

Influence of Newspaper Aesthetics on Readership in North-Central Nigeria

¹Kevin Alom & ²Vitalis Torwel

Abstract

This study examined the influence of newspaper aesthetics on readership in North-Central Nigeria. Using a selection of mainstream newspapers in Nigeria- *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *New Telegraph*, *The Daily Sun* and *The Guardian*, the study employed survey and in-depth interview methods for eliciting information from respondents. The population of respondents was drawn from all the six States in North – Central Nigeria, with a sample size of 400 respondents. The study found that aesthetic elements, such as good design, layout, bold font size and captivating headlines, the use of photographs and visual illustrations attract readers to particular newspapers and news stories. The study found, specifically, that readers' satisfaction with aesthetic quality of a newspaper significantly contributes to their patronage and readership. Hypothesis tested showed a significant relationship between newspaper aesthetics and readership in North-Central, $r = .732$, $P < .01$. Given the vital place of aesthetic elements in newspaper patronage and readership, the study concluded that newspapers with low aesthetic quality are likely to experience low patronage and readership. The study, therefore, recommended that editors and publishers should take advantage of reprographic technology to ensure that newspapers have high aesthetic value to gain more readership.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Newspaper, Readership, Aesthetic Elements, Patronage, Nigeria

Introduction

Aesthetic elements in newspapers offer textual, photographic and visual experiences that can influence readership. A newspaper is a product of professional venture, designed and packaged to attract and serve the need for information on all aspects of life. A newspaper may be described as a document which is printed and published regularly and consists of news reports, articles, photographs, and advertisements which are on large sheets of paper folded together but not permanently joined (Uwosomah, 2010). Newspapers, which may be published daily, weekly, or fortnightly are important in the lives of people because they perform key functions of informing, educating, and entertaining the populace. In fulfilling these needs, media professionals consciously strive to conceptualise, design and produce newspapers in ways that will attract readers' attention.

The visual appeal of a newspaper tends to depend largely on how aesthetic elements are designed. By definition, aesthetics refer to the beauty of something or qualities that beautify (Zettl, 2005). Beauty here does not only refer to surface outlook but also to innate feelings or

¹ **Kevin Alom Ph.D.** is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication Benue State University, Makurdi – Nigeria. Email: alomic2007@yahoo.com

² **Vitalis Torwel Ph.D.** is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication Benue State University, Makurdi – Nigeria. Email: vtorwel@bsum.edu.ng

responses elicited by exposure to something. Aesthetics is that quality that kindles a receiver's attention and interest in a message and elicits the desired response from the receiver. In communication, aesthetics ensure that the entire communication process is a lively and exciting activity between the sender and the receiver. The sender packages a message in a way that the receiver experiences satisfaction in the beauty of the message through an aesthetic experience. Aesthetics has been a crucial component of communication right from the beginning of written communication, serving to enhance and make communication more comprehensible and meaningful. The use of signs, symbols, images, and other graphical representations to emphasise, explain, highlight or illustrate certain facts, features or aspects of a news story has been a communication technique ever since the emergence of newspapers (Zettl, 2005; Udoh, 2010). Thus, aesthetics in newspapers serve not only to enhance and make communication more meaningfully, but also to attract attention, evoke emotions and/or persuade the audience to make readership choice.

Reputed as a strong strategy for visual attraction, newspaper aesthetics is the integration of colour, graphics and text into a coherent whole that intensifies the readers' taste for the newspaper. Users are goal-oriented in their aesthetics consumption and application. Uses and gratifications theory suggests that aesthetic elements complement other layout and design packages in fulfilling consumer's gratifications. As such, communicators are increasingly embracing newspaper aesthetics as a device to attract more newspaper readership.

Newspaper readership generally refers to those who buy and read or are thought to read a particular newspaper (Lee and Wei, 2008). Different studies have been carried out on newspaper readership in different parts of the world. Some studies have looked at editorial readership among students (Uyo, 1972); while some have examined the relationship between political affiliation and patronage or readership of particular newspapers (Oladimiji, 1981). There have also been studies on the relationship between education, age and economic status on newspaper readership (Schramm and White, 1949). This study hopes to add to the accumulation of scholarship on factors responsible for newspaper patronage and readership by assessing the influence of aesthetic elements on newspaper readership in North-Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons for newspaper readership preference in North-Central Nigeria?
2. What aesthetic elements attract readers to particular newspapers in North-Central Nigeria?
3. What gratifications do aesthetics provide for readers and thereby influence newspaper readership in North-Central Nigeria?
4. In what ways can application of aesthetic elements in newspapers be enhanced to increase patronage and readership?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis informs the assumption of this research and will be tested at 0.05 significance level:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between newspaper aesthetics and readership in North-Central Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratifications theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1973. The theory argues that media consumers play an active role in choosing and using the media. The theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of media for individuals, groups, and society. It examines the gratifications or benefits that attract and hold audiences to various types of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs. The theory basically discusses why people choose particular media and the needs fulfilled by such choice. While researchers traditionally tended to emphasize the effects of media exposure on audiences, Uses and Gratifications Theory espouses the need to consider what people do with media. The early inclination of research was focused on portraying media as a hypodermic needle that sent direct, standardized, and deliberate messages to an easily influenced mass audience in order to yield uniform effects (McQuail, 2010). Uses and gratification scholars ultimately helped falsify the notion of the magic bullet direct effects approach and expanded the understanding of media use and media effects by introducing the uses and gratifications theory.

The uses and gratifications theory is an offshoot of individual differences perspective. Defluer and Rokeach (1989) explain that during the 1940s, the realization of the consequences of individual differences and social differences on behaviors related to mass communication led to a new perspective on the relationship between audience and the media. This marked a shift from the view of the audience as passive to active in their selection of preferred content and messages from the media. Consequently, by the 1970s and 1980s the most important tenets of limited effects paradigm had been worked out and demonstrated in many studies as most limited effects research found media roles marginal in comparison with other social factors. Over the years, the uses and gratifications perspective has been applied to a variety of mass media content, including radio, print media, and television. And with the emergence of the information age a number of researchers have advanced the application of the theory in the context of new media, such as the Internet and mobile phones.

The six major topical areas uses and gratifications research focuses on include: linking the media use motives with media attitudes and behaviors; comparing motivations across media forms; evaluating the difference between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained; exploring whether variations in backgrounds affect behaviour and attitudes; consideration of the methods, reliability and validity of measuring motivation. Scholars have observed that of these six areas mentioned above, the concept of gratifications sought versus gratifications obtained by media audience has been relatively neglected (Ruggiero, 2009).

This study applies the uses and gratifications theory to examine the role of aesthetics in media use by newspaper patrons in North-central Nigeria. In line with the uses and gratifications theory, this study views media audiences in North-central Nigeria as actively responsible for obtaining messages from newspapers by seeking information of interest (Bryant & Zillman, 2002). In this way the uses and gratifications perspective places power in the hands of the newspaper reader who is viewed as making deliberate, intentional decisions about media messages he/she is exposed to, based on personal needs and gratifications. The application of the uses and gratifications theory in this study will help identify aesthetic elements employed by newspapers and the uses readers make of these aesthetic elements. The theory will also guide the study to identify readers' gratifications for use of certain aesthetics elements and if these aesthetic elements influence readers choice of newspaper(s) or news stories.

Research Design

Survey and in-depth interview research methods were used to gather data for the analysis. The survey method suits this research's interest in measuring "characteristics, opinions and behavior" (Barran, 2004, p. 161) of newspaper readers in North-central Nigeria. The justification for survey method is further strengthened by the fact that it is suitable for obtaining a wide spectrum of information on any particular topic, which often relates to diffused opinion, knowledge level and attitude. Another reason for the choice of survey method as observed by Bo (2012) is its flexibility and usefulness in describing the characteristics of a large population of study, and thereby, making it possible to collect a large amount of data with relative ease from a variety of people or respondents. A survey method also serves the set objectives of this study by allowing the researchers the opportunity to obtain undiluted opinion, attitude, and beliefs of the study sample on different variables examined.

The second method of in-depth interview was used to gather qualitative and detailed information from graphic editors of the selected newspapers to respond to the fourth research question. Moreover, the in-depth interview method allowed for considerable flexibility in the interaction between the researchers and respondents and elicited data that addressed elements of the research questions that could not be effectively measured quantitatively. The population of this study comprised 11,198,003 readers and ten graphics editors of the newspapers under investigation. The breakdown of readers among the states in North-Central Nigeria is presented as follows:

Table 1: Population of readers of selected newspapers in North-Central Nigeria

Papers	Benue	Kogi	Nasarawa	Plateau	Niger	Kwara	Total
DT	1,277,500	547,500	547,500	729,803	657,000	1,642,500	5,401,803
LS	547,500	273,750	273,750	365,000	328,500	730,000	2,518,500
NT	219,000	127,750	91,250	91,250	94,900	255,500	879,650
DS	182,500	91,250	109,500	219,000	182,500	365,000	1,149,750
GD	127,750	91,250	62,050	292,000	127,750	547,500	1,248,300
Total	2,354,250	1,131,500	1,084,050	1,697,053	1,390,650	3,540,500	11,198,003

Source: *Leadership* Circulation Data, 2015; *Daily Trust* Readership Survey of all Media and Product Survey; *New Telegraph* of Audited Bureau of Circulation, ABC 2015; *Daily Sun* Audit Bureau of Circulation, ABC 2015 and The Guardian Circulation and Readership Profile, CRP 2015.

Key:

D.T	=	Daily Trust
LS	=	Leadership
N.T	=	New Telegraph
D.S	=	Daily Sun
TG	=	The Guardian

This study population is based on the rate of firsthand readership as provided by each selected paper in North-Central States of Nigeria, excluding second or third party readership. The selection of these papers for the study was based on the criteria of consistency and frequency of publication, availability and spread. The population for the in-depth interview was made up of the five graphics editors and five graphic editor assistants from the five newspapers under study. The sample size of 400 respondents was statistically determined for this study using Taro Yamane formula for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{n}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Multi-stage sampling techniques, including purposive sampling, census sampling, and proportional sampling were used in selecting 400 respondents for the study. Employing purposive sampling, the researchers adopted the split of North-Central Nigeria into six States as follows: Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau, Niger, and Kwara. Secondly, the researchers employed purposive sampling (that is judgmental in identifying areas most vital to a study), to select headquarters of various States as contained in the strata above as follows: Makurdi (Benue), Lokoja (Kogi), Lafia (Nasarawa), Jos (Plateau), Minna (Niger), and Ilorin (Kwara). The decision to select only state capitals is based on the fact that state capitals accommodate relatively more literate population than other parts of the states. Also, there is more concentration of readership of newspapers in the state capitals. Census sampling was employed in determining 40 newspaper stands in the state capitals under investigation. This method helped the researcher avoid snowballing and wrong assumptions in determining

newspaper stands in the selected areas. Since 40 stands are manageable in size, they are all included in this study as follows:

Table 2: Number of Newspaper stands by State Capitals

States	Number of Newspaper Stands
Makurdi	3
Lokoja	2
Lafia	6
Jos	20
Minna	4
Ilorin	5
Total	40

To ensure representativeness of the population, the researchers employed the proportionate sampling technique to select readers according to the size of the states. This was done using the formula:

$$\frac{S}{N} \times \frac{n}{1}$$

Where:

S = Size of each unit (state)

N = Total population

n = Sample size

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by States

State	Population	Sample Selected
Benue	2,354,250	83
Kogi	1,131,500	40
Nasarawa	1,084,059	39
Plateau	1,697,053	60
Niger	1,390,650	50
Kwara	3,540,500	122
Total	11,198,003	400

The researchers went through state capitals and selected readers in various newspaper stands. This was done in the early hours of the day to get newspaper readers at various stands in state capitals investigated. Two research instruments – questionnaire and interview guide - were used for data collection in this study. The questionnaire comprised a 34 - item instrument designed and structured in both open and close-ended questions format. Section A of the questionnaire covered demographic information while Section B covered responses to the research questions. The questionnaire was designed to measure opinions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge and perception, regarding the influence of newspaper aesthetics on readership in North-Central Nigeria. Furthermore, 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered on respondents across the six selected State capitals in North-Central Nigeria.

In each of the six states, three research assistants administered the instrument on the respondents drawn from selected newspaper stands in the State capitals. The entire process took three months for the distribution and collection. To complement the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with graphic editors of newspapers investigated – *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *New Telegraph*, *Daily Sun* and *The Guardian* newspapers.

Findings

The presentation and analysis of results gotten were based on the 394 (out of 400) usable or valid copies of the questionnaire that were retrieved from the field. This represents 92 percent response rate. The formulated hypothesis was tested, using Parsons' Product Moment Correlation.

Test of Hypothesis

Parsons' Product Moment was used to test the hypothesis by measuring the correlation between newspaper aesthetics and readership in North-Central, with the following result showing a significant relationship.

Variables	Mean	SD	Df	R	P	Remark
Newspaper Aesthetics	7.8680	1.14489	392	.732**	.000	Significant/null rejected
Newspaper Readership	8.8756	3.40143				

****P<.01**

The table above shows the mean value of newspaper aesthetics to be $M = 7.8680$ and standard deviation to be $SD = 1.14489$ while the mean and standard deviation for newspaper readership were $M = 8.8756$ and $SD = 3.40143$ respectively. The degree of freedom is 392, $r = .732$ while $P = .000$ ($P < .01$). The table also revealed that there is significant relationship between newspaper aesthetics and readership in North-Central, $r = .732$, $P < .01$. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which states that 'there is no significant relationship between newspaper aesthetics and readership in North-Central, Nigeria' is rejected and alternate hypothesis upheld. The data collected for the study were further analyzed with descriptive statistics, using tables and percentages to answer the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the reasons for newspaper readership preference in North-Central Nigeria?

Table 4: Reason for newspaper readership preference by the respondents

S/N	Response	BN	KG	NS	PT	KW	NG	Total	Percentage (%)
1.	News content	11	05	18	119	25	35	213	54%
2.	Good design and layout	09	05	20	78	09	10	131	33%
3.	Bold font size	5	05	10	00	03	00	23	6%
4.	Use photographs and illustration	5	05	10	00	03	04	27	7%
	Total	83	40	39	60	122	50	394	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Data in Table 4 show reasons for newspaper preference by respondents. 213 respondents (54%) said that they buy newspaper because of news content, followed by 131 respondents (33%) who said they buy newspaper because of good design and layout. To a lesser degree 27 respondents (7%) said they buy newspaper because of photographs and illustrations used in the paper, while the remaining 23 respondents (6%) buy newspaper because of bold font size. This implies that 46% of respondents are influenced by various aesthetic elements in their choice of newspaper.

Research Question 2: What aesthetic elements attract readers to newspapers in North-Central Nigeria?

Table 5: Aesthetic features that attract respondents most to read newspaper

S/N	Response	Frequencies						Total	Percentage (%)
		BN	KG	NS	PT	KW	NG		
1.	Good design and layout of text, pictures and illustration	11	12	22	71	07	10	133	34%
2.	Bold Headline	11	00	10	34	12	11	78	20%
3.	The use of colour, tint and reverse block	08	00	07	40	02	04	61	15%
4.	Boxes and borders	00	05	05	13	11	13	47	12%
5.	Typeface and type size	00	00	10	26	03	03	42	11%
6.	White space	00	03	04	13	05	08	33	8%
	Total	83	40	39	60	122	50	394	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 5 shows specific aesthetic features that attracted readers to read a particular newspaper. 133 respondents (34%) are attracted by good design, layout of text, pictures and illustrations. 78 respondents (20%) are attracted by bold headlines, 61 respondents (15%) by the use of colour, tint and reserve block, while 47 respondents (12%) are attracted by the use of boxes and borders in newspaper design. Findings further show that 42 respondents (11%) were attracted by typefaces and type sizes, while white space attracted 33 respondents (8%) to a particular newspaper. These findings imply that aesthetic elements in newspapers have a strong appeal to readers and are capable of influencing readership of a particular newspaper.

Table 6: Aesthetic features that attract respondents to newspaper pages

S/N	Response	BN	KG	NS	PT	KW	NG	Total	Percentage (%)
1.	Good design and layout of text, pictures, and illustration	11	12	22	71	07	10	133	34%
2.	Headlines	11	00	10	34	12	11	78	20%
3.	Colour, tint and reverse block	08	00	07	40	02	04	61	15%
4.	Boxes and borders	00	05	05	13	11	13	47	12%
5.	Typeface and type size	00	00	10	26	03	03	42	11%
6.	White space	00	03	04	13	05	08	33	8%
	Total	83	40	39	60	122	50	394	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2017

As to what aesthetic features influence respondents to particular pages of a newspaper table 3 shows that 133 respondents (34%) said they were influenced to read the paper page by page because of good design, layout of text, pictures and illustrations. 78 respondents (20%) were influenced by headlines, 61 respondents (15%) by the use of colour, tint and reserve block, 47 respondents (12%) by the use of boxes and borders in newspaper design and the remaining 42 respondents (11%) were influenced by typefaces and type sizes and 33 (8%) influenced by the use of white space. The implication of this result is that combination of good aesthetic elements in newspaper design and production can influence page by page readership of the paper.

Research Question 3: What gratifications do aesthetics provide for readers and thereby influence newspaper readership in North-Central?

Table 7: Benefits aesthetics provide for newspaper readers investigated

S/N	Response	Frequencies						Total	Percentage (%)
		BN	KG	NS	PT	KW	NG		
1.	Allows for easy reading	29	15	13	18	50	18	143	36%
2.	Allows for faster reading	18	09	10	20	30	12	99	25%
3.	Encourage me to read more	13	08	08	12	15	10	66	17%
4.	Presents fewer obstacles to reading	12	05	05	06	10	05	43	11%
5.	Aids understanding of the message	11	03	03	04	17	05	43	11%
	Total	83	40	39	60	122	50	394	100.0

Data in table 7 show the benefits of aesthetic elements to the readers. Accordingly, 143 respondents (36%) identified that good aesthetics allow for easy reading of a newspaper, 99 (25%) responded that aesthetics allow for faster reading of the newspaper, 66 (17%) said aesthetics encourage them to read more, 43 (11%) said aesthetics presented fewer obstacles to newspaper reading, while the remaining 43 (11%) said aesthetics aided understanding of the message. These findings imply that aesthetic elements serve useful purposes for different readers as table 4 has shown.

Research Question 4: In what ways can application of aesthetic elements in newspapers be enhanced to increase patronage and readership?

Table 8: Ways application of aesthetic elements in newspapers can be enhanced

S/N	Response	BN	KG	NS	PT	KW	NG	Total	Percentage
1.	Training of journalist in newspaper design and layout	25	10	14	18	41	14	122	31%
2.	Need for aesthetic to be included as part of Mass Comm. curriculum	17	12	12	12	43	11	107	27%
3.	Need to engage professionals in newspaper design and layout	17	10	06	20	20	13	86	22%
4.	All the above	24	08	07	10	18	12	79	20%
	Total	83	40	39	60	122	50	394	100.0

Data in table 8 contains suggestions by respondents on what can be done to enhance use of aesthetic elements in newspaper design and layout. 122 (31%) suggested training of journalists in newspaper design and layout as priority, 107 (27%) suggested including aesthetics in curriculum for undergraduate journalism students, while 86 (22%) suggested engaging professionals in newspaper design and layout. The remaining 79 (20%) suggested that all the three activities should be included. This implies that usage of aesthetic elements in newspaper design and layout can be enhanced through training of journalist in newspaper design and layout; inclusion of aesthetics in the curriculum for undergraduate students and engaging professionals in newspaper design and layout. In addition to the above, the 10 interview respondents unanimously in their separate responses averred that aesthetics is a product of newspaper layout that is indispensable to newspaper patronage, which must be upheld at all times. Accordingly, Onuoha Ukuh of *The Sun* newspaper,

Aesthetics is a product of layout, which creates room for the departmentalization or structuring of the newspaper into column, opinion, editorials, political etc. and should be upheld at all times. As such, there is need to train journalist in newspaper design and layout and engage professionals in newspaper design and layout (Onuoha Ukuh, *The Sun*2017).

Shehu Mohammed of *Daily Trust* advocated the introduction of new technology to enhance good design on the paper. This was corroborated by Muazu Elazeh of *Leadership* newspaper, who said “the introduction of information and communication technologies and advanced computer technology will give the newspaper a better look and design when used to its advantage.”

Presentation of In-depth Interview Data

This section presents findings from the in-depth interviews with graphic editors of newspapers under study to respond to some aspects of the research questions that could not be quantified. The interviews explored the graphics editors' point of view and perspectives on the use of various aesthetics elements in newspaper production. From the in-depth interviews, two themes emerged as reported below.

Theme 1: Elements of Newspaper Aesthetics

The first interview question centered on the various aesthetics elements employed by newspaper editors in their organizations. According to a respondent:

The major aesthetics we use in *New Telegraph* are pictures, photographs, colours and headline variation. Other elements used are point size, white space and illustration (Ayodele Ojo, *New Telegraph*, 2017).

The Head of Arts and Creative Unit of *New Telegraph* added that:

In *New Telegraph* our aesthetic variables used in beautifying our newspaper include photos, illustration, headline placement, colour, etc. (Ugochukwu Nakwu, *New Telegraph*, 2017).

Editors of *Daily Trust* were also interviewed on the various aesthetics elements employed by newspaper editors in their organization. Accordingly, one of the editors, Nasiru Abubakar said:

We use column weight, text, font size, point size, pictures, photographs, colour, headlines, borders, white space (for paragraph air), illustration and the use of boxes (Nasiru Abubakar, *Daily Trust*, 2017).

The response by Nasiru Abubakar was also corroborated by the *Daily Trust* General Manager, Management Services, Shehu Muhammed who confirmed that;

In *Daily Trust* we use illustration and the use of boxes, column weight, pictures, photographs, colour, headlines, borders, white space, text, font size and point size to give aesthetics to the paper.

Theme 2 – Essence of Employing Aesthetics:

Another question that was asked centered on the essence of employing these aesthetics element in newspaper production. To respond to this question, Ayodele Ojo of *New Telegraph*, Nasiru Abubakar of *Daily Trust*, Magu Elazeh of *Leadership*, Onuoha Ukuh of *The Sun* and Omokioja Eto of *The Guardian* newspaper said it is to attract and influence readership of the paper. Specifically, Shehu Mohammed of *Daily Trust* said:

We are in a competitive world where the struggle to draw a passerby to your paper is intense. As such, the need to use aesthetics in newspaper design and layout is of great importance. It can make a passerby to have a pause, take a second look at the paper and the next thing is to buy the paper.

In addition, a Layout and Design editor with *The Sun* newspaper, Ben Njoku said:

The eyes are always attracted to beautiful things, so the orderly arrangement of aesthetic elements brings out the beauty of the paper which is also catchy for the passerby at the newspaper stand.

For Ugochukwu Nakwu, Head of Arts and Creative Unit of *Daily Trust*:

Aesthetics, in addition to adding beauty to a paper, brings out the uniqueness of the paper, gives it an identity and makes it appealing to readers. This is why all papers would want to organize every element of the paper so that the goal is achieved.

Another interview question centered on the nature of influence aesthetics has on newspaper readers. The unanimous response of respondents was that, aesthetics attracts the attention of readers to a newspaper. Two respondents, Ugochukwu Nakwu of *New Telegraph* and Onuoha Ukuh of *The Sun* Newspaper, said aesthetic elements used in newspaper design and layout allow for easy and faster reading, and aid in understanding of the message. Omokioja Julius Eto of *The Guardian* newspaper added that aesthetics motivates readers to buy a paper as soon as it gets out of the press.

Discussion

This section discusses the major findings of this study as they relate to the research questions, the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed earlier in the study. The first research question on the reasons for newspaper readership preference in North-Central Nigeria, the study found that aesthetics in newspapers is one of the major reasons for readers' preference. The study found that the various aesthetic elements that attract readers to particular newspapers include: news content, good design and layout, bold font size and the use of photographs and illustrations. The study also found that typefaces and type sizes, use of colour, tint and reserve block, good design, layout of text, pictures and illustrations, headlines, white space, boxes and borders attract readers to a paper. These findings imply that an unattractive newspaper aesthetically will likely lose its audience to a paper with attractive aesthetic elements that satisfy the public eye (Akpan, 2011, Montero, 2006). These findings conform with the uses and gratifications theory, which is concerned with the benefits that media audiences gain from use of various types of media.

The findings also give credence to works of earlier scholars on the subject matter of newspaper aesthetics. Zettl (2005), for instance, found that aesthetics is an indispensable newspaper technique for effective graphic representation and illustration of certain facts. This signifies that aesthetics in newspapers serve not only to enhance communication, but they also attract attention, evoke emotions and/or persuade the audience to read and make

readership choices. Paul (1994) aligns with this line of thought, positing that every aesthetic work appeals to or sensitizes our senses and taste because aesthetics by their nature cause people to feel and experience what the artist has felt and experienced. Thus, the study found that aesthetic elements like typefaces and type sizes, colour, tint and reserve block, good design, layout of text, pictures and illustrations, headlines, white space, boxes and borders play an important function of attracting readers in North-central Nigeria to specific newspapers or news stories.

Another finding of this study centered on the nature of aesthetic influence on newspaper readership in North-Central Nigeria. The study found that aesthetics contribute to newspaper readership, with readers not minding the cost as greater majority of respondents affirmed that a good newspaper attracted them not only to buy and read but also keep the paper in their library. The Kantian aesthetic theory (2000) provides an explanation behind such influence, arguing that the ‘faculty of judgment’ enables human beings to experience beauty and grasp such experience as part of an ordered, natural world with purpose. Thus, newspapers as visual media appeal to the eyes and provide aesthetic satisfaction to readers.

The third research question in this study centered on the extent to which aesthetics influence newspaper readership in North-Central Nigeria. First, respondents were satisfied with the aesthetic arrangement of the newspapers they patronize. According to respondents, good aesthetics allow for easy and faster reading of the newspaper, encourage more readership, present fewer obstacles to reading, and aid in understanding of the message. This implies that aesthetics make readership of the newspaper more interesting and gratifying, and thereby, affirming the assumptions of the uses and gratifications theory.

Lastly, the fourth research question centered on what can be done to enhance usage of aesthetic elements in newspapers to encourage readership. Findings showed that usage of aesthetic elements in newspaper design and layout can be enhanced through training of journalists in newspaper design and layout; through inclusion in the curriculum for undergraduate students and by engaging professionals in newspaper design and layout training. These findings also affirm the work of other scholars who asserted that improving the quality of newspaper content could ensure comfort of readers and, thereby, increase readership (Udoakah, 1996). For when the quality of newspapers is improved by adequate and effective use of various aesthetic elements, the newspaper tends to command more readership, making aesthetics one of the pillars of successful newspaper business.

Conclusion

The findings presented and discussed in this study have clearly established that selected newspapers in Nigeria significantly employ aesthetics in their design and layout. Based on the data collected and analyzed, the study concludes that aesthetic elements are very vital for the survival of newspapers since they attract readers to newspaper patronage and readership. Hence, the manner in which newspaper editors and/or their graphic editors handle aesthetics for their organization will determine how people may tend to read their publications. It is also clear that the responsibility of achieving aesthetics in the production

and management of newspapers rests more on the managers and/or the editors than the subordinates in establishments. This is in respect of the fact that it is mainly these categories of people that take the blame when things go wrong in newspaper design and production. The high quality production technological revolution of today affords newspaper managers ample opportunity to be more creative in coordinating and communicating their newspapers' aesthetic experience to the reading public to attract greater readership.

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