

## Conference Paper

# The Urban Environment Transformation Through Ambient Media in the Estimates of the Yekaterinburg Advertising Community

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**Abstract**

This article considers the influence which new advertising media has on the urban environment, through their impact on the modern communicative space. The aim of our research was to study the assessments of the impact of Ambient media new form communication on the urban environment of Yekaterinburg by experts of the city's advertising community. The sociocultural phenomenon of Ambient media — a media form of interaction with consumers embedded in everyday objects, is very popular in Europe, but it remains poorly understood in modern Russia. Ambient media not only conveys information about the advertised object, but is able to transform the surrounding reality. The author conducted an in-depth interview with representatives of the advertising community of Yekaterinburg (N = 22). The attitude of experts to non-traditional media was determined through the study. The research has fixed the social groups that are most susceptible to Ambient media. The impact of new media on changing the urban environment was analyzed. The study has recorded the high viability of non-traditional forms of advertising and identified the factors of the urban environment transformation with the help of Ambient media in Yekaterinburg.

**Keywords:** urban environment, communicative space, new media, Ambient.

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## 1. Introduction

In the past decade in Europe and the USA, there has been an active growth in the use of non-standard forms of advertising communications based on the search for new forms of interaction between people and the environment [1]. One of these innovative forms is Ambient media — an advertisement that is unobtrusively built into the environment. However, for modern Russia this is a new and poorly studied sociocultural phenomenon. Ambient media communicational channels are not traditional advertising media, but everyday objects that every person faces daily. These are objects of the urban environment that are familiar to people: public transport stops, parkland, benches, roads, escalators, garbage cans. The environment is becoming the main stimulus for the perception of the advertising message.

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A new advertising form emerges in a new communication space. Communicative space can be considered as a complex, multidimensional and variable system, which is a special form of social reality that, through communication, connects a person with the world around him / her. The dynamic sociocultural changes of the last decade affected the development and functioning of the communicative space of large cities most deeply. It is in an urban environment the development of technologicalization, the emergence of electronic communications; portable mobile devices that allow you to stay online permanently. The formation of a global communicative space has changed the structure of social and interpersonal interaction of groups and individuals [3].

Analyzing the modern communicative city space as an environment for the development of non-traditional advertising media, we have identified the following factors affecting the modern communicative space formation of the city:

1. Media inflation processes: an increase in the circle of participants in communication leads to informational chaos and uncertainty about the success of communication. The consequence of the oversaturation of the information field, according to Luman [8], is the inevitable search for social and psychological ways to protect an individual from unwanted information.

2. The expansion of the new media functions: they are no longer limited to the function of transmitting information, but become the most important factor affecting the transformation of the individuals' lifestyle, social practices and everyday life. New media offer the individual new social guidelines, dictating different rules of the game. Their influence is significant that provide the individual with social guidelines, they are able to replace social institutions in this function.

3. Change in interpersonal communication forms the dynamism and constant variability of the modern sociocultural space and form other ways of communication. Electronic technologies — the Internet, SMM, social networks, blogs, chats, as well as technical means — pocket-sized mobile devices, transform the very structure of social interaction [6]. For the first time in history, modern man has the opportunity to receive information online — that is, continuously, having the ability to access information at any time, independently control the number and frequency of social contacts, as well as the degree of his / her involvement in the interaction.

4. Continuous involvement in communication: the processes of obtaining and exchanging information become total and acquire the property of continuity. Communication has no more boundaries and conventions. Interpersonal and group communications through multimedia technologies gain new properties of permanence and mediation. Such communication can characterize the term “ambient awareness” — the included awareness surrounding a person [7]. Virtual information is transformed for the individual in the image of a real social system. Thus, a qualitative change in the structure of interpersonal and group communications today requires the search for new forms of media interaction with social actors.

5. The tendency of the communicative space towards openness and publicity: the developing phenomenon of public spaces leads to the formation of a single everyday life as a common reality. The American urbanist D. Jacobs believes that the meaning of the social life of urban sidewalks is that “they are public in nature” [4, p. 68]. Where there is ease and naturalness of public life on city streets, social interactions based on trust will certainly emerge there. Social groups, communities and institutions become public entities if they participate in the creation and updating of their own information field; have the opportunity to satisfy their information needs about their participation in the life of society, social groups and associations; and most importantly, when they are able to ensure “the manifestation of their participation in the processes of development and transformation of the world in cooperation with various social forces” [2].

Thus, spontaneous acts of friendliness and mutual assistance emerge and, as a result, social tasks are easier and more successful. A sense of public equality, public respect, trust and mutual assistance — these are the components of successful urban communication.

6. A new type of media consumption: a new trend is a change in media consumption. The development of communication technologies, the penetration of multimedia technologies into everyday life transforms the process of information consumption from passive perception to active. Following the Kolomiets [5], we assume that modern consumption is characterized by active social practice in obtaining and processing the meanings, symbols and codes of media products.

Thus, we are witnessing the formation of a new communicative space, new forms of social interaction and communication, dictated by the electronic revolution. New advertising media embedded in the human environment are actively involved in the construction of the social picture of the individual's world, as well as inevitably transform the urban environment. Do residents of Yekaterinburg notice such transformations? How does the emergence of new forms of advertising media affect the urban environment?

Does Ambient media foster open public urban spaces? What social groups are already involved in this process? Considering the innovativeness and poorly studied Ambient media for the Russian audience, we asked the representatives of the advertising community of Yekaterinburg about that, believing that advertising experts are the most competent group in the problem we are interested in.

## 2. Methodology and Methods

Despite the growing tendency to change the interaction of man and the environment, studies on the impact of alternative media on the urban environment in Russia have not yet been conducted.

In the summer of 2019, in Yekaterinburg, we conducted a sociological study using a qualitative strategy of the in-depth interview method (N = 22). The experts were advertising and marketing experts practicing in the field of creative and strategic planning of advertising campaigns, outdoor advertising, event marketing, PR with the status of the head of an advertising agency or department in the city of Yekaterinburg. Gender composition is as follows: 50% of men and 50% of women aged 27 to 50 years. The interview guide consisted of questions aimed at studying the attitude of advertising experts to non-traditional forms of advertising communications in Yekaterinburg; assessments of the significance of innovative methods of Ambient media, in particular embeddedness in the environment and the value of the location of the advertising object. The guide also contained a block of questions about the impact of Ambient media on the urban environment of Yekaterinburg. Also, we aim to study how the distribution of new media will effect on various social groups in Yekaterinburg.

In the analysis of the results the data from comparative studies of European scientists were used. European scientists in Sweden (2013) and Germany (2014) conducted sociological studies of individuals' perceptions of a new form of advertising [10]. A group of American sociologists (A. Shelton, L. Wojciechowski, and J. Warner, 2016) conducted expert interviews [12] aimed at identifying the attitude of communication specialists towards Ambient media as a new viable form of advertising. The authors of the study postulate that the boundaries of Ambient media are open for scientific discussion, they are interested in expanding the geography of studying the perception of Ambient media in various sociocultural environments for a possible comparative cross-cultural study of this problem.

The analysis of the sociocultural phenomenon of Ambient media is considered in the article from the perspective of modern theories of communication [8, 9, 11] and

urbanism [2, 4]. These approaches allow us to analyze the phenomenon of alternative communications as multifaceted and multifaceted.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In Ambient media, the concept of the environment is a fundamental factor in the effectiveness of an advertising message. The location of the advertisement encourages the recipient of information to recognize signs, symbols, meanings embedded in the advertising context. Therefore, the role of the Place in creating an advertising message is the key one according to advertising experts, participated in the surveys in Europe. As for the experts of Yekaterinburg, in their own practice, they take into account the location of the advertising object when planning an advertising campaign, however, the environment is more likely to complement the content of the message and is rarely the main condition for creating an advertising campaign. “Yes, of course, the place is important, especially now, when everyone has become more mobile. Advertising is influenced by the context, by the environment that surrounds it” (Stas, Executive Director of the outdoor advertising agency).

Most of the respondents note the presence of wide opportunities to embed the advertising in urban facilities in modern Yekaterinburg. This does not cause difficulties or problems for experts, since the objects of everyday life are everywhere and there are many of them. All you need is the ability of a professional to discern a potential advertising medium in the objects of the urban environment. “There are plenty of possibilities to make Ambient ad here. The tree can be wrapped in a rag — now you have both a non-standard and guaranteed interest of the audience” (Semyon, Director of Strategies, Communication Agency)

Ambient media meets a person in unexpected places, where there should not be advertising, according to the stereotypical opinion of the city dweller. Such advertising is difficult to ignore, it attracts attention and causes genuine interest. Experts note that a high level of engagement is achieved due to the fact that Ambient media is actively changing the urban environment. It provides the city with new bright images and meanings. The city in a special way communicates with its residents through non-standard advertising objects, embedded in the surrounding space. Ambient media is becoming the language with which the city speaks about itself. “We live in the era of a “talking city”. Now Ambient advertising is only the first drops of rain, soon it will be everywhere. And the space familiar to the eye will begin to change at a frantic speed. Remember the drawing on the building on Malysheva Street — ‘unscrupulously

talented.' It appeared, and the environment has changed, and the city immediately became different" (Svetlana, director of event projects of an advertising agency).

The interactive form of new advertising communications provokes the interaction of the individual with the urban environment. According to experts, non-standard forms of advertising are not just bright art objects but provoke the transformation of the city. Experts note the importance of the fact that by creating nonstandard advertising, professionals are able to influence changes in the urban environment. "We are planning an advertising campaign for one of Ural banks: the client applies Visa to the facade of the building to make a transfer to a charity fund. A black-and-white picture on the building turns into a color, and the total amount of the funds transferred appears. Thus, I myself can influence the life of our city by creating such an advertisement. I want to create the urban environment in which I am pleased to live" (Andrey, art director of the bank).

Most experts state the aesthetic aspect: new advertising media, being a form of creativity, decorate the city, just as architecture and landscape do. On the one hand, Ambient objects bring brightness and creativity to the city. On the other hand, they form the sense of beauty. Respondents note that the appearance of non-standard advertising objects, in their opinion, can increase the level of household culture of the population. "Nonstandard designs placed in non-traditional places form critical aesthetic thinking in people. People appreciate them or not, decide whether they like it and why. What's more, if everything around is unusually beautiful, then you will behave properly, you'll not drop a cigarette on the street" (Ekaterina, head of advertising agency).

Representatives of the advertising community unanimously highlight the positive attitude created by non-standard advertising as an emotional component. Such advertising is often made with humor and carries a life-affirming meaning. "This is inspiring, adding movement to everyday life. You are walking outside, seeing something intriguing and are glad, immediately sheering up. For me, such objects mean recreation" (Semyon, head of communications agency strategies).

The study has shown that the presence of Ambient media on the streets of Yekaterinburg is meant as a symbol of freedom and creativity for representatives of the advertising community. This is an opportunity to overcome the alienation of the environment, which is especially true for Russian cities, whose history of the Soviet way of life formation is associated with official culture and the limitations. Vivid non-standards indicate freedom from borders, freedom of self-expression and expression of will. The city becomes 'my own'. People accept it through identifiable meanings and meanings embedded in non-standard forms of advertising. "A city with Ambient media is a city of freedom! Its

appearance is the result of the will and creativity of various social groups: we need to enlist the approval of the authorities, we must convince the client to implement an unusual campaign, we must come up with such a creative that hooks everyone!" (Olga, PR-specialist of an industrial company).

The overwhelming majority of experts believe that the presence of Ambient media in Yekaterinburg is a cause of pride in the city. Each advertising object, transforming the environment, attracts the interest of not only residents and visitors of the city, but also the media, both local and federal. The presence of Ambient-objects increases the citation of Yekaterinburg. It also contributes to the promotion of the city worldwide. "The city they are talking about. I am pleased when colleagues from other cities tell me that they haven't known how cool your city is. The big installation of a Grater is located right in the city center. Animals are sitting on the wall of a living building, watching TV-channel about wild nature. I feel like living in a huge city full of drive and motion" (Ekaterina, SEO of SMM Agency).

The impact of new advertising forms on people is stronger than the one from traditional ones. Therefore, experts argue that the distribution of Ambient media should be controlled by the professional community and regulatory authorities. Firstly, such advertising should not be replicated. Otherwise, it will lose its uniqueness. "Today in Yekaterinburg the street objects are presented scarcely. They are little; indeed, someone may not even notice them, but this is good. Otherwise, they would cease to be non-standards. Advertisers should maintain conscious sensitivity in the distribution of Ambient media" (Eugene, head of the street art agency). Secondly, the development of creative ideas for Ambient advertising requires high professionalism: correlating the context of the advertising message with the context of the urban environment — the location of the advertisement, as well as the positive and life-affirming meaning with which the advertisement fills the surrounding space. Thus, creation of non-standard forms of advertising requires the high professional community responsibility for the content of the advertising message and its impact on the urban environment. "In Ambient everything depends on the idea! If Ambient made is created with the right emphasis, people will notice it and rumor about it. If the content does not catch the audience, then either people will pass by or there will be rejection of the advertising" (Svetlana, top-manager of events of the advertising agency)

Our research has fixed that representatives of the advertising community identify Ambient media with the so-called "places of attraction" for the citizens. These are the places of the city, around which public spaces are formed. New media became a natural incentive for communication based on trust and common interests of individuals.

Thus, the formation of successful urban communication takes place. “People gather around such objects. Non-standards create the proper lifestyle. Often, they have a social meaning. This makes you think of what are you up to, what interests you share” (Tatyana, SEO of the outdoor advertising agency).

Our study has also identified those social groups that most often interact with Ambient media. As criteria for identifying groups that will be affected by the distribution of new advertising media in Yekaterinburg, experts identified two basic ones:

1. the presence of individuals in public spaces.
2. the presence of individuals on the streets of the city and the presence of interest in social events taking place in the city.

Among social groups that meet the first criterion, experts identified the business community. These are specialists and employees, businessmen who periodically appear in places of public gathering as part of their professional activities. “At the airport, clippings of musical compositions related to the themes of sky, airplanes, and flight were placed on the walls. Musical passages are designed as barcodes. It was curious and interesting not only for young people, but for everyone who was present there. In public open spaces Ambient will be interesting for everyone!” (Olga, SEO of the PR-agency).

According to the criterion of presence on the city streets, respondents suggested considering young people — schoolchildren and students; young mothers with young children. “Millenniums, Generation Z — everyone who walks the streets! There is no gap in status or income level” (Anna, head of client service of an advertising agency).

Analyzing expert assessments, we can conclude that the main factor in gaining trust and the demand for new media on the city streets is the interest in certain meanings and meanings transmitted through the content of the advertising object. Respondents note that it is rather difficult to predict the reaction of people and assess the degree of perception of new advertising forms. Further studies are needed to reveal these issues.

## 4. Conclusions

New non-standard forms of advertising are actively beginning to appear in Yekaterinburg. Such forms, according to representatives of the advertising community, have a great influence on the image of the city for its guests and residents and creates a positive mood for people.



Experts postulated that the objects of Ambient media can transform the urban environment, endowing it with new symbols and meanings: freedom, creativity, aesthetics, pride in the city. A Our research has shown that the new media, being correctly inscribed in the environment, model and create it. They also provoke the interaction of individuals with the urban environment. However, this interaction should be controlled by the professional advertising community and built delicately.

The survey has revealed that the main social groups that will demand such interaction are groups that are actively present in public spaces. Such groups for Yekaterinburg can be young people, young mothers, and creative intelligentsia.

Further continuation of our work is associated with conducting qualitative research on the perception of Ambient media by these social groups.

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