design components in terms of significance to allow viewers to process the information in a premeditated order. The current research still tends to view hierarchy as a primary principle and not a secondary style issue. According to Saw et al. (2024), the visual hierarchy is the basis of choices regarding the way information is displayed and how the user navigates through information, whereas Ma et al. (2025) demonstrate that the visual hierarchy can be heavily influenced by the perceptual organization, namely, by size, spacing, proximity, and similarity. The significance of these studies to the research of billboards is that it validates the fact that the viewer does not internalize all the visual information at the same time or rate. Rather, perception is determined by highlighting. This can be applied to outdoor advertising, where a billboard is only effective when it is designed in such a way that the viewer can instantly identify the strongest message, details, and brand name in a recognizable progression. The absence or a weak hierarchy does not mean that the design should not be colorful or visually cluttered, it is just more difficult to decode. In such a way, the literature locates visual hierarchy as the process that transforms visual form into the communicative sense.

Elements that Construct Visual Hierarchy in Advertising Design

The literature reveals that there are a number of recurrent factors that influence visual hierarchy in advertising: size, contrast, typography, color, spacing, image placement and layout structure. Saw et al. (2024) specifically indicate that reflecting information importance can be done by assigning size, color, and contrast, whereas Ma et al. (2025) reveal that proximity and similarity influence the ways in which viewers group and rank visual information. In advertising, typography is of particular significance since in many cases the main verbal message is delivered by the headlines. Klinke et al. (2024) discovered that letter capitalization in advertising headlines affects legibility and readability, which is particularly important when designing billboards where the reading time is very limited. Their contribution implies that the emphasis in typography should be approached in a strategic, instead of a mechanical manner. Similarly, Jin et al. (2025) document that the high-contrast and text-heavy design may slow down the visual flow and increase mental load, whereas the visually balanced design enhances the legibility and decreases cognitive load. Collectively, these works indicate that visual hierarchy is not the consequence of a single element; rather, it is the result of the joint interaction of formal variables. In the case of billboard advertising, this means that effective design must be based on balancing image and text, controlling contrast, and making sure that the most essential message is brought out in a manner that is visually dominant to the viewer, but not overpowering.

Billboard Advertising, Attention, and Rapid Information Processing

One of the key themes of current literature is that billboard advertising must act in circumstances of discontinuous and time-limited attention. Billboards are normally seen in people on the move through a traffic or a crowd unlike the print or digital advertisements that might enable people to study them longer. With VR and eye-tracking, Schmälzle et al. (2023) revealed that exposure to message, gaze behavior, and subsequent memory are correlated, and that incidental memory of

billboard messages varies with visual engagement of viewers going past them. Madlenak et al. (2023) also assessed eye-tracking and A/B testing to examine the outdoor advertisement and concluded that objective attention measurements could be used to study real-world driver perception, not self-reported. The value of this mass of work is that it transforms billboard research into a state of assumption to a quantifiable visual behavior. It helps sustain the notion that attention is not ensured by exposure per se, but the ad has to arrange itself in a manner that draws the eye at a quick rate and to keep the eye long enough to get the message across. When it comes to billboard advertising, hierarchy, in turn, is strongly related to the communicative success: the more obvious the visual route, the more likely that the viewer will notice, comprehend, and retain the message.

Visual Order, Legibility, and Urban Visual Quality

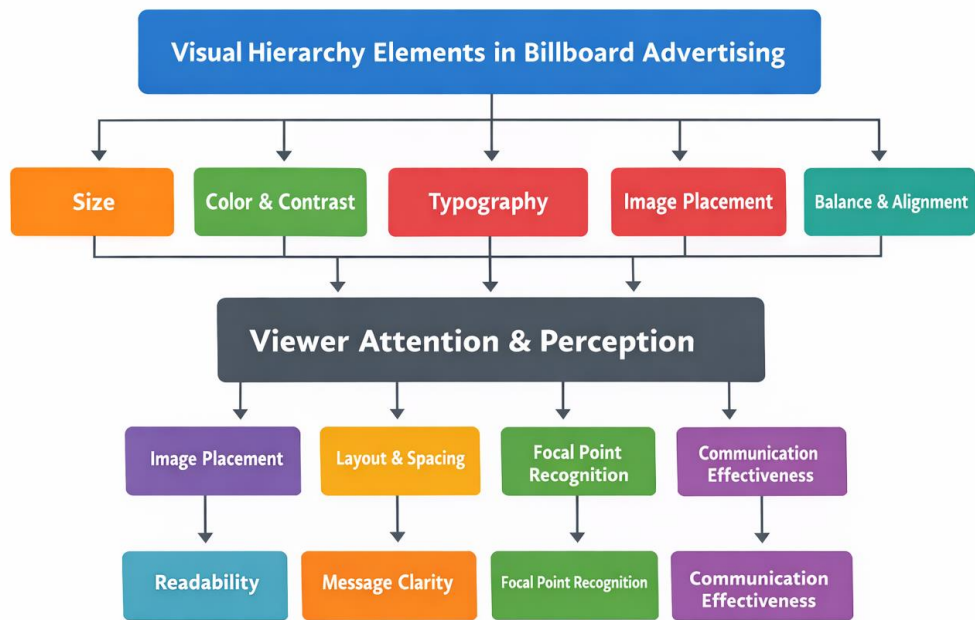
Recent studies also relate billboard design to the overall visual aspect of the urban landscape. Adam et al. (2022) revealed a significant correlation between color content, cumulative billboard area, and appreciation of urban images by the citizens, thus, it is proposed that the design of billboards is not a marketing problem but also a question of visual comfort. Their research shows that a huge amount or improperly controlled visual stimuli could lead to less appreciation of urban settings by people. Jin et al. (2025) continue this line of reasoning, stating that outdoor advertisements influence the visual identity of cities and that inadequately designed ads may also be the cause of visual pollution and cognitive overload. Notably, their eye-tracking results indicate that the complexity of the text, the hierarchy of information, colors, and spatial arrangements influence attention and cognitive load. The presented findings directly apply to the current study as they put billboard hierarchy into the perspective of a communication issue and an environmental design issue. An advertisement could be ineffective due to the excessive number of competing elements on a billboard, but could also undermine the integrity of the urban environment. The literature thus aids in the assessment of billboards as not merely detached commercial entities but as visual apparatuses embedded in the urban experience of the masses.

Billboard Advertising Research and the Local Gap

The most recent Pakistan-based source that can be found on the topic is the article by Hasan et al. (2022), who investigated the effects of strategic ambiguity in billboard taglines on consumer attention in Karachi. The usefulness of that study is that it proves the relevance of billboard advertising still in Pakistan and that attention is one of the key results in billboard effectiveness. Yet, it is primarily concerned with ambiguity, attitude, perception, and interpretation related to the brand as opposed to the formal visual hierarchy of the billboard composition per se. That is, it helps in the realization of the attention of the billboard, yet it fails to give an elaborate visual-design analysis on how size, typography, color, space, focus, and image-text interaction work in local billboard practice. This indicates a significant gap to the current study that can be filled when the article is read alongside the global body of literature on hierarchy, legibility, and eye-tracked attention. City specific design analysis of whether or not the billboards in the city of Gujrat, Pakistan are in a visual order that allows quick understanding is required. The current study thus

extends the recent literature by shifting the attention of advertising in general, to a specific analysis of visual hierarchy in real billboard designs. This renders the study not only applicable to the theory of visual communications, but also to local design practice in Pakistan.

Framework



Research Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This research is based on mixed-method research due to the fact that the issue of visual hierarchy in billboard advertisement needs structured visual analysis and interpretive knowledge. An integrated-methodology design is appropriate in situations where one methodology fails to adequately describe a complex communication phenomenon, in particular one that involves measurable visual characteristics and interpretation that is audience-oriented. The quantitative component in this study assists in determining the prevalence and prevalence of the visual components like typography, color contrast, image size, spacing and focal point whereas the qualitative component aids in clarifying the interaction of these components towards establishing visual order and clarity in the message. Through this, the methodology is aimed at not merely

describing the contents of billboards but also assessing the effectiveness of the communication of billboards in a real city environment. The latest literature on methodology advocates the use of content analysis together with other approaches since the combination will enhance the interpretation process and enhance the explanatory quality of communication studies (Castro et al., 2022).

Population and Sampling

This study will be based on the population of billboard advertisements that will be placed in key commercial and open places in Gujrat, Pakistan. The research does not focus on the study of all billboards in the city; therefore, purposive sampling technique is employed. The purposive sampling is suitable, as it enables the researcher to take cases purposely that are closely related to the research objectives. The choice of the billboards in this research should be large-size advertisements in the open space that should be conspicuous, use both verbal and visual elements of design, and reflect a range of advertising categories, including education, retail, health, real estate, food, and services. About 30 to 40 billboards are a good sample size to conduct a thorough visual analysis at the undergraduate research level. The recent methodological literature refers to purposive sampling as one of the most popular techniques in the qualitative inquiry, especially when the researcher requires cases rich in information that can best explain the phenomenon under the investigation (Ahmad and Wilkins, 2025; Czernek-Marszaalek and McCabe, 2024).

Data Collection Instruments

A visual analysis checklist based on the works on visual hierarchy and advertising design will be the main tool of this study. This checklist is applied to analyze every chosen billboard based on the most important variables like headline size, typography style, color contrast, image dominance, placement of logo or brand name, spacing, alignment, focal point, readability, as well as the general compositional balance. Such indicators enable the researcher to critically consider the information in the billboard in a systematic manner of importance. Besides the checklist the research can also contain a brief viewer-Response questionnaire to gather supportive information regarding the members of the population on which aspects of the billboard they are initially drawn to and whether they can easily grasp the overall message. Data with the help of questionnaires are valuable in the situations when the researcher aims at correlating formal design analysis and the perception of the viewer. The most recent methodological advice is that questionnaires should be well-calibrated to the context, structured well and to make sure of validity, reliability and a minimum level of bias (Koo & Yang, 2025).

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data will be gathered by direct observation in the field and taking photographs of the chosen billboards in Gujrat. The researcher will access major roads, commercial markets, intersections, and other places with high traffic in the city to get qualified samples of billboards. All

the billboards will be photographed and coded with the visual analysis checklist. In case of a questionnaire, the respondents will be sampled among the viewers in the surrounding open places and will be questioned on readability, recognition of focal points and clarity of messages in brief. This two-stage process enables the study to compare the formal presentation of the billboard with the perceived billboard by the audience. The combination of the visual content analysis and response-based data is methodologically justified due to the fact that the communication studies are more and more inclined to the integration of content analysis and other complementary methods to comprehend better the form of media and its possible impact (Castro et al., 2022).

Data Analysis Technique

The data gathered will be analyzed in a descriptive and interpretive manner. To begin with, the data of the billboard checklist will be classified into categories and summarized in frequencies, percentages, and comparative observations. It will assist in determining a recurring design pattern, including the possibility of oversized text, high image dominance, inadequate spacing, or ineffective contrast, and so on, in billboards. Second, the researcher will carry out qualitative research of the chosen billboard examples in an attempt to elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of visual hierarchy. In case of gathering the questionnaire data, the simple descriptive statistics will be applied in order to summarize the viewer responses. Combining these types of analysis will enable the research to make general conclusions regarding the quality of billboard design in Gujrat. The literature of the survey methodology also mentions that the quality of findings in the form of questionnaires will not only depend on the number of responses but also on the quality of the questionnaire design, its correspondence to the appropriateness of responses, and the transparency of interpretation (Holtom et al., 2022).

Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

The checklist items will be based on the latest literature on visual hierarchy, readability and communication design in order to enhance the validity. Before actual data collection, a pilot review of some billboards can be held to narrow down on the categories of the checklist and minimize ambiguity. In the event that a questionnaire is employed, the questions must be brief, neutral, and well phrased in a way that will allow respondents to respond on them as fast and accurately as possible. Consistent coding criteria of all billboard samples will be used to support reliability. The study is not associated with much risk ethically since it primarily deals with advertisements in the open areas. But when the viewers responses are sought, then it must be voluntary, informed consent must be taken and the respondent must not be identified. Recent studies involving questionnaire development stress that reliability and validity are context-specific and that pilot testing, expert scrutiny, and effective reporting are required to yield credible research results (Koo & Yang, 2025).

Results

Quantitative Results

In the analysis of the quantitative stage, 60 questionnaire answers were taken into account. The questionnaire was used to gauge the perception of visual hierarchy of billboard advertisements in Gujrat, Pakistan. The review included respondent profile as well as exposure to billboard settings, descriptive statistics of items, subscale means, and general interpretation of billboard visual hierarchy.

Table 4.1: Demographic profile of respondents (n = 60)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37	61.7
	Female	20	33.3
	Prefer not to say	3	5.0
Age Group	18–25	27	45.0
	26–35	17	28.3
	36–45	12	20.0
	46 and above	4	6.7
Education	Bachelor's	29	48.3
	Master's	18	30.0
	Intermediate	9	15.0
	Other	4	6.7
Occupation	Employed	31	51.7
	Student	14	23.3
	Businessperson	10	16.7
	Homemaker	5	8.3

Table 4.1 indicates that most of the respondents were male (61.7%), with 33.3% being female. Regarding age, 1825 years (45.0%), 2635 (28.3) years formed the largest groups, which means that the sample was predominantly made of younger adults. In the case of education, the Bachelor degree holders (48.3) were the highest number then Master degree holders (30.0). Occupationally, over fifty percent of the respondents were working individuals (51.7%), with 23.3% being students. In general, the sample represents a rather educated and urbanized population of respondents, which is appropriate to assess the billboard design and visual presentation in an urban setting.

Table 4.2: Respondents' exposure to billboard environments (n = 60)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Travel frequency in billboard-populated areas	Very often	20	33.3
	Often	15	25.0

Frequency of noticing billboard advertisements	Sometimes	13	21.7
	Rarely	11	18.3
	Never	1	1.7
	Very often	18	30.0
	Often	19	31.7
	Sometimes	15	25.0
	Rarely	4	6.7
	Never	4	6.7

Table 4.2 indicates that most of the respondents were male (61.7%), with 33.3% being female. Regarding age, 1825 years (45.0%), 2635 (28.3) years formed the largest groups, which means that the sample was predominantly made of younger adults. In the case of education, the Bachelor degree holders (48.3) were the highest number then Master degree holders (30.0). Occupationally, over fifty percent of the respondents were working individuals (51.7%), with 23.3% being students. In general, the sample represents a rather educated and urbanized population of respondents, which is appropriate to assess the billboard design and visual presentation in an urban setting.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics for attention/focal point and typography/readability items

Code	Item (short form)	Mean	SD	Agree %
Q7	Most important element should appear first	4.07	0.86	70.0
Q8	One main visual element is noticed first	3.93	0.78	70.0
Q9	Too many competing elements become confusing	4.22	0.69	85.0
Q10	Clear focal point improves understanding	4.03	0.71	80.0
Q11	Large and bold text improves readability	4.02	0.81	71.7
Q12	Headline should be most noticeable text	4.23	0.59	91.7
Q13	Too much written text reduces effectiveness	4.03	0.78	75.0
Q14	Simple and clear font improves understanding	4.00	0.76	75.0

Table 4.3 shows that the basic visual hierarchy principles have a solid support. The maximum in this part was that of Q12 ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.59$) which indicated that the respondents were firm in their belief that the most salient text item on a billboard should be the headline. On the same note, Q9 ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.69$) shows that there is a lot of agreement that there are too many competing elements that cause confusion. This result is significant as it directly contributes to the notion that visual hierarchy is anchored on controlled emphasis instead of clutter.

Q7, Q10, Q11, Q13 and Q14 values were all higher than 4.00 indicating that there was a consistent positive perception of design hierarchy, readability, and typographic clarity. The general consensus of the respondents was that a billboard must be able to convey its primary focal point instantly, and that big text and plain fonts are beneficial in enhancing readability. These results suggest that viewers not only know about the quality of billboard designs, but also perceive the effects of textual prominence and focal sequencing on rapid comprehension.

Table 4.4: Descriptive statistics for color/contrast and image/layout items

Code	Item (short form)	Mean	SD	Agree %
Q15	Strong color contrast attracts attention quickly	4.33	0.60	93.3
Q16	Poor color combinations reduce readability	4.00	0.84	75.0
Q17	Color guides the viewer's eye	4.12	0.72	80.0
Q18	Bright but balanced colors improve effectiveness	3.98	0.72	73.3
Q19	Images help viewers understand faster	4.08	0.74	76.7
Q20	Placement of text and images affects attractiveness	4.07	0.86	73.3
Q21	Balanced layout and spacing improve clarity	3.90	0.86	68.3
Q22	Crowded composition reduces effectiveness	4.05	0.75	81.7

As Table 4.4 indicates, the respondents placed a lot of significance on the variables of color, contrast, and layout in billboard design. The largest mean in the whole questionnaire was on Q15 ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.60$) meaning that the respondents very strongly agreed that strong color contrast draws attention fast. This implies that one of the most impactful perceived tools in billboard communication is the color contrast. Also, the Q17 ($M=4.12$) and Q19 ($M=4.08$) display that the respondents believed that color and imagery are useful in directing the attention of the viewer and assisting them in quickly understanding the message.

Q21 ($M = 3.90$) has the lowest mean in this part but, nonetheless, it is a positive number, which means that the respondents were broadly consistent in their beliefs that balanced layout and spacing enhance clarity. Similarly, Q22 ($M = 4.05$) supports the idea that visual crowding is commonly viewed as detrimental to the effectiveness of billboards. Combined, the findings indicate that respondents relate effective billboard communication with layouts that are visually controlled, high contrast, and significant placement of images.

Table 4.5: Descriptive statistics for communication effectiveness items

Code	Item (short form)	Mean	SD	Agree %
Q23	A well-designed billboard communicates in a few seconds	3.87	0.75	71.7
Q24	Visual hierarchy helps viewers understand more quickly	4.22	0.64	88.3
Q25	Billboards in Gujrat generally use visual hierarchy effectively	2.68	0.83	15.0
Q26	Better visual order increases interest in the message	4.20	0.71	83.3

One of the most important patterns in the quantitative analysis is presented in Table 4.5. The respondents highly rated the conceptual value of visual hierarchy reflected in Q24 ($M = 4.22$) and Q26 ($M = 4.20$). The findings suggest that the viewers have a clear perception that visual hierarchy enhances fast comprehension as well as fascination in the message advertised. Similarly, Q23 ($M = 3.87$) implies that participants were largely agreeable to the fact that an effective billboard can be effective in communicating in a matter of a few seconds.

Nonetheless, Q25 ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.83$) is the lowest mean in the whole questionnaire. Billboards in Gujrat generally apply visual hierarchy effectively were only agreed upon by 15.0% of the respondents with a high percentage remaining neutral or disagreeing. This finding is very important as it demonstrates that there is a significant gap between what the respondents know effective billboard design should be like and what they perceive is present in the immediate environment. That is, the participants seem to value visual hierarchy as a concept, yet do not think that it is always implemented in the billboard advertising of Gujrat.

Table 4.6: Subscale means, standard deviations, rank, and interpretation

Subscale	Mean	SD	Rank	Interpretation
Communication Effectiveness	3.74	0.40	1	High
Color & Contrast	3.61	0.40	2	High
Overall Visual Hierarchy Mean	3.57	0.16	3	High
Typography & Readability	3.55	0.39	4	High
Image, Layout & Composition	3.50	0.35	5	High
Attention & Focal Point	3.45	0.38	6	High

Table 4.6 reveals that all the major dimensions of billboard visual hierarchy had the mean values of high range and this indicates that there was an overall positive orientation of a respondent to the importance of visual hierarchy in advertising. Communication Effectiveness ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.40$) was ranked as the highest, which implies that the respondents have a strong linkage of good visual order with communication that is quicker and more efficient. Color and Contrast ($M = 3.61$) was ranked as the second-highest dimension, which supports the previous item-level results that color contrast is perceived to be an important billboard element.

The lowest subscale mean was Attention and Focal Point ($M = 3.45$) which is still in the high category. This indicates that even though respondents found clarity of focus points to be important, they could have found a little more discrepancy between the way dominance and attention sequencing are managed in real-life billboard design. The mean visual hierarchy ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.16$) shows that the sample, in general, had a positive attitude towards the role of visual hierarchy, which cannot be misconstrued to imply the same degree of satisfaction with the actual local practice.

Table 4.7: Overall level of perceived visual hierarchy in billboard advertising

Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	0	0.0
Moderate	10	16.7
High	50	83.3
Very High	0	0.0

The results of the study in Table 4.7 indicate that the majority of the respondents (83.3) were in the high category of overall visual hierarchy perception, with the remaining 16.7% in the moderate range. None of the respondents were in the low or very high categories. This trend indicates that the respondents were primarily very aware of the significance of hierarchy-related design aspects. Concurrently, the lack of a very strong category could be a sign of some hesitation in their overall assessment, which once again coincides with the poorer performance on the perceived real-world use of visual hierarchy in Gujrat.

Overall Quantitative Summary

The quantitative results using the dataset illustrate three significant trends. To begin with, the respondents showed a good grasp of the principles of the visual effectiveness of billboard advertising, namely the prominence of headlines, clear focal points, high color contrast, restrained text volume, and balance. Second, communication effectiveness and color/contrast got the highest scores, which implies that the visual order is viewed by the respondents as the tool of quick information delivery and attention-grabbing. Third, though this conceptual awareness is strong, there was a significantly weaker assessment of the statement that billboards in Gujrat tend to make effective use of visual hierarchy. This indicates that the local billboard practice might not be entirely fulfilling the expectation of the viewer regarding the clarity of the design, visual organization and prioritization of the message given by the billboard, and that its practical application in Gujrat may still be inconsistent or inadequate. This quantitative trend gives a solid basis to the qualitative results section where the observation checklist and interviews may clarify the reasons why the viewers find some weaknesses in designing the local billboards.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data were drawn from three sources: open-ended questionnaire responses, billboard observation checklist notes, and semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the qualitative phase was to gain deeper insight into how viewers and observers perceive visual hierarchy in billboard advertising in Gujrat, Pakistan. After reviewing the responses, the data were organized into five major themes and related sub-themes.

Table 4.8: Summary of qualitative themes and sub-themes

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Visual Attention and Focal Point	Image dominance; headline prominence; unclear focal sequence
Typography and Readability	Large text improves readability; small text reduces comprehension; excessive wording weakens impact
Color and Contrast	Strong contrast attracts attention; weak contrast reduces visibility
Layout, Balance, and Clutter	Balanced spacing improves clarity; crowded composition creates confusion; weak alignment affects order
Message Clarity and Communication Effectiveness	Simple messages communicate faster; too many elements weaken understanding; unclear call-to-action reduces impact

As indicated in table 4.8, the qualitative results were centered on repetitive issues pertaining to visual dominance, readability, contrast, layout organization and clarity of communication. These themes were present throughout the three qualitative tools and this indicates that the respondents, interviewees and the observational data were also indicating the same design problems in billboard advertising.

Theme 1: Visual Attention and Focal Point

The significance of visual attention and focal point was one of the most powerful themes that appeared after the results of the qualitative data. The participants kept on indicating that the usefulness of a billboard is dependent on whether it directly causes the eye of the viewer to focus on a single prominent aspect or not. Mostly, the first thing that was noticed by respondents was the main image or a big headline. This implies that viewers anticipate a billboard to create a visual point of entry instead of focusing on all the elements equally.

Sub-theme 1.1: Image dominance

A number of respondents mentioned that the image is typically the most attention-grabbing factor on a billboard. Participants in a number of questionnaire answers justified that a big image captures attention more than text since it can be more easily processed at a distance.

"I mostly notice the picture first because it is bigger and easier to understand quickly."

"If the image is strong, I look at the billboard, but if the picture is weak, I ignore it."

These reactions imply that image dominance is an important factor in outdoor advertising particularly in a setting where exposure duration is brief. It was also observed during observation that billboards that had a good focal image tended to be more effective aesthetically as opposed to those that used much text.

Sub-theme 1.2: Headline prominence

Images were often cited as the initial visual stimulus, but most respondents also indicated the significance of a big and bold headline. Some viewers elaborated that after the image appeals to them, the second most crucial aspect of the viewing is the headline.

"I notice the image first, then the main heading, and after that I try to understand the rest."

"The headline should be bold and clear, otherwise the billboard loses its purpose."

This trend indicates that the viewers anticipate the billboards to be hierarchical whereby the image and headline complement each other, as opposed to competing against one another.

Sub-theme 1.3: Unclear focal sequence

One time statement in the qualitative responses is that most billboards do not set a clear focal order. The respondents tended to refer to local billboard designs as having too much visual clutter and no clear point of entry on the eye.

"Sometimes everything looks important at the same time, so I do not know where to look first."

This means that lack of controlled visual sequencing may be one of the key weaknesses in the billboard design. Instead of leading the eye through the image to the headline to the brand message, there are billboards that seem to all be positioned at the same time, thus making them less clear.

Theme 2: Typography and Readability

Typography and readability was another key theme. The point that a billboard can easily and quickly be read in a distance was repeatedly highlighted by the respondents as the determining factor of the success of a billboard.

Sub-theme 2.1: Large text improves readability

Large and bold text was reported by many participants to enhance effectiveness of billboard communication. This was particularly with headlines, slogans and key message lines.

"If the letters are large and simple, I can understand the message immediately."

"Big text helps because people do not have time to read slowly on the road."

Such remarks indicate that typography is not just a matter of design; it directly influences the speed of communication and delivery of messages.

Sub-theme 2.2: Small text reduces comprehension

Meanwhile, the respondents were very critical of the use of small texts in billboard advertisements. They observed that the font size can be too small such that the billboard becomes visually irrelevant despite its appealing design.

"If the text is too small, I ignore the billboard even when the image looks good."

This suggests that readability is a basic requirement of billboard design. A billboard that cannot be read quickly may fail regardless of its use of color or imagery.

Sub-theme 2.3: Excessive wording weakens impact

A further sub-theme was the problem of **too much written content**. Participants often felt that local billboards include more information than viewers can absorb in a few seconds.

“Some billboards try to tell everything at once, and then nothing becomes clear.”

This was also confirmed by the observation checklist where a couple of billboard notes talked about text heavy layouts and a poor differentiation between primary and secondary information. This implies that typography should collaborate with content diminution. A good billboard hierarchy should not only have readable text, but also limited and prioritized text.

Theme 3: Color and Contrast

The third major theme was **color and contrast**, which participants saw as essential for visibility, attention, and clarity.

Sub-theme 3.1: Strong contrast attracts attention

Many respondents stated that contrast helps billboards stand out and improves the visibility of the message. Strong contrast between text and background was especially valued.

“Bright contrast makes the billboard more visible, especially from far away.”

“If the color difference is strong, I can read the words more easily.”

These statements suggest that contrast acts as both an attention device and a readability tool. In visual hierarchy terms, contrast helps determine what appears more prominent and what recedes.

Sub-theme 3.2: Weak contrast reduces visibility

A very common criticism was that poor color combination reduces readability and weakens the billboard's visual impact.

“Sometimes the text and background are too similar, so the words disappear.”

“Some billboards are colorful but still hard to read because the contrast is weak.”

This means that it is not sufficient to be just color. The respondents differentiated between the use of bright color and the use of effective contrast, which implied that the quality of the billboard is based on the control of color rather than the amount of color applied.

Theme 4: Layout, Balance, and Clutter

A fourth predominant theme was related to the layout organization, especially balance, spacing, and clutter. Both the observation notes and the responses given by the interviewees were great contributors to this theme.

Sub-theme 4.1: Balanced spacing improves clarity

Effective billboards were usually characterized by participants as being visually calm, balanced, and easy to process.

"The best billboards are the ones with enough empty space and one clear layout."

"When the design is balanced, it feels easier to understand."

This suggests that viewers do not only respond to what is included in the billboard, but also to how elements are spaced and arranged.

Sub-theme 4.2: Crowded composition creates confusion

One of the most repeated negative comments was that many billboards appear too crowded.

"Most billboards are full of too many things, and that makes them confusing."

Observation notes also frequently mentioned crowded layout, too many competing elements, and weak spacing. This suggests that clutter is one of the clearest threats to visual hierarchy in billboard advertising.

Sub-theme 4.3: Weak alignment affects visual order

Some responses also pointed indirectly to alignment problems, where logos, text blocks, and images do not appear properly organized.

"Sometimes the design looks messy, like everything was added without proper order."

This indicates that visual hierarchy is also influenced by structural discipline. Poor alignment can make even a simple design appear unorganized.

Theme 5: Message Clarity and Communication Effectiveness

The final theme focused on the overall relationship between visual hierarchy and billboard communication effectiveness.

Sub-theme 5.1: Simple messages communicate faster

Participants consistently favored billboards that communicate a single clear message.

"The best billboard is the one that tells one thing clearly and quickly."

"One image, one headline, and one message is enough."

These views suggest that simplicity supports not only attractiveness, but also communication efficiency.

Sub-theme 5.2: Too many elements weaken understanding

Many participants felt that when a billboard contains too many visual or verbal elements, the message becomes diluted.

"If there is too much information, I stop trying to understand it."

This reflects a key principle of visual hierarchy: communication becomes weaker when emphasis is divided across too many competing parts.

Sub-theme 5.3: Unclear call-to-action reduces impact

A few participants also suggested that some billboards look visually appealing but still fail to communicate what action the viewer should take.

"Sometimes the design looks good, but I still do not understand what they want me to do."

This is an important finding because it shows that visual strength alone is not enough; the message must also reach completion.

Overall Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

Qualitative results indicate that respondents believe that the successful billboard advertising is connected to the presence of definite focal points, powerful images, readable fonts, good contrast, balanced composition, and straightforward message presentation. In all three qualitative data, similar issues were observed: visual clutter, low contrast, excessive text, ineffective spacing, and ambiguous arrangement of messages. These results imply that it is not the lack of design elements in billboard advertising in Gujrat but the inappropriateness of the visual prioritization of the elements.

That is, most billboards seem to have all the elements (image, text, logo, color, and promotional content) that they need, but fail to arrange them in a truly useful visual hierarchy. Consequently,

the viewers might pay attention to the billboard, and they might not receive its message in a flowing and wholesome way. This qualitative data is a great contribution to the overall thesis of the research that visual hierarchy is one primary factor in determining the effectiveness of billboards, and that the lack of any uniform use of visual hierarchy can diminish the communicative effectiveness of billboard advertising in Gujrat, Pakistan.

Discussion

This study was aimed at assessing visual hierarchy in billboard advertising in Gujrat, Pakistan, the way viewers perceive billboard design and the way elements are organized in billboards in real life. Combined, the results of the research indicate that visual hierarchy is a key element of billboard effectiveness. The quantitative and qualitative findings lead to the same overall conclusion: audiences have a clear idea of the significance of focal point, legible typography, vivid color contrast, well-balanced layout, and simplified message structure, but they do not think those are always implemented in local billboard advertising. This discussion brings out the way the findings can respond to the study objectives and the implication on the practice of billboard design in Gujrat.

The quantitative outcomes demonstrated that the main postulates of visual hierarchy were highly accepted by the respondents. The mean scores of items concerning headline prominence, clear focal point, strong contrast and less clutter are high, which means that viewers prefer the design of billboards that convey messages in a fast and direct way. Specifically, respondents largely concurred that visual hierarchy was beneficial in making the audience comprehend billboard messages faster and that higher visual hierarchy enhances curiosity in the ad. These findings substantiate the argument in the literature that billboard communication requires rapid information processing, in which an attention should be captured and directed within a very small amount of time. Because of the time constraint and the movement in which the billboard advertisement is displayed, the design becomes more relevant than the decorative value. The numerical results thus confirm the viewers to appreciate order, emphasis, and visual control in billboard design.

Meanwhile, among the most important quantitative results was the fact that the statement which said that the visual hierarchy is usually effective in billboards in Gujrat was rated rather low by the respondents. This demonstrates an evident disparity between the knowledge of the audience on good billboard design and a perception of the local practice. In plain words, the respondents are aware of the way an effective billboard should appear, yet they do not believe that the majority of the billboards that are currently present in Gujrat correspond to the specified criteria. This result is particularly significant in that it turns the study into a less theoretical discourse about design principles and more of a local issue. It indicates that visual hierarchy is not just an abstract design notion, but a practical problem, which influences the communicative value of billboard advertising in the city.

This trend is elaborated and elaborated in the qualitative results. By responding to open-ended questions, taking notes during observations, and interview evidence, a number of recurrent themes were identified, such as image prominence, headline prominence, readability, contrast, clutter, and message clarity. People frequently said that what they notice first is the picture or big headline, which confirms the point that billboards need to have one prominent point of entry. Nevertheless, they also criticized billboards many times that they contained excessive text, poor contrast, overcrowded layouts, and focal sequence was not clear. These results contribute to the understanding of why the visual hierarchy application on a local level was rated lower on the quantitative section. It is not that billboards are not designed, but there are many elements that are usually put together without adequate order, or prioritization. Consequently, the billboard can be viewed but the message is more difficult to process.

This conclusion was also supported by the observation checklist. Although a few of the samples of billboards were moderate in terms of typography and color application, there was poor performance in areas of the focal point clarity and organization of messages. It implies that sometimes the designers of billboards manage to make the advertisement conspicuous, but not always easy to comprehend. Attention is not sufficient in billboard communication. The design should also influence the eye to move to the next element in an intentional way as in most cases, image to headline to brand or call-to-action. Communication gets disjointed when the sequence is disrupted. This study is in agreement with other literature on visual hierarchy, advertising perception and outdoor communication. The article vindicates the perception that effective billboard design relies on restrained focus, excellent readability and simplified visual arrangement. Simultaneously, the research also provides a local understanding as it demonstrates that these design principles are not always applied to their full extent in the billboard environment in Gujrat. Thus, it can be argued that advertisers and designers in Gujrat need to pay more attention to design decisions based on hierarchy, namely, minimizing clutter, enhancing contrast, reinforcing focal points, and minimizing redundant text.

Conclusion

This paper discussed visual hierarchy of billboard advertising in Gujrat, Pakistan, with a view to learning how the elements of billboard designing are arranged and how the audience perceives their efficacy. The general results of the research indicate that visual hierarchy is a very crucial consideration in billboard communication. Focal point, headline prominence, readable typography, strong color contrast, balanced layout, spacing and simplified message structure are some of the elements that make a billboard successful. These are the elements that when put together correctly make the billboard easier to notice, read and comprehend in very little time. The message will be physically weak, congested and hard to process when not organized well.

The research also suggests that the audience knows what constitutes an effective billboard. Both the quantitative and the qualitative results indicate that the respondents believe in high visual order and want billboard designs that convey one message with the help of the dominating image

or headline. Meanwhile, the results reveal that a good portion of the billboards are considered overly packed with messages, overly text-focused, and do not follow a clear sequence of focal points. This implies that there is no problem with lack of visual elements, but rather the misplaced arrangement of the elements. That is, a lot of billboards can have all the required design elements, but still not attain effective communication due to a weak hierarchy.

The other significant conclusion is that billboard advertisement cannot be perceived as a sole instrument of marketing, but as a component of the urban visual landscape. Badly constructed billboards may diminish the readability, undermine the communication and lead to visual chaos in the street. Consequently, the better hierarchy of billboard is, not only to advertisers and brands, but also to the general aesthetic appearance of the city. The present research shows that visual hierarchy is the key to the successful advertising on the billboard, in Gujrat, Pakistan. Focus points, legible text, good contrast, balanced composition, and simplicity of message must be addressed as a need to design and not as a design option.

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