

Graphic memory and the visual legacy of COVID-19 in Jeffreys Bay, South Africa

Memória gráfica e o legado visual da COVID-19 em Jeffreys Bay, África do Sul

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the concept of graphic memory by analyzing ephemeral visual artifacts produced during the COVID-19 pandemic in Jeffreys Bay, a coastal town in South Africa renowned for its surf tourism and visual culture. Grounded in graphic memory theory, which highlights the significance of transient printed materials as cultural and historical markers, this research positions visual artifacts as critical tools in capturing socio-economic disruptions and community responses during times of crisis. Employing Zeisel's Design by Enquiry methodology, pandemic-related visual traces such as signage, sanitation stations, and floor markers were systematically documented within key tourist areas, capturing shifts in public behavior, economic impacts, and evolving local identities. The findings illustrate how temporary visual interventions simultaneously communicated public health measures, exposed tensions between governmental mandates and local economic survival, and underscored community resilience. The eroded condition of certain graphic traces, alongside the deliberate integration of public health messages with local branding, revealed dynamic processes of compliance, adaptation, and resistance. Ultimately, this research highlights graphic memory's role in preserving local identity narratives and informing future strategies in crisis management, urban resilience, and cultural heritage preservation, thereby contributing significantly to the broader discourse on visual culture, design history, and socio-economic recovery.

Keywords: COVID-19. Jeffreys Bay. Visual culture. Pandemic signage. Physical traces.

RESUMO

Esta investigação explora o conceito de memória gráfica por meio da análise de artefactos visuais efêmeros produzidos durante a pandemia de COVID-19 em Jeffreys Bay, cidade costeira na África do Sul conhecida pelo seu turismo de surf e cultura visual distinta. Fundamentada na teoria da memória gráfica, que destaca a importância dos materiais impressos transitórios como marcadores culturais e históricos, esta investigação posiciona os artefactos visuais como ferramentas críticas na captura de perturbações socioeconômicas e respostas comunitárias em tempos de crise. Empregando a metodologia Design by Enquiry de Zeisel, vestígios visuais relacionados à pandemia, como sinalização, estações de saneamento e marcadores de piso foram sistematicamente documentados nas principais áreas turísticas, capturando mudanças no comportamento público, impactos econômicos e evolução das identidades locais. As descobertas ilustram como as intervenções visuais temporárias comunicaram simultaneamente medidas de saúde pública, expuseram tensões entre os mandatos governamentais e a sobrevivência econômica local e sublinharam a resiliência da comunidade. A condição desgastada de certos traços gráficos, associada à integração deliberada de mensagens de saúde pública com marcas locais, revelou processos dinâmicos de conformidade, adaptação e resistência. Em última análise, esta investigação destaca o papel da memória gráfica na preservação de narrativas de identidade local e na informação de estratégias futuras na gestão de crises, resiliência urbana e preservação do patrimônio cultural, contribuindo assim significativamente para o discurso mais amplo sobre cultura visual, história do design e recuperação socioeconômica.

Palavras-chave: COVID 19; Baía de Jeffreys. Cultura visual. Sinalização pandêmica. Traços físicos.

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INTRODUCTION

Graphic memory serves as a critical tool for bridging historical gaps by examining ephemeral materials, languages, and graphic processes embedded in daily life. These transient printed materials reflect the prevailing material culture and contribute to shaping local identities through design (Farias, 2014; 2019). The study of graphic memory extends beyond conventional design history, offering an alternative lens to explore visual narratives, particularly in non-hegemonic contexts where dominant historical narratives often overshadow local expressions (Farias, 2019). By intersecting print, visual, and material culture studies (Farias, 2019), graphic memory research highlights the materiality of graphic artifacts as spatially situated phenomena that encode cultural, social, and economic histories.

A key focus of graphic memory research is printed ephemera, or transient, everyday documents that often escape formal archiving yet serve as crucial markers of cultural memory. These materials, encompassing railway prints (Zapata, 2024) and the historical evolution of “printed ephemera” (Russell, 2014), function as mnemonic carriers that preserve cultural diversity and counteract the erasures imposed by time (Mussell, 2012). The interdisciplinary nature of graphic memory studies enables visualization techniques, such as historical geographical information systems (GIS), to analyze spatially embedded artifacts (Farias, 2019) while addressing broader cultural and ethical concerns surrounding identity formation (Lezama Galindo, 2020). Brand archives, for instance, play a vital role in resisting the homogenizing effects of globalization, safeguarding local specificity in visual identity (Carvalho de Almeida, 2012). Additionally, critical examinations of print culture challenge dominant narratives in graphic design history, offering insights into issues of class, race, and gender representation (Raizman, 2020).

This study situates graphic memory within Jeffreys Bay, South Africa, where visual artifacts produced during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal complex intersections between public health communication, cultural identity, and economic disruption. As an ephemeral material not necessarily intended for long-term preservation, COVID-19 signage provides a unique lens through which to analyze shifting identity narratives in a post-pandemic landscape. By engaging with broader discussions on visual culture and material memory, this research investigates how the pandemic era’s visual artifacts contribute to shaping public identity, resilience, and local design heritage in the town of Jeffreys Bay in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF JEFFREYS BAY

Located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, the small coastal town of Jeffreys Bay has a rich history and a global reputation as a premier surfing destination. The origins of Jeffreys Bay can be traced back to the early 19th century, when European farmers and traders first settled the area. The town is named after Captain Jeffrey, a trader who established a port in the area to facilitate the export of agricultural products. Initially, Jeffreys Bay was a quiet fishing village, with its economy centered around the abundant marine resources of the Indian Ocean (Hift, 2022).

Over time, its natural beauty, with pristine beaches and rolling dunes, began to attract tourists. The 1960s marked a turning point, as surfers discovered the world class waves at Supertubes, now regarded as one of the best right-hand point breaks globally (Hift, 2022). This propelled Jeffreys Bay into international prominence within the surfing community, leading to steady economic growth driven by surf tourism (Hift, 2022). The town hosts the annual World Surf League event called the Corona Cero Open J-Bay, attracting elite surfers and global spectators (World Surf League, 2025). Despite its development, Jeffreys Bay retains much of its small town charm, with a laid-back atmosphere, vibrant craft markets, and a conservation and marine preservation focus. In addition to its surf culture, Jeffreys Bay holds cultural and historical significance as part of the broader Eastern Cape, known for its rich Xhosa heritage and historical events during South Africa's colonial and apartheid eras (Hift, 2022).

VISUAL CULTURE OF THE TOWN

Jeffreys Bay, globally recognized as a premier surfing destination, has developed a visual identity shaped by its strong surfing culture, natural coastal environment, and local community engagement. The town's aesthetic landscape is deeply influenced by surfing-related iconography, marine themes, tourism, and environmental consciousness, which contribute to a unique sense of place. The town's public signage, shopfronts, and street art prominently feature surfboards, waves, and ocean imagery (see Figures 1–4). Tourism-driven visual communication is evident in the town's visual identity, which showcases pristine beaches and surfing culture. The town's strong environmental consciousness is reflected in visual campaigns advocating marine conservation and sustainability. Local artisans and crafters emphasize marine-inspired aesthetics, selling handmade items such as driftwood sculptures, shell jewelry, and ocean themed textiles in Jeffreys Bay's informal markets. The color palette of the urban landscape frequently mirrors beach tones, with soft blues, sandy beiges, and whites dominating storefronts and public spaces, evoking a sense of coastal tranquility. The dominance of surf-related businesses aligns with broader trends in surf tourism economies, where place branding becomes essential to the visitor experience (Ponting; O'Brien, 2015). This visual contrast between corporate surf branding and informal sign making illustrates the diverse economic landscape of the town, where global surf culture coexists with local entrepreneurial traditions.



Figure 1. Public signage of Jeffreys Bay, South Africa.



Figure 2. Examples of shopfronts in Jeffreys Bay, South Africa.



Figure 3. Street art in Jeffreys Bay, South Africa.



Figure 4. Environmental conscious campaigns in Jeffreys Bay, South Africa.

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the global tourism industry, affecting economic stability, social interactions, and environmental conditions. Lockdowns and mobility restrictions led to sharp declines in international travel, causing significant losses in revenue, employment, and business sustainability within the tourism sector (Dossan, 2021; Liang *et al.*, 2021; Wallace *et al.*, 2023). The crisis mainly affected small businesses, vacation rentals, and cultural attractions, where tourist preference shifts altered urban dynamics (Liang *et al.*, 2021; Zaar, 2022). In addition to economic consequences, the pandemic also had environmental implications, with improved air quality observed in major tourist destinations due to reduced human activity (Silva; Branco; Sousa, 2021).

Beyond economic and environmental factors, the pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in urban planning and tourism dependent economies. The emergence of “ghost cities” highlighted the drastic transformations in urban landscapes as once thriving tourist hubs became deserted due to prolonged restrictions (Korstanje;

George, 2023). While international tourism suffered significant setbacks, some positive trends emerged, including the growth of domestic tourism, increased reliance on digital solutions for travel experiences, and a renewed interest in local attractions (Wallace *et al.*, 2023). However, despite these adaptive responses, small cities and rural destinations, particularly those reliant on informal economies, experienced severe food insecurity and financial strain, exacerbating inequalities among low income populations (Ruszczuk *et al.*, 2021).

Like many other nations, South Africa experienced severe economic and social disruptions due to the pandemic. Following the country's first confirmed case on 5 March 2020, the government implemented one of the strictest lockdowns globally (Steytler; De Visser, 2021). Measures included travel bans, school closures, and restrictions on business operations, which were strictly enforced by police and military personnel (Mattes; Glenn, 2021). While initially accepted, these measures faced increasing criticism due to inconsistencies in policy, concerns over human rights violations, and allegations of corruption in government relief efforts (Mattes; Glenn, 2021). The tourism industry was one of the hardest hit sectors in South Africa, with severe implications for employment and local economies. Lockdowns and travel restrictions led to financial distress for tourism businesses, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMMEs), many of which faced bankruptcy or closure (Gumede, 2022; Rogerson; Rogerson, 2022). Sectors such as aviation, maritime tourism, special events, accommodation, and cultural attractions were among the most affected (Dube, 2021). Coastal towns that relied on tourism revenues, such as those along the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, experienced significant economic downturns, with many businesses unable to recover from prolonged restrictions (Rogerson, 2021). By January 2022, South Africa had recorded over 3.5 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and nearly 100 thousand deaths, further straining the healthcare system and economic recovery efforts (Loo *et al.*, 2022).

One of the most contentious policies impacting the tourism industry was the closure of beaches during the peak holiday season of December 2020 (see Figure 5). This decision, implemented to curb the spread of the Beta variant (second wave), had significant economic consequences for coastal communities that depended on seasonal tourism. The closure sparked legal challenges and public protests as businesses struggled to sustain operations without government relief support. This highlighted the disconnect between national level decision making and local economic realities in tourism-dependent towns (Rogerson, 2021). Figure 5 illustrates the South African government's festive season restrictions during the second wave of COVID-19, as communicated by the Kouga Municipality (2020b), which governs Jeffreys Bay. These restrictions, which included beach closures, were part of broader public health measures to curb infections, particularly in coastal towns reliant on tourism. Such policies had significant socio-economic consequences, disproportionately affecting small businesses, informal traders, and tourism-dependent communities (Rogerson, 2021). As seen in Figure 5, beach closures were also not applied consistently to all the beaches in South Africa. Beaches in the Eastern Cape province

(where Jeffreys Bay is located) and the Garden Route District were closed for the majority of the peak holiday season, whereas other beaches remained open or only closed for a few days. While the “Stay Safe, Protect South Africa” campaign for the festive season’s restrictions was widely used across many coastal regions in South Africa, its presence on social media pages for Jeffreys Bay heightened the visual and economic disruption experienced by locals and holiday-goers during the pandemic. Although not unique in form, such signage gained symbolic weight in this context by interrupting established local practices and visual rhythms associated with surf culture and seasonal tourism.



Source: Kouga Municipality (2020b).

Figure 5. Stay Safe Protect South Africa campaign: Festive season restriction to contain the second wave.

The pandemic significantly disrupted surf tourism, local businesses, and small-scale fisheries that form the backbone of the economic structure of Jeffrey Bay, leading to widespread financial losses, unemployment, and business closures (Martín-González; Swart; Luque-Gil, 2021; Rogerson, 2021). The closure of beaches during lockdowns was particularly devastating, as Jeffreys Bay relies heavily on beach-based tourism, including surf competitions, holiday rentals, and local hospitality businesses (Schotte; Zizzamia, 2021). The tourism downturn exacerbated existing socio-economic challenges, exposing the vulnerability of Jeffreys Bay’s economy to external shocks. Small business owners faced cancellations, income losses, and prolonged periods of inactivity, with many unable to sustain operations beyond the lockdown period (Vermeulen-Miltz *et al.*, 2022). The crisis also deepened economic inequalities as informal sector workers, including small scale fishers and vendors, struggled with food insecurity and financial support (Okafor-Yarwood *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the tensions between public health mandates and local economic sustainability. While restrictions were justified based on rising infections, their enforcement disproportionately affected small coastal towns where tourism is the primary economic driver (Rogerson;

Rogerson, 2022). Many local businesses questioned the effectiveness of blanket restrictions, advocating instead for targeted risk mitigation strategies that would allow economic activity to continue while maintaining public safety (Mach, 2021). Moving forward, discussions around tourism recovery in Jeffreys Bay emphasize resilience, sustainability, and community-led development. Scholars argue that future tourism strategies should integrate risk management, diversification of economic activities, and increased local involvement in decision making (Daniels; Tichaawa, 2021). Sustainable tourism initiatives, such as eco-tourism and digital tourism, offer potential pathways for recovery while reducing the town's reliance on seasonal visitors (Mach, 2021). Additionally, policy reforms in the small scale fishing sector could enhance social protection and ensure economic stability for vulnerable communities (Okafor-Yarwood *et al.*, 2020). While this research does not focus on economic inequalities, the broader economic tensions provide relevant context for understanding the precariousness of informal economies in coastal towns like Jeffreys Bay, where visual signage during the pandemic often intersected with economically sensitive spaces such as beachfront markets and informal trading zones.

The enforcement of beach closures during South Africa's second wave of COVID-19 was met with resistance from coastal municipalities and tourism-dependent communities. The Kouga Municipality, which oversees Jeffreys Bay, publicly expressed shock and disappointment over the government's decision to close beaches during the festive season, a period crucial for local economic activity (Kouga Municipality, 2020a). Figure 6 offers a visual of the deserted Dolphin Beach, which is the town's main beach during the December festive period. Official municipal statements, such as the one shared on Facebook on December 15, 2020, reflect the tensions between public health mandates and economic survival in small tourism driven towns. These digital communications also serve as visual and textual artifacts documenting local frustrations, shaping how the pandemic is remembered in Jeffreys Bay's tourism history.



Source: Kouga Municipality (2020a).

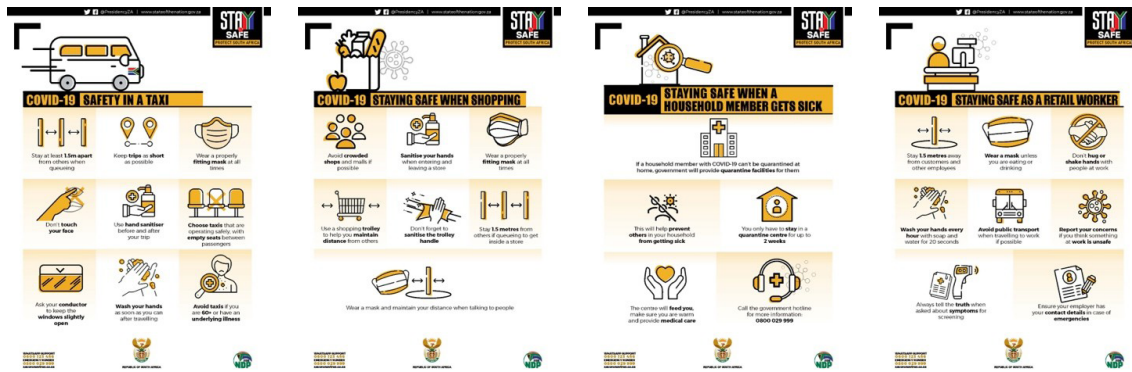
Figure 6. Photo of empty Dolphin Beach (main beach): The municipality was shocked and disappointed by the decision to close beaches.

From a graphic memory perspective, such public statements often shared through municipal websites, social media, and printed notices become part of a broader visual narrative of crisis communication. The backlash against beach closures underscores how official COVID-19 signage and government-issued restrictions became more than just public health tools they were also catalysts for socio-political debate.

VISUAL CULTURE OF THE PANDEMIC

In urban areas, COVID-19 related signage and advertisements transformed cityscapes, vividly reflecting government responses and public health concerns (Speake; Pentaraki, 2023). South Africa, in particular, experienced extensive digital health communication campaigns that introduced and normalized new terminologies like “social distancing” and prioritized accurate, timely dissemination of information to mitigate the virus’s spread (Farao, 2020). The visual culture of the pandemic emerged through official public health messaging, typography, street art, digital communication, government branding, and modifications to physical environments.

Bold, high contrast signage featuring urgent instructions such as “Stay Safe,” “Sanitize Your Hands,” and “Wear a Mask” became ubiquitous, often enhanced by universally recognizable visual symbols such as masks, sanitizer bottles, and social distancing markers that transcended linguistic barriers (see Figure 7 for examples of the visual symbols commonly used in South Africa). These symbols have largely been incorporated into online iconography libraries and, at one point, even became generic signage available for purchase in stores much like standard toilet signs. Typography played a crucial role in these efforts, employing clear, authoritative sans-serif fonts (see Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10) often in several languages to facilitate inclusive communication across South Africa’s diverse communities. Digital platforms amplified the visual impact through vibrant, easy to understand infographics promoting public health practices and memes that provided humor and social commentary (for example the Hay’khona Corona! campaign in Figure 7), helping citizens cope emotionally and socially during the crisis. Street art also significantly contributed to the visual landscape, documented comprehensively by initiatives like the COVID-19 Street Art Database, which is a crowdsourced collection of over 500 entries from across the world. These artworks tackled fears, connected isolated individuals, offered alternative narratives, and extended the reach of essential health and safety messages, demonstrating street art’s power as a communal engagement tool during the pandemic (Lawrence; Shirey, 2023). Figure 8 shows #YOURBESTSHOT which was the first iteration of a COVID-19 vaccination awareness campaign in South Africa using carefully selected street artists to create accessible, impactful, and positive vaccination narratives through street art (BIZ-ART, 2020). Official government branding, notably the “Stay Safe, Protect South Africa” campaign, reinforced visual consistency, embedding public health guidelines into everyday visual encounters. Initially, it was called the “Stay Home, Save South Africa” campaign, but following the easing of lockdown restrictions, the campaign evolved into the “Stay Safe, Protect South Africa” initiative and thereafter a vaccination campaign (see Figure 9).



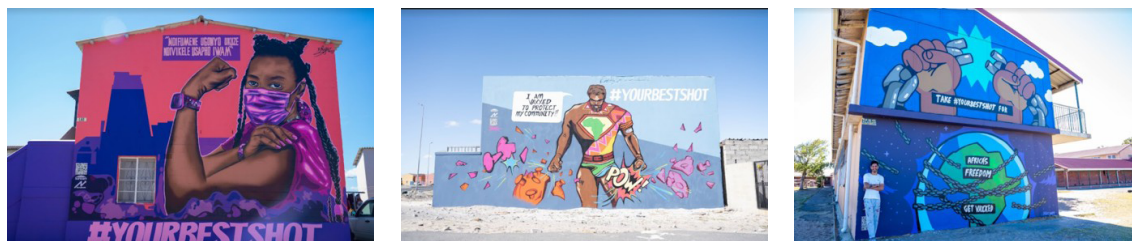
Source: Republic of South Africa (2020b).

Figure 7. Common pandemic visual symbols used in South African campaigns.



Source: Jive Media Africa (2020).

Figure 8. Multilingual South African Hay'khona Corona! Campaign.



Source: BIZ-ART (2020).

Figure 9. Examples of #YOURBESTSHOT Covid-19 vaccination awareness campaign in South Africa.



Source: Republic of South Africa (2020a).

Figure 10. "Stay Home, Save South Africa" initiative.

Physical spaces were also profoundly altered, incorporating practical visual markers such as floor stickers delineating social distancing requirements, plexiglass barriers for safety, and widespread use of branded disposable masks and personal

protective equipment. These visual elements facilitated adherence to health guidelines and became integral aspects of individual and collective identity. Additionally, temporary COVID-19 testing and vaccination stations emerged visually within public spaces, further reinforcing the visibility and importance of public health measures.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As March 2025 marks five years since the initial COVID-19 lockdown, South Africans continue to encounter graphic devices in the urban environment that trigger memories of the pandemic. These visual remnants include faded social distancing floor decals, weathered public health posters, and signage instructing mask-wearing that each serves as a fragmented yet persistent record of a collective experience. Carmona (2021) argues that time is a crucial factor in urban design, embedding interventions within locally specific historical processes of place. During the pandemic, the urban environment became a medium for temporary interventions to guide human behavior, such as floor markers indicating safe distances, posters reinforcing hygiene protocols and health stations to check your body temperature and mandatory sanitizing. These interventions dictated public actions while coexisting with the natural time cycles of cities, such as day and night transitions, seasonal shifts, and changing weather patterns (Carmona, 2021), despite the lockdown creating a perceived stasis in social life. As restrictions eased, human interaction with public spaces resumed, accelerating the erosion of pandemic related visual cues. Some physical traces disappeared over time; for example, floor signage gradually wore away from pedestrian traffic, and printed messages faded under exposure to the elements. However, remnants persist, whether in ghost signage on floors and walls, the lingering presence of sanitization stations, or even the collective memory evoked by once familiar symbols of crisis. These traces highlight the layered nature of urban environments, where graphic memory acts as both a reminder of past disruptions and a marker of resilience in the evolving cityscape.

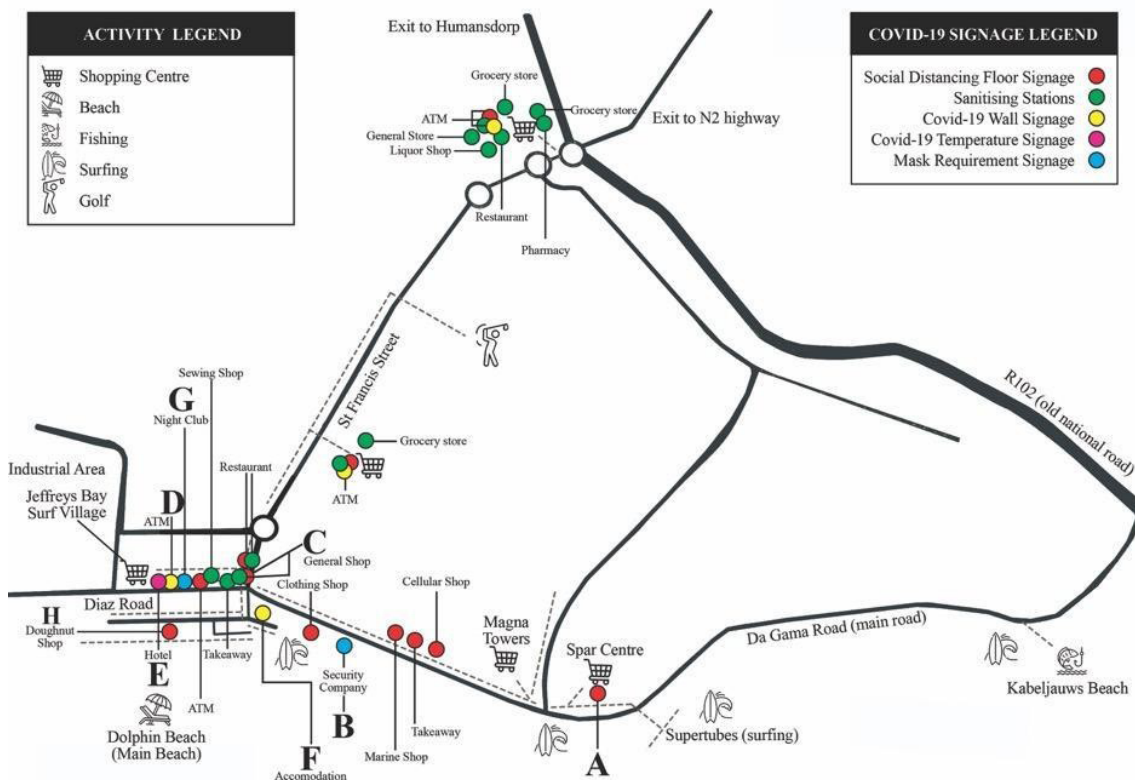
This exploratory research adopts John Zeisel's Design by Enquiry approach to document pandemic-related physical traces in the urban environment of Jeffreys Bay during December 2024. Physical traces were observed exclusively in the main tourist areas of the town, including the central town area of Jeffreys Bay, Dolphin Beach (the main beach), the five most prominent shopping centers in the town and places that offer activities for tourists such as golf, fishing and surfing. Zeisel (2006) describes this method as systematic and consciously curious, enabling researchers to analyze physical surroundings for visible remnants of past activities. The method possesses several key qualities that make it effective for exploring this phenomenon. Firstly, its imageability allows for observing physical traces that create vivid impressions and are highly illustrative. Secondly, it is unobtrusive, meaning that observations do not influence the behaviors that initially produced the traces. Thirdly, the method is durable, as many traces persist over time, permitting multiple site visits for further documentation and analysis. Finally, physical trace observation is cost effective and efficient, enabling researchers to investigate various hypotheses

quickly (Zeisel, 2006). Field observations focus on documenting COVID-19 signage in public spaces, focusing on spatial distribution and contextual relevance. According to this method, recording devices included photography to obtain high-resolution images, annotated diagrams to map forgotten signage to identify the locations and persistence of pandemic related signs and observational notes to capture the spatial distribution, condition, and contextual relevance of these signs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The pandemic related physical traces observed in Jeffreys Bay were systematically documented using an annotated diagram of the town (see Figure 11) and classified according to Zeisel's (2006) four categories: by-products of use, adaptations for use, displays of self, and public messages. Human interaction with the built environment leaves behind various physical and symbolic traces. These by-products of use are typically classified into three categories: erosions, such as trampled grass or worn paths that indicate repeated activity; leftovers, including tangible remnants like cigarette butts; and missing traces, which suggest absences in behavior, such as unfurnished balconies that remain unused. In contrast, some elements are intentionally introduced to shape or facilitate use. These adaptations for use include props like bike racks, separations such as sidewalk barriers preventing vehicle intrusion, and connections like ramps that enhance accessibility. People also communicate their presence and identity through displays of self, which may take the form of personalization (e.g., family photos on a refrigerator), identification (e.g., numbered addresses), or expressions of group membership (e.g., sports team memorabilia). Additionally, the urban landscape is saturated with public messages, ranging from official signage such as street signs, to unofficial notices like lost dog posters, and unsanctioned expressions considered illegitimate, such as graffiti. The diagram employs colored markers to indicate locations where COVID-19 signage was observed. At the same time, the letters A to H correspond to places where photographic evidence was gathered in public spaces (illustrated in Figure 11). Photographic documentation was limited as certain traces were located inside private or semi-public spaces, such as shops or shopping centers, where photography was prohibited as per the ethical considerations of this research.

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that graphic memory plays in capturing and interpreting cultural, economic, and social responses to crises within localized contexts. Through the systematic documentation of pandemic-related visual artifacts in Jeffreys Bay, using Zeisel's (2006) physical trace observation method, graphic interventions' ephemeral yet impactful nature during the COVID-19 pandemic became clear. Jeffreys Bay's identity, deeply intertwined with surf tourism and its coastal aesthetics, underwent pronounced disruptions during the pandemic. The documented visual traces range from heavily eroded floor markers to enduring branded sanitation stations, highlighting how these graphic interventions were more than mere tools for public health communication; they became markers of societal resilience, adaptation, and the socio-political tensions between government mandates and local economic realities.



Source: adapted from the Jeffreys Bay Tourism Map, originally designed by Dare to Image Studios. Figure 11. Annotated diagram of the research area in Jeffreys Bay.

The category by-products of use illustrated how physical interactions with pandemic signage reflected changing community responses. The worn social distancing markers found predominantly in high traffic areas such as shopping malls act as an erosion that vividly portray how initial compliance gradually gave way to pandemic fatigue or disregard (see Figure 12A). Remaining pandemic signage as documented in this research are examples of leftovers from the pandemic which might have been forgotten about or purposively not removed (see Figures 11 and 12). Conversely, the absence of signs in prominent tourist spots like Jeffreys Bay Surfing Village and the local golf course might point to community-driven choices about memory and identity, possibly signaling a collective desire to distance themselves from the disruptive events and return swiftly to pre-pandemic normalcy or even non-adherence in the first instance.

In the category adaptations for use, temporary public health interventions evolved into lasting commercial identity markers. Initially, props like improvised sanitation stations (see Figure 12C) have either become forgotten props hidden away in a corner or transitioned into permanent and branded fixtures at retail stores and restaurants within shopping centres which reflects a long-term shift in consumer safety expectations. This evolution indicates an enduring transformation in public spaces and underscores how businesses have capitalized on crisis-driven necessities to reinforce brand identities and consumer trust, blending health compliance seamlessly into marketing and branding strategies. Figure 13 shows a Sani-touch hand and trolley wipe station, now commonly found outside stores (Sani-Touch, 2021). These stations can be branded to align

with the store's identity. Unfortunately, no separating or connecting physical traces were observed within the study area. An example of a pandemic-related separation was the protective screens installed at cashier counters in Spar stores for example (Nair, 2020). A gazebo outside a local pharmacy chain functioning as a walk-in and drive-through COVID-19 testing facility (Kew, 2020) is an example of a connection (see Figure 13).



Figure 12. Photographic evidence of physical traces of COVID-19 signage.



Figure 13. Examples of common adaptations for use in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic which was also used in Jeffreys Bay, namely props, separations and connections.

Displays of self, documented primarily through personalized pandemic-related signage by local businesses, highlighted a critical intersection between public health communication and local commercial identity. Businesses integrated their unique visual identities within crisis messaging with common pandemic visual symbols, subtly merging compliance with marketing (for example, the social distance signage of the ATM in Figure 9D that adheres to the branding of the specific South African bank). This personalization also contributed to brand identification in some instances, ensuring visibility and narratives amid economic hardship. Although no physical traces of pandemic-related group membership were observed in the study area, social media commentary and lived experience in South Africa suggest the presence of two forms of affiliation. On one side, compliant individuals aligned with official health campaigns, as evidenced by behaviors such as mask-wearing, queuing at vaccination centres, and the use of signage promoting social distancing. In contrast, dissenting groups such as anti-vaccination advocates expressed their resistance through protests and visible acts of non-compliance, including the refusal to wear masks in public spaces.

Public messages dominated the graphic landscape during the pandemic in South Africa. The prevalence of unofficial signage in Jeffreys Bay points to a community-driven response, emphasizing the need for practical, immediate action in localized contexts rather than relying solely on centralized governmental directives. Over time, many of these unofficial signs degraded into ghostly visual echoes, reflecting their temporary functional role and the enduring residues left by the pandemic. Many of these messages took the form of self-made notices often placed in street-facing windows near entrances (see Figure 12E as an example) or displayed outdoors where exposure to the elements limited their longevity. Official signs maintained clarity and longevity, representing institutional consistency in contrast with the transitory nature of informal communications and illegitimate messages that were not observed. Official signs included generic bold, high contrast signage featuring urgent instructions with universally recognizable visual symbols (see Figure 12).

These findings enrich graphic memory scholarship by illuminating how temporary visual interventions during crises encapsulate broader socio-political dynamics, community identity, resilience, and adaptation. Although many of the graphic interventions, such as generic signage, were implemented nationally and not exclusive to Jeffreys Bay, their local resonance must be considered within the town's long-standing surf identity. The juxtaposition of these restrictive signs against an otherwise vibrant, surf-oriented landscape created a dissonance that underscored the community's economic vulnerability and the temporary rupture in its visual identity. Therefore, Jeffreys Bay's visual artifacts from the COVID-19 pandemic embody the memory of a historical moment and reflect deeper narratives around local economic struggles, identity negotiations, and collective resilience. The documented tensions between public health messaging and local economic realities suggest the need for further investigation into how visual communication reflects localized responses to top-down policy implementation. While this study does not prescribe policy solutions, it points to the potential of graphic memory as a tool for revealing overlooked socio-economic dimensions during crises.

CONCLUSION

As Jeffreys Bay moves toward economic and cultural recovery, residual visual artifacts from the COVID-19 pandemic serve as valuable insights into how design, tourism, and crisis response intersect to express local identity. These visual traces represent resilience and economic hardship, reflecting the town's complex, layered visual culture. The persistence of COVID-19 signage highlights the critical role graphic memory plays in documenting, critiquing, and reflecting upon community experiences during disruptions, particularly public health crises. Such artifacts preserve historical narratives and inform future community-driven development strategies by balancing historical preservation with urban renewal. By examining graphic memory in Jeffreys Bay, this research contributes to broader discussions on visual culture's role in shaping collective memory, ultimately highlighting how visual legacies from the COVID-19 pandemic can contribute to understanding community experiences and responses, with the aspiration that such insights may inform more inclusive, resilient, and culturally grounded approaches to future disruptions.

Future research could expand on comparative studies of similar coastal towns or tourism-dependent regions affected by global crises, deepening our understanding of diverse community responses through visual culture. Insights from such studies would inform future policy decisions and intervention strategies, emphasizing sustainability, economic resilience, and culturally nuanced community engagement.

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