

Aesthetic Examination of Advertisements in Select Nigerian Dailies

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Abstract

This study sought to find out the extent to which newspapers in Nigeria apply certain aesthetic principles in their advertisements. To achieve this, the researchers identified modern aesthetic elements and examined how three widely read newspapers in the country; namely: *Punch*, *TheGuardian* and *TheSun*, applied these elements on their product and service advertisement pages. Findings showed that while the select newspapers were generally aware of modern aesthetic elements and have applied such aesthetic elements in their advertisements, they were not elaborate in their application of all the identified aesthetic elements. Based on findings, the researchers recommended that advertisers and designers of advertisements should be more elaborate in their use of all aesthetic elements, especially in their message design and presentations.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Advertisement, Newspapers, Arts, Aesthetic Elements, Hedonism

Introduction

Human beings generally have something in common when it comes to their aesthetic feelings or perceptions. This means that human beings are generally similar in expression and reception of their aesthetic feelings. In other words, human beings tend to be similar when it comes to their feelings about what is pleasant or painful; good or bad; beautiful or ugly; noisy or informative; convincing or confusing and so on. This statement expresses the universality of aesthetic feelings among conscious human beings; thus, summarising the concept of aesthetic feelings among the human. However, in the media realm, although, aesthetic application may differ from one medium to another, the fact remains that what is aesthetic by a particular medium is generally seen as an aesthetic expression, especially to a trained eye outside that medium. Therefore, just as journalists, editors, broadcasters, programme producers and designers and all other professional contributors to the growth of the industry seek to design their contents in a way that would attract their audiences, newspaper advertisement designers usually take cognizance of aesthetic appeals, while designing the advertisements for the eyes. In other words, newspaper advertisement designers and copy writers usually apply one aesthetic principle or the other to ensure that they hold the attention of their audience. This attention-holding strategy is what determines the basics of aesthetic communication.

Among the various media organs is the newspaper, which is the focus of this research. As a print medium, a newspaper has certain beneficial features that make messages placed in it very convenient for consumers to access. In other words, a newspaper conveys signs and messages that its readers interpret without any constraint and this interpretation is made more convenient with the application of certain aesthetic indices commonly applied or acceptable in newspaper production. The newspaper reader who

either positively or negatively comments on the presentation appeal of news, features and even advertisement contents in a newspaper is making an aesthetic statement. A foremost aesthetic scholar, Zettl (2011) notes that the activities such as deciding what to put on as cloth so that things are put where they belong, choosing what flowers to put on a dinner table or even judging the speed of one's car relative to that of others while driving, are basic perceptual and aesthetic activities. For many scholars, media aesthetics, especially print, is one area which does not receive proper attention from communication scholars. Udoakah & Olise (2009) observe that newspaper aesthetics like other non-electronic-based media areas has continuously suffered neglect, mostly in terms of research. To them, studies in media aesthetics have specifically been tilted towards television and such other electronic and electronic-based media. Udoh (2010) asserts that studies in aesthetics have continuously transcended the traditional aesthetic ambience and is applied almost everywhere. It is seen that the manner of packaging and presenting advertisement in newspaper supposed to embrace certain aesthetic principles in order to create certain impressions on the buyer/reader. In other areas of aesthetics, Nigerian newspapers have been criticised for their inability to adhere to certain identified principles. Even though some of them go to great lengths to ensure readability of the news and other contents that they carry, Udoh (2010) in Udoh (2017) says a flip through the pages of many Nigerian newspapers know little or nothing about aesthetics. Borrowing significantly from Zettl's (2011) approach to media aesthetics, Udoh observes that most of Nigerian newspaper pages are lacking in unity, balance, contrast, dynamics and many other elements of modern print media aesthetics.

In designing with the purpose of increasing aesthetic value, one consideration in particular is essentially the notion that beauty is not only objective and universal (as German philosopher of the Enlightenment period Immanuel Kant argued), but that it has a subjective side to it as well. A user's cultural background, education or class may influence his or her judgements of aesthetic value. Designers need to understand these aspects in order to match them with the appropriate design. Thus, as aesthetics involves multiple dimensions of a target audience's makeup, it demands research into diverse areas relevant to a product's distribution, including foreign market considerations. In some Nigerian newspapers, these elements/principles may be there or lacking. It is against these foregoing backgrounds that the researchers attempt to find out the extent the select newspapers in the country use aesthetic elements in their advertisements.

Statement of the Problem

According to Udoh (2017), any media content that lacks the ability to command the serious attention of the audience is a dead content; hence, an advertisement, be it in newspapers or other media, should be full of life and drama. However, these visual elements sometimes might not instill in the prospects the intended instinct to embrace, grab or appreciate the product or service. This happens if there is no explicit or implicit aesthetic appeal in the advertisement itself. In other words, the ability of an advertisement designer or creator to select a suitable advertising appeal such as humour is of paramount importance. Besides application of humour as a popular effective mechanism for drawing attention, it is also

crucial for advertisers to find other important aesthetic indices for a particular product if a successful advertising campaign is to take place.

In countries where the mainstream media are a major means of advertisement, one finds a situation where newspapers in particular appear to aesthetically vary in their preparation and presentation of product and service advertisements. For instance, while local newspapers in Nigeria are observed not to pay serious attention to the aesthetic appeals in their advertisements, many foreign national dailies are suspected to make more sales and attract better readership because of proper application of aesthetic principles in their advertisements. In line with this suspicion, it becomes worrisome the extent to which some Nigerian newspapers apply aesthetic indices in their advertisements. A way of handling the worry is that of investigating the aesthetic contents of advertisements in some popular Nigerian newspapers; namely: *Punch*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun*.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the dominant aesthetic elements in select Nigerian newspaper advertisements.
2. Identify the commonly ignored aesthetic elements in such newspaper advertisements.
3. Determine the advertisement aesthetic awareness of such newspapers.
4. Find out the areas of aesthetic flaws in the newspaper advertisements.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

According to the American Marketing Association, advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of goods, services and ideas by an identified sponsor. Similarly, Abisden & Saleem (2010) define advertising as a subset of promotion mix which is one of the 4ps in the marketing mix; that is, product, price, place and promotion. However, McQuails (2005) says that advertisements have various aims which include the creation of awareness, making brand images, forming positive associations and encouraging consumer behaviour.

On the other hand, Akpan, Rishante, Obukoadata & Suntail (2013) define aesthetics as the subject of taste, perception of the beautiful or sublime streaming from the creation, interpretation and ultimate appreciation of creative works of arts. Udoakah (2000) says that aesthetics is very broad and concerns major areas of arts appreciation, criticism, judgement, arts creation, intention limitation, representation, irritation, realism, expression, form content intuition, appreciation and creation. This, therefore, implies that a painted representation of a typically ugly human face which brings out the ugliness in the person being painted is aesthetic. The beauty in this case lies on the artist's ability to depict or bring out in an artistic form, the significant features of ugliness on the human face. Udoh (2017) notes that a good painting is a demonstration of the artist's excellence and by extension, professionalism. Emphatically and by this understanding, aesthetics concerns all the fields of sensory knowledge; that is, the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. That is why Udoh & Obot (2013) talk of *newspaperness* and *magazineess* in newspaper and magazine page and general design and production. But it must be pointed

out that since the five senses can naturally not operate at the same level of intensity, perceptions from some of the senses are usually more intense or pronounced or even celebrated than the others. That, perhaps, is why some areas of aesthetics are given more attention than the others even in an academic environment.

Udoh (2021) defines newspaper in its traditional format as a loose publication, usually tabloid or broad in form, containing news and ancillaries such as feature stories and advertisements, published on daily or weekly basis and handled by persons trained in journalism or mass communication. But to Franklin (2008), newspapers are becoming like news magazines, offering lengthy analyses of evolving events of the world and featuring newsworthy people, corporations and social trends and at the same time displaying layouts that increasingly prioritise photographs. Okunna & Omenugha (2012) define a newspaper as an unbound, printed publication issued at regular intervals which presents information in words, often supplemented with pictures. However, Herrera (2006) defines print media as newspapers, magazines, periodicals, professional journals, professional letterhead, professional cards, telephone directories, circulars, handbills, flyers, billboards, signs, on premise signs and other similar items, documents or comparable publications, the content of which is disseminated by means of the printed word. Barbara (2018) states that print media are the printed version of telling the news, primarily through newspapers and magazines. Udoh (2021) further says, traditionally the term print media“ refer to the distribution of printed works. It includes newspaper, magazines, booklets, barouches, house magazine, periodicals or newsletters, direct mailers, handbills or flyers, billboard, press releases, books, etc. Similarly, Udoh & Obot (2013) define print media as newspapers and magazines in their hard copies. Additionally, Hanson (2005) defines a magazine as a periodical that contains articles of lasting interest, targeted at a specific audience and derives income from advertising, subscription and news-stand sales.

According to Robert (2013), aesthetics plays the role of complementing the verbal message in newspaper advertisements. The scientific relevance of aesthetics consists in the increasing importance of the aesthetic components in advertising imagery of the recent years, contributing to the success and effectiveness of an advertisement. To them, the aesthetic and stylistic components of advertising ensure the difference between qualitative advertising images and ordinary advertising images, their correct application being a key requirement for the advertising design. Thus, to get an audience to pay attention and interest, advertising should deliver a coherent and pertinent message. Sandage (2001) adds that a successful advertising imagery, from the aesthetic point of view, will capture audience attention with its form and content. Thus, to them, the content of the advertising imagery is relevant for the sent message, object or product it advertises for, encoding more or less complex significations, as social, economic, political, religious, etc. The image's content is more often symbolically molded in accordance with the aesthetic vision of the creative team; its symbolic dimension, alongside the aesthetic one, manifests a psychological impact on the audience. The shape of the advertising image fulfils the role of visually externalising the content aided by an ensemble of techniques, processes and graphic means. The form is thus the expressive element that aesthetically transfigures the content, attributing profile and expressivity depending upon different artistic means, most

notably being the style and the aesthetic categories. We surely find the form of the advertising image, where the case may be, as being original, thus artistic expressive, pronouncedly recognisable, spectacular, unique or it can be standard (easily mistaken for other shapes), expressionless, ordinary, often incapable to be visually impressive. And as implied by Olatunji (2012), the advertising imagery is engrafted from the aesthetic content of its components, expressed in various artistic styles specific for fine art with re-designated and re-signified intent.

Udoh (2010) opines that aesthetics has been applied in the unity of the image; the harmony, the compatibility, and the succession arrangement of its elements; the accent, the contrast and the variety of dimensions, shapes and colours that confer particularity; the equilibrium, namely equally sized and shaped elements on both sides of the image; the colour, necessary to lift and highlight certain elements or products, the capture and guide attention, unleashing emotiveness, able to communicate a defined state; the background and the spaces, which are basic instruments in creating an impactful layout. Accompanying these elements, are the format, overlap of layers on the image to highlight essential information, the use of zooming techniques to avoid losing the panoramic effect in advertisements, stationary photography or frames, ensuring image structure coherence. Visual techniques, moreover, represent a merge of diverse and different percentage of these elements and seldom prove to be found in a singular depiction in the aesthetic of the advertising imagery.

In their study, Daniel & Effiong (2016) examined the use of aesthetics in select print advertisement. The objectives of their study were to find out the extent to which the select print used aesthetics; identify the aesthetics elements in the select print and know the relevance of aesthetics in the select print. The findings were that the select print media, except one, made use of aesthetic elements to a great extent in the advertisement and the advertisements contained some aesthetic elements such as typeface and size, photographs and illustrations, white space, contrast and colour. According to Udoakah & Oliseh (2009), theories provide the latitude for analysis aimed at predicting phenomena of any research.

This research had its theoretical underpinning on two known theories namely: the pleasure theory (Hedonism) and the aesthetic theory. These theories make it easy to understand the relevance of aesthetics to advertising, and how aesthetics influence readers' perception of newspaper advertisements. The pleasure theory sees an aesthetic presentation as something that is capable of producing an outstanding feeling of pleasure. Specifically, the pleasure theory of aesthetics or aesthetical hedonism explains that the immediate pleasure derived from perceiving objects determines the aesthetic value of that object. Therefore, beauty is grounded in the processing experience of the perceiver, which is in part, a function of stimulus properties. In relation to the study, advertising message in newspapers must be aesthetically designed before it can have influence on the audience.

Study Design

The research method used for this study was the content analysis. This study considered three widely read newspapers in Nigeria; namely: *Punch*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun* newspapers published between January 1 and June 31, 2021. The newspapers were chosen

out of the other available newspapers because of their national coverage, their frequency and their popularity, developments that observably attract advertisers. Since the study was specifically limited to advertisement, a preliminary study analysis showed that the newspapers carried an average of three advertisements per day.

In terms of population, this study considered three national newspapers in Nigeria, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *The Sun* which were published from January 1, to June 31, 2021. The sample size of this study is 54 advertisements. It was drawn using the census method directly from the population of the study which is sizeable enough to be used as a sample size. All the (54) advertisements were, therefore, studied.

Table 1: Samples that were analysed

Month	Day	Newspaper
January	Thursday	<i>Punch</i>
February	Saturday	<i>The Guardian</i>
March	Thursday	<i>The Sun</i>
April	Saturday	<i>Punch</i>
May	Thursday	<i>The Guardian</i>
June	Saturday	<i>The Sun</i>

Preliminary checks showed that advertisements were carried mostly on the days chosen; while advertisements were the only unit of analysis, the following constituted the content categories for the study: political, financial, entertainment and educational advertisements.

According to Udoh (2017), there are some of the aesthetic indices for newspaper graphics and print media advertisements. In this study, they were used as the yardstick for assessing the aesthetics of the advertisements. They are: brevity, clarity and grammar of the advertisement message and colour as well as white space management in the advertisements.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Dominant Aesthetic Elements

Units of analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic element				
		Brevity	Clarity	Grammar	Colour	White space
Text	<i>Punch</i>	3	3	3	4	2
Grammar	Jan-June 2021					
Mechanics	<i>Guardian</i>	2	3	4	3	2
Graphics	Jan-June 2021					
Size	<i>The Sun</i>	3	4	2	2	3
Punctuation	Jan-June 2021					

The dominant aesthetic element used by *Punch* is appropriate colour choice; that of *The Guardian* is correct grammar, while dominant element in *The Sun* newspaper is clarity in language.

Table 2: Most Ignored Aesthetic Elements

Units of analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic element				
		Brevity	Clarity	Grammar	Colour	White space
Text	<i>Punch</i>	2	3	4	4	3
Grammar	Jan-June 2021					
Mechanics	<i>Guardian</i>	3	3	3	4	2
Graphics	Jan-June 2021					
Size	<i>The Sun</i>	4	3	3	3	2
Punctuation	Jan-June 2021					

The aesthetic element mostly ignored by *Punch* is brevity, while *TheGuardian* and *The Sun* ignored white space.

Table 3: Advertisement Aesthetic Awareness

Units of analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic element				
		Brevity	Clarity	Grammar	Colour	White space
Text	<i>Punch</i>	3	3	3	4	2
Grammar	Jan-June 2021					
Mechanics	<i>The Guardian</i>	2	3	2	4	2
Graphics	Jan-June 2021					
Size	<i>The Sun</i>	3	2	2	4	2
Punctuation	Jan-June 2021					

The newspapers were relatively aware of the importance of aesthetics in their advertisements. The newspapers were aware of the role of colour in their advertisements.

Table 4: Areas of Aesthetic Flaws

Units of analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic element				
		Brevity	Clarity	Grammar	Colour	White space
Text	<i>Punch</i>	2	3	4	4	3
Grammar	Jan-June 2021					
Mechanics	<i>The Guardian</i>	3	3	3	4	2
Graphics	Jan-June 2021					
Size	<i>The Sun</i>	2	4	3	4	2
Punctuation	Jan-June 2021					

The most flawed aesthetic element in *Punch* is brevity; in *TheGuardian* newspaper, it is white space; while in *TheSun* newspaper, it is brevity and white space

Discussion of Findings

Aesthetic elements are very paramount in newspaper advertisements because they increase patronage and sales. These elements also determine the pleasure readers derive from the advertisement. The pleasure theory states that something is beautiful when it gives pleasure

to the observer. Therefore, the ability of making newspaper advertisements give pleasure to its readers lies on the proper use of aesthetic elements.

It was inferred from table 1 that the dominant aesthetic element in the advertisements carried by *Punch* from January to June 2021 was colour. *Punch* newspaper made use of aesthetically appealing primary colours in their graphics. There was effective use of visual elements in their advertisements. Specifically: the background of their advertisements provided a strong blend of colours thereby creating a good sense of aesthetic appeal. Their right choice of colour makes the advertisement very inviting and pleasurable to the reader. Colour became the dominant aesthetic element in *Punch* newspaper advertisements not because it was the only element used in their advertisements, but because it was the only element that was repeatedly emphasised and used appropriately and without flaws. This made the graphic representation of the advertisement beautiful and attractive.

Table 1 also shows that the dominant aesthetic element in the advertisements carried by *TheGuardian* newspaper was grammar. Advertisements carried by *TheGuardian* showed a mastery presentation and construction of grammar which is seen in their text. The appropriate use of grammar is seen in their right use of punctuation marks and spellings which makes their advertisements clear and understandable. Their good use of grammar helps in instilling an aesthetic feeling in readers because it makes readership pleasurable. Good grammar is a pleasure. The dominant aesthetic element in *TheSun* newspaper advertisements was clarity. The texts were clear and understandable which enhances the readers' aesthetic experience and feeling. It also helps readers find pleasure in reading the newspapers hence achieving the advertisement goal of customer patronage and sales. The dominant aesthetic elements in the select newspaper advertisements were colour, grammar and clarity. The aesthetic value of a newspaper advertisement is equivalent to the level of beauty and pleasure derived from the combination of the aesthetic elements because the pleasure theory of aesthetics explains that the immediate pleasure derived from perceiving objects determines the aesthetic value of that object.

The aesthetic theory of formalism holds that a successful work of art must use the elements and principles effectively to achieve an overall unity. That is to say that when an aesthetic element is ignored in an advertisement, the success of that advertisement will be limited. Of course, there would be no balance and the amount of unpleasantness and negative aesthetic value on that advertisement will increase, which is not healthy for the growth of any newspaper. In table 2, it is shown that *Punch* newspaper ignored brevity at the scale of 2 (fair), which means they did not pay quality attention to brevity; rather, *Punch* did not make their text short and straight-forward. They filled their advertisement with lengthy words; although, they made good use of white space to make the text clear to readers' sight. Also, table 2 shows that *The Guardian* and *TheSun* newspapers ignored white space which is an important aesthetic element in advertising. Although, there is a contrast in their use of words, there is also a good blend of small and big texts, but the texts were written on no clear spaces of their own and as such, the text lacked clarity. The graphics and texts were placed on a dark background and this altered the aesthetic appearance of their advertisements. From table 2, it is also inferred that the select

newspapers were not managing their newspaper pages to accommodate both the advertisement and the text; yet, they occupied the advertisement with text without employing white space to enable the page to breath and this did not only reduce good aesthetic performance of the select newspapers, but also made the advertisement difficult to read.

White space makes advertisement breath and produces a better design, arrangement and balance of the aesthetic elements on the advertisement. Therefore, the inadequate use of white space made their advertisements lose their actual form and aesthetic value. This is to say that for every newspaper advertisement to achieve its set goal, the aesthetic elements must be applied with equilibrium. However, findings of Daniel & Efffiong (2016) were similar to those of this study. For instance, findings in that study showed that almost all the four select print media, to a great extent, made use of all the aesthetic elements considered by the researchers.

Advertisement aesthetic awareness is measured by the ability of the advertisement to attract wide readership and greatly inform the audience about the brand or service advertised. The findings showed that *Punch*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun* newspapers demonstrated their awareness or considerable knowledge of advertisement aesthetics. This was showcased in their relative artistic use of most of the aesthetic elements, particularly, good and generous use of colours in their advertisements. The select newspapers made use of colours that are generic and appropriate to the brands they are advertising. For instance, the blend of green, white and orange colour on a bank advertisement carried by *Punch* newspaper gave the advertisement a good aesthetic quality. The select newspapers modified the colours on their advertisements and did not make the colours too bright or too dull. There were no multiple colours that would have purged the advertisement of its aesthetic appearance and quality and this is a credit to their aesthetic performance.

Robert (2013) notes that colours constitute one of the most significant graphological features that characterise advertising in newspapers and magazines. When colour is added to texts, they show interesting and exciting details or the quality of the strings of words that have blended together to buttress the aims of the advertisement. This explains why Schenarz & Winkielman (2004) affirm that one of the techniques adopted by advertisers is the use of colour to attract the reader by creating a strong aesthetic awareness on the advertisements. Improper use of aesthetic elements in newspaper advertisements reduces the worth of an advertisement, its attractiveness and ability to add pleasure to the reader. This loophole sets in when some aesthetic elements are not properly handled. In table 4, it is seen that two aesthetic elements- brevity and white space were flawed in the select newspaper advertisements. The areas of aesthetic flaws in *Punch* newspaper was seen in its inability to make their text short and concise. Besides the Providus Bank advertisement, their advertisements on birthday celebrations of prominent people had long and lengthy text, which should have been brief and straight forward for easy understanding. It must be noted that brevity is an advertisement aesthetic element

The Guardian newspaper did not make proper use of white space. For instance, most of its advertisements had a little blend of white and black colour only in the graphic area, but the other areas of the advertisements were dark. However, the texts on the

advertisements were clear. This is because they were written with white colours; otherwise, the text would have been dark and difficult to read. However, this limited the aesthetic quality and value of the *TheGuardian* newspaper advertisement. Similarly, *TheSun* newspaper did not make good application of white space. Although, the exact colour of the product they were advertising was clear and bright, but the absence of white space made the advertisement page dark and not aesthetically appealing. Also, it flooded the advertisement with too many words. It made the advertisement suffocating to the eyes of readers. The inability of *Punch*, *TheGuardian* and *The Sun* newspapers to balance the use of these aesthetic elements indicates aesthetic flaws on their overall advertisement aesthetic performance. The assessment of the aesthetic performance of the select newspapers shows that the newspapers are on the average because they did not completely and effectively use the aesthetic elements. The three newspapers did not score more than 4 points. They also did not fall below 2 points on the scale of 5 points.

One of the aesthetic theories in this study is the hedonistic or pleasure theory which holds that an aesthetic object is that which gives pleasure or satisfaction to the audience or reader, besides commanding the audiences' satisfactory attention. The findings discussed above did not completely comply with the pleasure theory because the advertisements carried by the select newspapers lacked complete satisfaction and pleasure, while assessing the aesthetic worth and value of the three newspapers. The second theory is the aesthetic theory which has to do with sense perception, beauty and taste, visual attractiveness and appreciation of artworks. The findings of this study do not completely conform to the aesthetic demands of this theory because the select newspaper advertisements complied with visual attractiveness through the use of colour, but did not meet the requirements of beauty, appeal and taste. It did not also meet with the requirements necessary for the appreciation of the art work (advertisement). This, again, is similar to the findings made by Daniel & Effiong (2016) where the select newspaper advertisements did not completely meet the full requirements of the aesthetic theory.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Advertising has become an influential communication tool in passing message about products and services to prospects. As such, the blending of aesthetic elements in advertisements becomes crucial to increase customers' patronage and sales. Thus, aesthetics plays a significant role in any advertisement, particularly print (newspaper), when all the vital elements are judiciously utilised to enhance the products beauty, taste and sense perception. In this study, the select newspapers applied aesthetics to a reasonable extent, thus, the select newspapers have performed above average in their advertising aesthetic application. From the findings, it is hereby recommended that:

1. The newspaper industry and the general print media advertisers should be above average and more creative in the use of aesthetics elements in message design and presentations.
2. Also, advertisers and designers of advertisement should always strive more to combine words with pictures in print advertisements in a manner that will enhance balance so that the aesthetic experience could be heightened.

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