

Should billboard advertising be banned?



Campaigner Charlotte Gage says that the outdoor adverts you see on billboards and bus stops should all be removed.

"These ads are in the public space without any consultation about what is shown on them," she says. "Plus, they cause light pollution, and the ads are for things people can't afford, or don't need."

Ms Gage is the network director of UK pressure group Adfree Cities, which wants a complete ban on all outdoor corporate advertising. This would also apply to the sides of buses, and on the London Underground and other rail and metro systems. [...]

Ms Gage says that while there are "ethical issues with junk food ads, pay day loans and high-carbon products [in particular], people would rather see community ads and art rather than have multi-billion dollar companies putting logos and images everywhere".

She adds: "We're not saying people shouldn't own cars or eat burgers, but we know there's a direct correlation between seeing ads and purchasing these products."

Ms Gage adds that resistance to such "sight pollution" is growing in the UK. Adfree Cities, which was set up in 2020, now supports a network of eight community groups across the country - all opposed to outdoor corporate advertising.

Unsurprisingly, the outdoor advertising industry, which calls its sector Out of Home (OOH), strongly defends itself.

Tim Lumb, from the trade body Outsmart, points out that adverts "contribute a significant amount of money every year to the transport authorities and local councils through rent and business rates". [...]

"Individuals make free and informed decisions about their spending choices, and pursue whatever they consider to be their 'good life', safe in the knowledge that

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25 advertising in the UK is appropriately regulated to ensure it is legal, decent, honest and truthful." [...]

Still, some experts say that banning certain outdoor adverts may be a good idea, such as Dr Nathan Critchlow, research fellow at Institute for Social Marketing and Health at the University of Stirling.

30 "There is consistent evidence that exposure to marketing for unhealthy commodities - for example advertising for alcohol or food and drinks high in fat, salt, or sugar - is associated with consumption, including among children and young people," he says.

He points to the impact of Transport for London's ban on such adverts since 2019 across its entire network of tube and overground trains, buses and trams. A study last

35 month found that the policy had prevented almost 100,000 obesity cases.

By Suzanne Bearne, BBC Business, 8 September 2022