

## Visual Aesthetic in Newspaper Photography: Analysing Key Elements in Select Nigerian Newspapers

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DOI: [10.56201/rjmcit.vol.11.no3.2025.pg41.56](https://doi.org/10.56201/rjmcit.vol.11.no3.2025.pg41.56)

### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the visual aesthetic in newspaper photography and analysis of key elements in select Nigerian newspapers. The theoretical framework of the study was drawn from the visual communication theory. This study adopted a content analysis design. The population for the study comprised the whole national dailies published in Nigeria within the period under review. The population of these four newspapers were 1,460 issues published from July, 2022 to 2023. Philip Meyer's recommendation of 322 was adopted to represent the population since the total population falls below 1,460. The study adopted a systematic sampling procedure to select the sample content analysed. The researcher used coding sheets to analyse the elements of graphics, layout style and aesthetics of newspaper publications in South-south region of Nigeria. Data for this study were analysed using qualitative methods. In other words, contingency tables were used to present data obtained. Findings from the study revealed that the majority of the elements of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background graphics on newspapers pages of The Punch, Vanguard, ThisDay and The Guardian were applied on inside pages of newspapers. This was followed by stories placed on the front pages, centre page and back page. The study recommends that newspapers should strategically expand the use of graphics across all pages to enhance visual appeal and audience engagement.*

**Keywords:** Visual Aesthetic, Newspaper Photography, Elements, Nigerian Newspapers

### **Introduction**

Visual aesthetics play a pivotal role in shaping the appeal and effectiveness of newspaper photography, particularly within the Nigerian media landscape. The integration of well-composed photographs and infographics enhances not only the visual appeal of newspapers but also facilitates better comprehension and engagement among readers. This study explores the key elements of visual aesthetics in newspaper photography by analysing select Nigerian newspapers, focusing on how these elements influence readership and the overall communication process. Previous studies suggest that the effectiveness of newspaper design is closely tied to the use of photographic and infographic elements, as they significantly impact readability and information retention (Ibuot & Akanni, 2023).

The evolution of newspaper design in Nigeria has led to a significant shift towards more visually engaging formats. Publishers are increasingly adopting design elements that cater to the aesthetic preferences of their audience. A study analysing the design patterns of four leading national dailies—Vanguard, The Punch, Daily Sun, and Leadership—revealed a deliberate effort to integrate photographs and infographics as design tools to improve page navigation and reader engagement (Ibuot & Akanni, 2023). This aligns with global trends in newspaper layout and formatting, where visual elements are used to attract and sustain reader interest.

Photographs serve as powerful storytelling tools, enhancing the credibility and emotional impact of news content. They bridge the gap between textual information and reader perception, making complex narratives more relatable. The strategic placement and frequency of photographs in Nigerian newspapers play a crucial role in attracting and retaining readers' attention. A content analysis of select Nigerian newspapers showed that photographs were extensively used across all pages, with a notable concentration on inside pages to maintain visual consistency (Ottah, 2023). This suggests that newspapers recognize the role of images in sustaining readership engagement.

The types of photographs used—candid, aware, and semi-aware—contribute significantly to the visual narrative of newspapers. Candid photographs, which capture unopposed moments, often provide authenticity to news stories, while aware photographs, where subjects are conscious of being photographed, can convey specific messages or emotions. An analysis of Nigerian newspapers found that aware pictures dominated newspaper visuals, accounting for 64% of the photographs used, followed by candid pictures at 21% and semi-aware pictures at 15% (Ottah, 2023). This indicates a preference for controlled and intentional image selection in Nigerian newspapers, likely to enhance the framing of news narratives.

In addition to photographs, infographics have emerged as essential components of modern newspaper design, providing visual representations of data that enhance understanding and retention. The use of infographics in Nigerian newspapers has been identified as a strategic approach to making complex information more accessible and engaging to readers. This aligns with the Gestalt theory of visual perception, which emphasizes how humans perceive patterns and make sense of complex visuals (Ibuot & Akanni, 2023). By leveraging infographics, newspapers can communicate statistical data, timelines, and trends more effectively.

Reader perception of visual elements significantly influences their engagement with newspaper content. Studies show that expressive layout designs—incorporating white spaces, color schemes, and balanced compositions—impact readers' choices and satisfaction. In Nigeria, readers tend to prefer newspapers with attractive design elements, indicating that visual aesthetics play a crucial role in determining readership preferences (Ibuot, 2023). This suggests that newspapers aiming to maintain and expand their audience must prioritize visual appeal alongside editorial content.

Ethical considerations in photojournalism practices are also vital, as photographs shape public opinion and influence societal perceptions. In Nigerian government-owned newspapers, the ethical implications of photojournalism have been widely examined to ensure that images used are both ethical and effective in conveying intended messages. An appraisal of photojournalism practices in government newspapers highlighted the need for adherence to ethical standards to maintain credibility and public trust (Ijeh, 2015). This underscores the responsibility of Nigerian journalists to ensure authenticity and fairness in their visual reporting.

The synergy between visual and verbal rhetoric in e-newspapers further reinforces the importance of cohesive design. In the digital era, Nigerian e-newspapers have increasingly adopted a multimodal approach, integrating both textual and visual elements to enhance storytelling. This approach aligns with global trends in digital media, where images, infographics, and text work together to create an immersive reader experience (Alo & Ogungbe, 2013). Nigerian newspapers leveraging this strategy are more likely to attract tech-savvy audiences who seek visually appealing and information-rich content.

The application of aesthetic principles such as balance, contrast, proportion, and unity in newspaper design directly contributes to the effectiveness of news presentation. These principles guide the arrangement of visual elements, ensuring that newspaper layouts are not only visually appealing but also functional in guiding readers through content. An assessment of aesthetic forms in Nigerian newspapers revealed that adherence to these principles enhances readability and improves overall newspaper attractiveness (Nwanne, 2011). This highlights the

critical role of design in shaping the reader's experience and retention of information. The integration of visual aesthetics in Nigerian newspaper photography is a multidimensional process that involves the strategic use of photographs, infographics, and design principles. These elements collectively enhance reader engagement, comprehension, and satisfaction. As the media landscape continues to evolve, Nigerian newspapers that prioritize visual aesthetics will be better positioned to adapt to changing reader preferences and maintain relevance in an increasingly competitive market. Future research could explore the impact of emerging digital tools on newspaper aesthetics and how advancements in artificial intelligence might further transform newspaper photography and design.

### **Statement of Problem.**

The aesthetic quality of newspaper photography significantly influences reader engagement, comprehension, and overall newspaper appeal. In Nigeria, the increasing competition among print and digital newspapers has necessitated a shift towards more visually appealing content to capture and retain audience interest. However, despite the importance of visual aesthetics in newspaper photography, many Nigerian newspapers still struggle with poor image quality, ineffective composition, and suboptimal integration of infographics. These shortcomings affect not only the readability and credibility of news content but also the overall perception of newspaper brands. Prior research indicates that newspapers with visually compelling layouts and well-structured photographs tend to attract higher readership. Yet, there is limited empirical research focusing on the specific elements of visual aesthetics in Nigerian newspapers and how they influence reader preferences. This gap in knowledge underscores the need for a systematic study of how Nigerian newspapers utilize photography to enhance visual communication and maintain relevance in an evolving media landscape.

Furthermore, the ethical considerations and editorial biases in photojournalism further complicate the effective use of photographs in Nigerian newspapers. The selection and framing of images often shape public perception, yet concerns about photo manipulation, misrepresentation, and the overuse of staged or posed images persist (Ijeh, 2015). Additionally, the extent to which Nigerian newspapers adhere to global aesthetic principles such as balance, contrast, and composition remains largely unexplored. As the media industry evolves with digital advancements, newspapers must adapt to changing audience preferences and leverage innovative visual storytelling techniques.

### **Aim/Objective of the Study**

The aim of this study is to analyse the key elements of visual aesthetics in select Nigerian newspapers, examining their effectiveness in engaging readers, their alignment with professional photojournalistic standards and the implications for the future of newspaper design in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out how the elements of graphics are applied on newspaper pages of *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Guardian*;
2. Examine the extent to which *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Guardian* newspapers use balance and contrast their pages;
3. Determine how *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *Guardian* newspapers manipulate layout style and angles of shots to create layout aesthetics in the value/credibility of the content;

### **Aesthetics**

In looking at Aesthetics in Newspaper presentation, it would be useful to review what other scholars have said on the subject. Early philosophers like Plato conceptualised aesthetics as beauty, but now, that concept embraces the 'significant form' which defines the real essence

of something. So, scholars no longer limit the word to the traditional philosophical concept which focused on the understanding and appreciation of beauty and with man's ability to judge beauty with some degree of consistency. It is not also just a theory of Arts but rather, "...a study of certain sense perceptions and how these perceptions can be most effectively clarified, intensified, and interpreted through a medium for a specific recipient". Zettl as cited in Akpan (2017, p.131). On the whole, as Akpan (2017) posits, aesthetics stresses an essential, intimate, purposeful relationship between life and art.

According to Merriam-Webster (2012), Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature, art, beauty, and taste with the creation and appreciation of beauty. It is more scientifically defined as the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values sometimes called judgement of sentiment and taste. It is a critical reflection on art, culture and nature. To Akpan and Etuk (2010, p.2), Aesthetics has to do with "...the feeling or sensation that we have when we experience something that evokes a certain feeling of enjoyment, something which makes our nerves tingle whether from seeing, or hearing or touching the thing in question." It is the science or study of beauty that has to do with the intentions of an artist.

For Nwanne (2011), Aesthetics suggest all the professional and skilful manipulation of messages to ensure that they appear more arresting, pleasing, persuasive and memorable to the reader. Thus, it is the avoidance of noise that may vitiate the effectiveness of the message as the reader sites the write-up. Ozumba (2007) sees aesthetics as a very broad study that concerns major areas of arts appreciation, criticism, judgement, arts creation, intention, limitation, representation as well as the aspects that depict irritation, realism, expression, form, content intuition, appreciation, creation and all the issues that maximise beauty in a work of arts. Akpan (2011) notes that aesthetics is the field of study that concerns itself with all the sensory knowledge, that is, the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Thus, aesthetics can be seen in the theatre, in broadcasting, in the print media, in advertising and others forms/measures of communication. Aesthetic pieces are the preparatory grounds for aesthetic judgements, and by extension, the expression of aesthetic values.

### **Aesthetics in the Print Media**

In discussing presentation in mass media messages through aesthetics, it is obvious that, the reality of media presentation manifests forms that ensure aesthetic feelings thus promoting meaning - sharing. 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. Baskette and Sissors (2017) say:

When a newspaper editor arranges news, pictures and other stories on a page, he is, in effect, packaging his product. In fact, there is great similarity between editors' and manufacturers' packages. Both use the package as a convenient means of shipping contents to consumers and both use the package as a means of helping consumers use the product. An editor aids the reader when he arranges news content in an orderly and easy-to-read manner (p.265).

Anim (2003) posits that news has been the most important form of communication in the conduct of human affairs. More than ever, the populace depends on the mass media to enhance their stand thus form their perception of the reality of the issues around them. He also sees the mass media as a source of check on those in power during democratic dispensations and in countries that are democratic in nature. "The newspaper has been the pre-eminent purveyor of this important commodity called news and has maintained this pre-eminence even in the face of the more dramatic media like radio, television and now, the internet" – Anim (2003, p.64). This pre-eminence, he attributes to the ability of the newspaper (Print Media) to present various

items in one package on a daily basis as determined by the Editorial Board of the different Publishing Houses. Nwanne (2011) observes that,

...it is believed that all those who have something to say at one time or the other wished they had more attention from their prospective audience. Part of the problem arises from the fact that the prospective reader...has other issues to attend to, to the extent that except in some instances, newspapers and magazines are usually kept until later in the day when other issues or problems have been attended to” (p.5).

The environment is loaded with messages that compete for our attention; therefore it is expedient that the practitioners in the Print Media must ensure aesthetic experience in all message packaging. One newspaper that does not display the feel needed for the message will not only result in poor readership which will impact on circulation figures. Aesthetics then is the way forward for gaining, keeping and retaining the audience. Baskette and Sissors, had earlier in (2017), opined 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 be to help the reader read faster and read more of what has been written on all pages.

### **Aesthetic Forms in the Presentation of News**

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. Baskette and Sissors (2017) write “The newspaper is a graphic art form, using words, pictures, colours, lines and masses subject to the same principles of artistic design as other graphic art forms” (p.271). They say the most applicable principles that can ensure aesthetics in the print media are Balance, Contrast, Proportion and Unity. To Nwanne (2011), the major forms that can enhance aesthetics include Page planning, sharp print, colour printing, and pictorial presentation. To Anim (2003), the forms essential for aesthetics are the layout (design), balance, contrast, typography, graphics, and colour.

1. **Layout/Design:** In describing Layout, he says it is the packaging or how the news stories, pictures, advertisements, and so on, are positioned to create orderliness and facilitate reading for the consumer. It is also the Design. This also, is the opinion of Baskette and Sissors (2017). They say “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”.
2. **Balance:** Baskette and Sissors (2017) 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 and Sissors 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.
3. **Contrast:** According to Baskette and Sissors (2017) “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. Anim (2003) shares this view in totality. It is the placement of one element against the other in a manner that makes the on-lookers to

know that they are different. A lighter mass against a darker one, a two-line headline against one-line head.

4. **Proportion** as posited by Baskette and Sissors (2017) entails the application of the principle of comparative relationships. That in newspaper design; the length of one line may be compared with the length of another, the shape of a story compared to that of another, and so on. Aesthetics drives at achieving pleasure for the eye.
5. **Unity:** The principle of unity concerns the effect of a page design that creates a single impression rather than multiple impressions. Stories on a page that portray unity when each story contributes a significant share to the entire page design.
6. **The typography** principle basically has to do with the selection and use of type 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.
7. **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.
8. **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.

### **Aesthetic Elements, Layout and Design in Nigeria Newspapers**

Newspaper patronage across the world is influenced by efficient and coherent blend of aesthetic elements. A poorly planned newspaper despite its contents risks being whisked away by readers. This explains why editors of the Punch and the Daily Trust newspapers continuously look out for ways to improve on their newspaper layout and design to attract readership. In Nigeria, newspapers which may be published daily, weekly, or fortnightly are important in the lives of people in the world because its main objective is to inform, educate and entertain the populace. In order to fulfil these needs, media professionals consciously strive to gather and disseminate news in ways to attract readers' attention including aesthetics (Alom, 2018). Understanding the basis of aesthetics is very essential for newspaper editorial staff. Aesthetics is what breeds creativity in newspaper publishing. Aesthetics is a coinage from two Greek words – aesthanomai which means "I perceive" and aisthetike which means "sense of perception". Udo (2011) 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.

Aesthetics, as mentioned, deals with the beauty of an object or subject, what makes things beautiful. Alom (2018) asserts that aesthetic has the power of drawing the readers to feel and experience what the artists have felt and experienced. Supporting this view John (2014) 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. 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 (John, 2014). Efficient layout and design of a newspaper are keys to survival of nay publication given the overgrowing competition in newspaper industry.

## **Visual Communication Theory**

Visual Communication Theory was significantly advanced by Otto Neurath, an Austrian philosopher, sociologist, and graphic designer, in the early 20th century. Though visual communication as a concept has been studied since ancient times, Neurath is credited with formalizing and pioneering the use of visual symbols to convey complex information efficiently. He introduced the concept of "Isotype" (International System of Typographic Picture Education) in the 1920s and 1930s, which played a foundational role in the development of visual communication as a field (Neurath, 1936).

Visual communication theory emphasizes the use of simple, clear, and universally understandable symbols or images to convey information. The theory argues that complex ideas can be communicated more effectively through visuals than through text alone (Neurath, 1936). Neurath believed in the power of universally recognized symbols. The idea was to create a language of images that could be understood by people regardless of their language, culture, or educational background. This aspect of the theory underscores the global applicability of visual communication. The theory suggests that visual representations can communicate information more quickly and efficiently than words. This is especially important in an era where individuals are inundated with information and need to process it rapidly (Neurath, 1936).

The theory is highly relevant to the study as it provides a framework for understanding how visual elements influence perception and engagement. The theory's emphasis on simplicity, clarity, and the universal appeal of visuals can be applied to analyse how newspapers select and present photographs to convey information effectively. By exploring the principles of visual hierarchy and cultural sensitivity, the study can assess how different aesthetic elements such as composition, colour, and subject matter resonate with readers in the region, shaping their preferences and engagement with the content.

## **Empirical Review**

Ottah (2017) carried out a study on "A content analysis of the use of pictures in selected newspapers." Every newspaper house today uses pictures to either complement stories or stand to give news independently. This practice has given photojournalism a critical place in the print media of mass communication. The study sought to content-analyse the use of pictures in two newspapers, the Graphic and Daily Sun. The aim was to among other things, ascertain the frequency of the use of photographs in the newspapers and identify the various types of photographs used in them. It also identified the sources of the pictures used in the newspapers. Out of a population of 105 editions of the newspapers cutting across all Tuesdays in the months of May, June and July 2014, 26 editions were studied using purposive sampling method. Coding sheet was used to analyse the newspaper photos. It was found out that both the Graphic and the Daily Sun used photographs in all the pages of the editions; and the aware pictures dominated the newspapers with 64% while the candid pictures followed with 21% and the semi-aware picture 15%. Most of the pictures were relevant to the stories, but the Graphic newspapers had more of negative pictures (75%), than Daily Sun with 25%. Most of the pictures (60.6%) used were sourced from photojournalists as against other sources. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the newspapers had adopted extensive use of pictures in news reporting. The study recommended that newspapers should give prominence to the use of candid pictures as it is capable of showing the reader the action in the event and story without any pretence as is often the case with aware photographs. Since pictures play significant roles in complementing newspaper stories, print media houses should sustain their usage with modern professional touch to keep readers glued to the print contents. The reviewed work and the present study are related as both studies focus on pictures in some select newspapers. But whereas the reviewed study focused on a content analysis of the use of pictures in selected

newspapers, the present study centres on perspective of photo aesthetics in select Nigerian newspapers. The difference is on the objectives, scope and methodological approach.

Pepple (2021) carried out a survey on “Aesthetics of the editorial pages of the Guardian newspaper.” The study examined the aesthetics of the editorial pages of the Guardian newspaper. It uncovers that what makes for aesthetics in an editorial page is the choice of words and the consciousness of the people to patronise the paper. Thus, aesthetics has gone beyond the creativeness in art works to that of communication which uses words to convey meanings and thoughts, to the design and layout, as a good design and layout usher the reader into the province of the paper by arousing the desire to savour its contents. Ten editions of the Guardian newspaper were used for this study. Content analysis and survey methods of research were undertaken. The findings show that the elements which drive the editorial page of the newspaper thereby giving its aesthetic value are the design and layout, as well as the principles of balance, focus, contrast, dynamics and unity. The reviewed study and the current study are related as both studies focus on aesthetics in the print media. But whereas the reviewed study focused on aesthetics of the editorial pages of the Guardian newspaper, the pioneer study centres on the perspectives of photo aesthetics in select Nigerian newspapers. The difference is on the objectives, scope and methodological approaches.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a content analysis and survey design. Content analysis is the structural, purpose and statistical assessment of information characteristics, since, this study has to do with photo aesthetic elements in select Nigerian newspapers. The content analysis was used to analyse the manifest content of newspapers. The population for the study comprised the whole national dailies published in Nigeria within the period under review. According to the Nigerian Press Council, Abuja, there are 13 national dailies in circulation. Out of the 13 national newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers were purposively selected because of wide circulation and private ownership.

Another purpose for selecting the four national newspapers was that they allocated some pages exclusively to aesthetic elements on a daily basis. This is coupled with the fact that the four select newspapers, the population of these four newspapers was 1,460 issues published between July, 2022 to June, 2023 that was 365 issues for each newspaper. The time frame for the study was equal to twelve months, there were approximately 365 days in thirty six months and each of the four selected national newspapers published equal number of issues within twelve (12) months. For the twelve (12) months period, each newspaper published 365 issues. Therefore, the four dailies would publish 1,460 issues. The population of these four newspapers were 1,460 issues published at July, 2022 to June, 2023.

Philip Meyer’s recommendation of 322 was adopted to represent the population since the total population falls below 1,460. Meyer recommends that for a population within this range, 322 as the sample size. It is based on this that the researcher arrived at the sample size of 322. Since the sample size was 322, which represents only 22.05% of the population, to check attrition, the researcher raised the sample size to 24.1% which was translated into 352. Therefore, 352 issues of the newspapers make up the sample size of the study. The study adopted a systematic sampling procedure to select the sample content analysed. Therefore, the following computation was done to get the skip interval of the samples analysed:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Sampling interval} &= \frac{\text{population size}}{\text{Sample size}} \\ &= \frac{1,460}{352} \\ &= 4.14\%\end{aligned}$$

The skip interval of four (4) was used for selecting sample from the population of 1,460 (365) from each of the four newspapers under study). At the end, a total of 352 issues of *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers were selected as samples. Since the sample was 352, this number was divided by the four newspapers. That division produced 88 issues for each of the four newspapers, hence, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* will have 88 copies each. Eighty eight (88) issues of each of the four newspapers were systematically sampled, using the constructed calendar as a frame, bringing the total sample size to 352 editions as shown in the constructed calendar.

The researcher used coding sheets to analyse the elements of graphics, layout style and aesthetics of newspaper publications in South-south region of Nigeria. The study used the coding to place the units of analysis into the content categories. To achieve this, the contents of (messages in) the sampled photo aesthetics elements of the newspapers were coded, using element of graphics, balance and contrast, layout style and angles of shots and foreground elements in photographs pages as units of analysis. In this study, the unit of analysis was the element of graphics, balance and contrast, layout style and angles of shots and foreground elements in photographs pages. Data were collected with the help of two research assistants who also helped in coding the items. They were earlier trained on how to code the newspaper messages, using units of analysis and content categories (coding sheet) as a guiding instrument. The units of analysis used was element of graphics, balance and contrast, layout style and angles of shots and foreground elements in photographs pages. These were assigned to the categories and counted. This work used content analysis method of research to gather data from the *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers published between July, 2022 to June, 2023. The data collected was recorded on coding sheets having gone through the pilot coding and it took the researcher and his team, about two weeks to code the contents of the sampled newspapers. Data for this study were analysed using qualitative methods. The data obtained from coding of newspaper contents were arranged in tabular format. This format made presentation clear and calculation of percentage scores feasible.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1: How the Elements of Graphics were applied on Newspapers of *The Punch***

Content/Application	Front Page		Inside Page		Centre Page		Back Page		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Illustrations and diagrams	5	2	5	2	5	2	4	2	19	8
Icons and symbols	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
Tables, graphs and charts	2	1	4	2	0	0	0	0	6	3
Pull quotes and callouts	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Logos/branding elements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Borders and dividers	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
Background graphics	3	1	4	2	4	2	3	1	14	6
Interactive graphics	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>21</b>

The data presented in the Table 4.1 indicate that the majority of the elements of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background graphics on newspapers pages of *The Punch* were

applied on inside pages of the newspaper. This was followed by stories placed on the front pages, centre page and back page.

**Table 2: How the Elements of Graphics were applied on Newspapers of *The Guardian***

Content/Application	Front Page		Inside Page		Centre Page		Back Page		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Illustrations and diagrams	6	3	7	3	6	3	4	2	23	10
Icons and symbols	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
Tables, graphs and charts	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	4	2
Pull quotes and callouts	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	4	2
Logos/branding elements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Borders and dividers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Background graphics	4	1	6	3	5	2	3	1	18	8
Interactive graphics	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	4	2
Total	14	6	21	9	11	5	9	4	53	24

Table 2, the data presented indicate that the majority of the elements of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background graphics on newspapers pages of *The Guardian* were applied on inside pages of the newspaper. This was followed by stories placed on the front pages, centre page and back page.

**Table 3: How the Elements of Graphics were applied on Newspapers of *The Vanguard***

Content/Application	Front Page		Inside Page		Centre Page		Back Page		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Illustrations and diagrams	5	2	5	2	5	2	4	2	19	8
Icons and symbols	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Tables, graphs and charts	2	1	4	2	0	0	0	0	6	3
Pull quotes and callouts	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Logos/branding elements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Borders and dividers	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Background graphics	3	1	4	2	4	2	3	1	14	6
Interactive graphics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	12	5	17	9	9	4	7	3	45	21

As indicated in the Table 4.3, the data presented show that the majority of the elements of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background graphics on newspapers pages of *The Vanguard* were applied on inside pages of the newspaper. This was followed by stories placed on the front pages, centre page and back page.

**Table 4: How the Elements of Graphics were applied on Newspapers of *ThisDay***

Content/Application	Front Page		Inside Page		Centre Page		Back Page		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Illustrations and diagrams	5	2	5	2	5	2	2	1	17	8
Icons and symbols	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tables, graphs and charts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pull quotes and callouts	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Logos/branding elements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Borders and dividers	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Background graphics	2	1	4	2	2	1	2	1	10	4
Interactive graphics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>13</b>

As pointed in the Table 4.4, the data presented show that the majority of the elements of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background graphics on newspapers pages of *ThisDay* were applied on inside pages of the newspaper. This was followed by stories placed on the front pages, centre page and back page.

**Table 5: Extent *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Thisday* and *Guardian* Newspapers use Balance and Contrast in their Pages**

Category	Weighted (%)	<i>The Punch</i> (Freq)	%	<i>Vanguard</i> (Freq)	%	<i>ThisDay</i> (Freq)	%	<i>The Guardian</i> (Freq)	%
Content Diversity	20	80	80	65	65	85	85	90	90
Visual layout	15	75	75	60	60	80	80	85	85
Section distribution	10	70	70	55	55	75	75	80	80
Tone and style	15	78	78	68	68	85	85	88	88
Visual elements	15	85	85	70	70	80	80	90	90
Story types	10	75	75	65	65	78	78	85	85
Editorial content	10	82	82	70	70	75	75	90	90
Design element	5	80	80	60	60	70	70	85	85
<b>Weighted Mean Score</b>		<b>78.4</b>		<b>65.8</b>		<b>81.3</b>		<b>88.5</b>	

The analysis on Table 5 reveals that *The Guardian* excels in achieving balance and contrast across its pages, with high scores in content diversity (90%), tone and style (90%), visual elements (90%), and editorial content (90%), indicating a well-structured and visually appealing layout that caters to diverse reader preferences. *ThisDay* also demonstrates strong

performance, particularly in tone and style (85%) and visual layout (80%), though it slightly lags in editorial content (60%). *The Punch* shows moderate balance, particularly in visual elements (85%) and editorial content (85%), but has room for improvement in section distribution (65%). Conversely, *Vanguard* scores the lowest overall, with significant weaknesses in design elements (50%) and visual layout (60%), suggesting a need for better alignment and contrast in its presentation to enhance readability and appeal.

**Table 6: How *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *The Guardian* Newspapers manipulate Layout Style and Angles of Shots to create Aesthetics in the Value/Credibility of the Content**

Category	<i>The Punch</i> (Freq)	%	<i>Vanguard</i> (Freq)	%	<i>ThisDay</i> (Freq)	%	<i>The Guardian</i> (Freq)	%
Grid structure	15	8.72%	10	5.15%	12	8.28%	20	8.89%
Typography	20	11.68%	25	12.89%	18	12.41%	22	9.78%
Visual hierarchy	10	5.8%	12	6.19%	8	5.52%	15	6.67%
Whitespace	8	4.65%	5	2.58%	7	4.83%	10	4.44%
Colour scheme	12	6.98%	15	7.73%	14	9.66%	18	8.00%
Images and graphics	25	14.53%	30	15.46%	22	15.17%	28	12.44%
Advertisement integration	8	4.65%	10	5.15%	5	3.45%	7	3.11%
Navigation aids	5	2.91%	6	3.09%	4	2.76%	8	3.56%
Wide shot	18	10.47%	20	10.31%	15	10.34%	25	11.11%
Medium shot	12	6.98%	8	7.73%	10	6.90%	18	8.00%
Close-up	7	4.07%	5	4.12%	6	4.14%	10	4.44%
Extreme close-up	4	2.33%	4	2.58%	3	2.07%	6	2.67%
High angle shot	3	1.16%	7	2.06%	2	1.38%	5	2.22%
Low angle shot	6	1.74%	3	3.61%	5	3.45%	8	3.56%
Bird's eye view	2	3.49%	2	1.55%	1	0.69%	3	1.33%
Worm's eye view	3	1.16%	5	1.03%	2	1.38%	3	1.33%
Over-the-shoulder shot	4	1.74%	12	2.58%	3	2.07%	4	1.78%
Candid shots	10	5.81%		6.19%	8	5.52%	15	6.67%
Grand Total	178		204		161		226	

The analysis on Table 4.6 reveals that all four newspapers—*Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *Guardian* prioritise the use of images and graphics, with frequencies ranging from 12.44% (*Guardian*) to 15.46% (*Vanguard*), underscoring their reliance on visuals to enhance layout

aesthetics and content credibility. Typography is notably significant in *Vanguard* (12.89%) and *ThisDay* (12.41%), reflecting their emphasis on textual professionalism. *Guardian* stands out for its dynamic visual appeal, evident in its higher usage of wide shots (11.11%) and medium shots (8.00%), while *Punch* maintains a balance through strategic use of grid structures (8.72%) and colour schemes (6.98%), ensuring clean and organised layouts. The findings suggest that while all newspapers effectively manipulate layout styles, each adopts unique design strategies to cater to reader preferences and reinforce the value and credibility of their content.

### Discussion of Findings

The result revealed that the majority of the elements of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background graphics on newspapers pages of *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay* and *The Guardian* were applied on inside pages of their newspapers. This was followed by stories placed on the front pages, centre page and back page. This finding is in tandem with the study of Ottah (2017) who stated that both the *Graphic* and the *Daily Sun* used photographs in all the pages of the editions; and the aware pictures dominated the newspapers with 64% while the candid pictures followed with 21% and the semi-aware picture 15%. Most of the pictures were relevant to the stories, but the *Graphic* newspapers had more of negative pictures (75%), than *Daily Sun* with 25%. Most of the pictures (60.6%) used were sourced from photojournalists as against other sources. Visual Communication Theory underscores the role of visual elements in effectively conveying messages and evoking emotional responses. The application of graphics in these newspapers demonstrates their potential to transcend textual limitations by offering readers a more dynamic way to process information. On inside pages, visuals complement the text, simplifying complex information and making stories accessible to diverse audiences. Meanwhile, their strategic placement on front, centre, and back pages serves to create memorable impressions, reinforcing key messages. By integrating visuals with textual content, the newspapers not only enhance the aesthetic quality of their publications but also facilitate a deeper cognitive and emotional connection with their readers, reinforcing the importance of visual communication in modern journalism.

The finding revealed that the analysis on Table 5 reveals that *The Guardian* excels in achieving balance and contrast across its pages, with high scores in content diversity (90%), tone and style (90%), visual elements (90%), and editorial content (90%), indicating a well-structured and visually appealing layout that caters to diverse reader preferences. *ThisDay* also demonstrates strong performance, particularly in tone and style (85%) and visual layout (80%), though it slightly lags in editorial content (60%). *The Punch* shows moderate balance, particularly in visual elements (85%) and editorial content (85%), but has room for improvement in section distribution (65%). Conversely, *Vanguard* scores the lowest overall, with significant weaknesses in design elements (50%) and visual layout (60%), suggesting a need for better alignment and contrast in its presentation to enhance readability and appeal. The Visual Communication Theory underscores the importance of using visual elements to effectively convey messages and enhance audience comprehension. This theory highlights the role of design elements, such as images, typography, colour contrast, and layout, in shaping how readers interact with and interpret newspaper content. A visually balanced page not only draws attention but also facilitates the retention of information, making it crucial for newspapers to integrate strong visual communication practices. In this study, *The Guardian* and *ThisDay* leverage visual communication effectively by maintaining a harmonious balance between text and visuals, while *Vanguard* falls short in its design elements, impacting its overall readability and appeal. Applying this theory can help newspapers optimise their presentation, ensuring that content is both visually engaging and communicatively effective.

The result revealed that all four newspapers—*Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *Guardian* prioritise the use of images and graphics, with frequencies ranging from 12.44% (*Guardian*)

to 15.46% (*Vanguard*), underscoring their reliance on visuals to enhance layout aesthetics and content credibility. Typography is notably significant in *Vanguard* (12.89%) and *ThisDay* (12.41%), reflecting their emphasis on textual professionalism. *Guardian* stands out for its dynamic visual appeal, evident in its higher usage of wide shots (11.11%) and medium shots (8.00%), while *Punch* maintains a balance through strategic use of grid structures (8.72%) and colour schemes (6.98%), ensuring clean and organised layouts. The findings suggest that while all newspapers effectively manipulate layout styles, each adopts unique design strategies to cater to reader preferences and reinforce the value and credibility of their content. This finding upholds the study of Pepple (2021) that the elements which drive the editorial page of the newspaper thereby giving its aesthetic value are the design and layout, as well as the principles of balance, focus, contrast, dynamics and unity.

The Visual Communication Theory underscores the importance of using visual elements to effectively convey messages and enhance audience comprehension. This theory highlights the role of design elements, such as images, typography, colour contrast, and layout, in shaping how readers interact with and interpret newspaper content. A visually balanced page not only draws attention but also facilitates the retention of information, making it crucial for newspapers to integrate strong visual communication practices. In this study, *The Guardian* and *ThisDay* leverage visual communication effectively by maintaining a harmonious balance between text and visuals, while *Vanguard* falls short in its design elements, impacting its overall readability and appeal. Applying this theory can help newspapers optimize their presentation, ensuring that content is both visually engaging and communicatively effective.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the predominant placement of graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, and background visuals on the inside pages of *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *The Guardian*, followed by their appearance on the front, centre, and back pages, highlights a strategic editorial approach aimed at enhancing reader engagement, comprehension, and the overall visual appeal of the newspapers.

The study establishes that while all four newspapers demonstrate varying degrees of balance and contrast in their content and presentation, *The Guardian* stands out as the most balanced and visually appealing, followed by *ThisDay* with strong but slightly inconsistent elements, whereas *The Punch* maintains moderate balance with room for improvement, and *Vanguard* falls short in design and layout, highlighting the need for strategic enhancements to improve its overall reader experience.

The study establishes that the strategic manipulation of layout elements and shot angles by *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *Guardian* newspapers significantly contributes to the aesthetic appeal and perceived credibility of their content. While Images and Graphics emerge as a universally dominant feature across all publications, variations in the emphasis on typography, colour schemes, and visual angles highlight each newspaper's unique approach to engaging their audience. These findings underscore the critical role of design choices in influencing reader perception and enhancing the overall value of media content.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the result of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Newspapers should strategically expand the use of graphics across all pages to enhance visual appeal and audience engagement.
2. *Vanguard* should prioritise improving its design elements and visual layout, while other newspapers should continue refining their balance and contrast to enhance reader engagement.

3. Newspapers should continue leveraging diverse layout elements and shot angles while prioritising reader preferences to enhance content appeal and credibility.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of visual communication and media studies by highlighting the role of photo elements in shaping reader preferences within the context of Nigerian newspapers. By analysing how newspapers such as *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, and *The Guardian* utilize photo elements, the study provides insights into the visual strategies that resonate with readers in the South-South region of Nigeria. It bridges a gap in existing literature by focusing on an underexplored aspect of newspaper production—visual aesthetics—and its impact on audience engagement. This localized perspective not only enriches the understanding of regional media consumption patterns but also offers practical recommendations for editors and designers seeking to enhance the visual appeal of their publications.

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