

Challenges Confronting Community Newspapers in Meeting Aesthetics Standards

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics deals with the beauty of an object or subject. Aesthetics has the power of drawing the readers to feel and experience what the artists have felt and experienced. This paper therefore examined the challenges affecting community newspapers in meeting aesthetics demand. Anchored on investment theory of creativity, the paper employed ethnographic research design, the paper found that, community newspapers find it difficult to command visual appeal among its audience due to the inability of most publishing house to work as a team. Also, the lack of experience among journalists/editors, as well as the absence of sophisticated tools equally affects the ability of community newspapers to bring out of its best in respect to physical appeal. The study further found that getting the layout and design right is difficult because of lack of creativity and poor visual sensitivity. Lastly, the paper established that community newspapers have equally been found culpable in the area of textual aesthetics; hence the need for improvement.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Community newspaper, Challenges, Design, Editors

INTRODUCTION

The word 'Aesthetics' originates from two Greek words - aesthanomai which means "I perceive" and aisthetike which means "sense of perception". [1], posits that a combination of these two words shows that aesthetics deals with what appeals to people's senses and make people perceive the beauty of the work [2]. Aesthetics deals with the beauty of an object or subject. [3], remarks that aesthetic has the power of drawing the readers to feel and experience what the artists have felt and experienced. Supporting this view, [4] believes that as soon as the readers and spectators are affected by the same feelings which the artist felt, experience is shared and emotions evoked; implying that aesthetic communication enables

sharing of experience and emotions [5]. The power of communication today affect what people wish for and what they aspire to become. It shapes how people conduct their lives. Aesthetic elements enable the newspaper industry to not only attract attention but balance the visual appeals into beautifully packaged newspaper. Efficient layout and design of a newspaper are keys to survival of any publication given the overgrowing competition in newspaper industry. This assertion is captured by [6], that, newspapers and magazine just like the television are visual media that appeals to the eyes. The ever increasing number of newspapers and magazines on the newsstand has generated stiff

competition to attract and retain readership. The effort to win readership does not only consist in seeking and publishing 'scoops' but also in the manner in which these 'scoops' are packaged. [7], posit that, aesthetic elements constitute that which satisfies good taste or good to look at. All the other elements of artistic design applied to newspapers are aimed at achieving an overall beautiful appearance, in order to attract attention to the message. Thus, having achieved balance, contrast, proportion and unity in the design, aesthetic tends to be achieved. In support of this view, [8] explains that when the elements of make-up such as headlines, pictures and other graphic devices are deliberately reproduced in dainty type faces of flashy colour, it is not only balance/contrast, proportion or unity that is aimed at, but also, it is to show beauty and encourage patronage to readership. As [9] points out, the reason for this attitude is simple; the front page of a newspaper is "an attention-gripper on the newsstand; an attention-seeker on a desk or on a coffee table; a curiosity-arouser

tempting one to look inside; in short a show case for the product". [10], in identifying newspaper design elements, confirm that the size, positioning, object and photograph axiality, etc for example affect the visual behavior of readers. That is, they contribute to a quicker perception and cognition of the content. Undoubtedly, the poor aesthetic presentation of most community newspapers makes it difficult for them to sustain production due to poor commercial patronage. Most people at the grassroots, and even those outside their communities, are interested in knowing the happenings across the state in its entirety; hence, rural newspapers carry information on local politics, healthcare systems, local sporting events, cultural festivals, land disputes, religious activities, chieftaincy matters and tussles and other activities which may not interest the entire country. The inability to present these papers in a manner that appeal to the reading audience makes it difficult to sustain or even increase the readership.

Literature Review

[11], observe that in the print media, there is the need to ensure that all forms of aesthetics are employed to gain the attention of the reader, and then keep the readers glued while reading through each message in the form of news, features, editorials, comments, advertorials, etc. They maintain that because the environment is loaded with messages that compete for attention; it is expedient that the practitioners in the print media ensure aesthetic experience in all message packaging. Accordingly, a newspaper that does not display the feel needed for the message will result in poor readership which will impact on circulation figures. Aesthetics is the way forward for gaining, keeping and retaining the audience. Citing [12], they further opine that news stories are occasionally so unusual or interesting that a reader will disregard poor design and suffer his way through the newspaper. But that will not always be the case each day. Also, this is because, in the age of global digitization of mass media

channels, with the resultant crowding of the space, the loss of scarps and exclusive stories, newspapers must embrace aesthetics to each readership, sustain it, and gain a larger market share else such a newspaper dies. Readers often consider just the front page until they encounter the next interesting section. The aim of the editor in presentation should then be to help the reader read faster and read more of what has been written on all pages. Aesthetic elements may not all be utilised within a page or the packaging of a message; nonetheless, some expedient techniques should be considered and applied to enhance the page. Some of these include page planning, sharp print, the colour of the print, pictorial presentation, the font (typography) as well as the size chosen, balance, and contrast. The means of achieving aesthetics in the print media may differ from one media house to the other but there are basic principles that will allow for artistic designs. [13], say the most

applicable principles that can ensure aesthetics in the print media are Balance, Contrast, Proportion and Unity. To [14], the major forms that can enhance aesthetics include Page planning, sharp print, colour printing, and pictorial presentation; while [15], outlines the forms essential for aesthetics as the layout (design), balance, contrast, typography, graphics, and colour.

- **Layout/Design:** In describing layout and design, [2] explains that, it is the packaging or the way in which news stories, pictures, advertisements, among others, are placed to create orderliness and facilitate reading for the consumer. This too, is the opinion of [5] who note that “designs exist primarily to facilitate readership. A newspaper is a collection of many stories, pictures, features and advertisements. When they are haphazardly placed within the newspaper or on any given page, they become a deterrent to reading because the effect is confusing”.
- **Balance:** [7], see balance as the ability of the editor to ensure that pages are not overwhelmingly heavy in one section or extremely light in another. Nwanne (2011) agrees with Baskette et al saying that balance is concerned with the establishment of equilibrium on the page, by balancing layout elements on opposite sides of the page; mostly the top against the bottom.
- **Contrast:** According to [7] “it is the principle of using at least two or more elements on a page, each of which is dramatically different from the other”. An instance is the use of a light headline contrasting with a bold headline, small pictures contrasting with a larger one. [2] adds that, it is the placement of one element against the other in a manner that makes the on-lookers to know that they are different.
- **Proportion:** just as aesthetics drives at achieving pleasure for

the eye, proportion entails that in newspaper design, the length of one line may be compared with the length of another, just as the shape of a story can be compared to that of another.

- **Unity:** According to [5] in a unified publication, all elements of the design are related. Thus, the principle of unity concerns the effect of a page design that creates a single impression rather than multiple impressions. Stories on a page portray unity when each story contributes a significant share to the entire page design.
- **Typography:** this principle basically has to do with the selection and use of typefaces in a systematic way to achieve an appealing print. The choice of font size as it were is the responsibility of the layout person, but this act determines what becomes of the entire newspaper company. Thus, “...the selection of type (font and font size) needs to be taken seriously, especially in the age of Desk Top Publishing....Indiscriminate mixing of type editor families and faces, use of tilted type...poor spacing of letters, too much or too little spacing between lines are some faults the editor should guard against.
- **Graphics** has to do with the impression the print material gets at the end. The use of maps, charts, graphs, illustrations, etc, has contributed to the readability of the print matter. It aids the reader in understanding the message easily particularly when they are presented with colours; the aesthetic expression needed is brought to bear.
- **Colour:** the decision to go off the black and white era of newspapers and print with colours as seen in most newspapers is basically to earn aesthetic value. Colour makes the newspaper brighter for readership and enhances the

images. It can also be used to tint stories thus distinguishing one

story from another.

Theoretical Framework

Investment Theory of Creativity

The investment theory of creativity was propounded by Sternberg and Lubart in 1995 as divergent thinking and ability to generate multiple ideas, creation of new patterns, a transformation of knowledge and meaning or use the function objectives in a new way. It asserts that creative thinkers are like good investors: they buy low and sell high. Whereas investors do so in the

world of finance, creative people do so in the world of ideas. The theorists assumed that creativity is a phenomenon whereby something new and somehow valuable is formed. The created item may be intangible (such as an idea, a scientific theory, a musical composition, or a joke) or a physical object (such as an invention, a printed literary work, or a painting).

Aesthetics Challenges of Community Newspapers

Community newspapers face several aesthetics challenges, one of which is visual appeal. This is as a result of layout and design factors which affects aesthetic demands of community newspapers. Accordingly, some community newspapers do not have the ability to guide readers smoothly through the page [5]. Some elements you find on newspaper pages have no business being there, and some elements can be confused with advertising sometimes. Also, a good observation of some community newspapers shows that the shapes and sizes of element are not appropriate for the content. While some logos or headlines are out of proportion with the size of the story or column, the shapes of some elements do not add contrast and interest. In the same vein, [8] explain that the nonexistence of team work, experience and lack of modern editing tools and software, skills as well as the inability to provide regular training for newspaper editors contributes to the failure of community newspapers to meet aesthetic demands. Thus, there is need

for group of professionals to work together when gathering news ideas, when planning for the most efficient method to gather information, as well as in the course of combining text and visuals to package information clearly and concisely.

In addition, some community newspapers do not have the capacity to achieve unity in their publication because they fail to carry their design themes across all pages as well as within individual layouts. Sadly, most community newspapers are unable to keep up with the times and changing technology, due to obsolete tools and software, making their output poor and unattractive [12]. [11], further observed that some journalists find it difficult to maintain constancy in the use of either American or British English as they often interchange spellings, and putting the readers into confusion. Hence, for any community newspaper effectively communicate its content, it must take into consideration the language by which it sends out its messages.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the challenges faced by community newspapers in meeting aesthetics demand and found that, the lack of experience among journalists/editors, as well as the absence of sophisticated tools equally affects the ability of community newspapers to bring

out of its best in respect to physical appeal. Thus, the paper recommends that it is expedient for Publishers of community newspapers to always engage the services of experienced professionals as this will improve the outlook of their publications.

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