



The Impact of Expressive Newspaper Layout Designs on Nigerian Readers

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Abstract: Newspaper readership has witnessed considerable sophistication in recent years following the expressive design elements used by publishers and the eye-tracking visual behaviour adopted by readers. This is contrary to earlier assumptions that newspaper audiences were attentive, receptive, but relatively passive sets of readers assembled in a more or less public setting and paid little attention to how the titles were designed. This paper explores the use of white spaces, colour, and layout design principles of balance, contrast, unity, and proportion to aid page navigation in Nigerian newspapers and the psychological concept of eye tracking during newspaper reading. The Gestalt theory of visual perception and the Uses and Gratification theory serve as its theoretical underpinnings. The finding is that not only have the newspaper publishers adopted colour and other attractive design elements to retain the attention of readers, but readers now pick those titles whose designs appeal to them on the newsstands.

Keywords: audience, colour, design elements, eye tracking, newspaper readership, white spaces.

Introduction

Newspaper visual makeup or design has evolved over the years. A cursory look at this evolution reveals that these evident changes have been brought about by the organisation of texts and page elements, or furniture, as well as the packaging of the news products. The primary reason for the change is the newspaper publishers' recognition of the sophistication of the audience they serve. Newspaper layout design is concerned with the process of selecting, planning, organising and arranging typography, photographs, and information graphics on a page to make it readable. It is, therefore, necessary and worthy of adaptation by any project that carries any message with eye-catching visuals such as advertisements, newspaper or magazine page layouts, or even website page designs. In business, layout design is associated with the configuration of the different elements of an organisation, and its purpose is to optimise the layout of machinery, or tools with the aim of maximising value-added operations. Its main function is essentially in its service as an avenue for the assembly and/or arrangement of different parts or elements, such as headlines, sub-heads, body text, and graphic materials, into a unified whole for the presentation of the message.

The second reason is the result of the eye tracking research on newspaper readership, which shows that eye movements are powerful indicators of human behaviour, preferences, and decision making. Thus, with eye tracking research, newspaper editors are able to understand human behaviour and the underlying cognitive processes that provide invaluable insight and opportunities. It also enables readers or viewers to identify and monitor visual attention in terms of location, objects, or duration. The most important function of eye tracking services is that they facilitate the study of visual attention, and they do so by enabling the brain to selectively choose relevant visual information on the basis of interest and environment. While interest involves the conscious or unconscious decision to look at an object, environment is concerned with elements detected through peripheral vision. Two eye tracking techniques are popular: those that measure the position of the eye relative to the head, and those that

measure the orientation of the eye in space, or the "point of regard." Duchowski (2022) explains that the later measurement is often used when the contention is the identification of elements in a visual scene, especially in graphical or interactive applications.

On its part, the audience represents readers of the newspapers or buyers. McQuail (2012, p. 398) defines the audience as "an attentive, receptive, but relatively passive set of listeners or spectators assembled in a more or less public setting." The characteristics embedded in this definition, which are captured in the key words 'assembled listeners or spectators' who are 'relatively passive,' have, however, not fully explained the essence of the audience that the newspapers have. Livingstone (2005, p. 18) distinguishes the concept of the audience from the public and private perspectives. He remarks that in elite discourses, audiences are often "denigrated as trivial, passive, individualised, while the public is valued as active, critically engaged, and politically significant."

From this perspective, audiences are often taken to represent issues in the private domain, while the public is associated with politically significant issues. What is also noteworthy is the fact that though 'audience' and 'public' may derive their beings from different bodies of theory, they do not refer to different realities, but are composed of the same people. This is the postulation of Corner (1991), who argues that the activities of audiences cannot be separated from those of the public, or citizen-viewers. However, Silverstone (1990, p. 173) assumes a cultural dimension in his definition of audience, as he defines it as "a potentially crucial pivot for the understanding of a whole range of social and cultural processes that bear on the central questions of public communication...essentially questions of culture." This concern is similar to that of the public sphere theory as developed by Jurgen Habermas in the 1970s. Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox (1974, p. 220) argue that the 'public sphere' comes into being in "every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body." The theory holds that when such individuals assemble, they shed business, professional, or constitutional behavioural characteristics and "behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion... ..with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to publish their opinions about matters of general interest."

Theoretical underpinnings

The work is anchored in two theoretical underpinnings: the Gestalt Theory of Visual Perception and the Uses and Gratification Theory.

The Gestalt Theory of Visual Perception: Gestalt theory is associated with a pattern or form joined or arranged in a structure or format, and owes its origins to German scholars, otherwise known as the Berlin School, in the 1920s. The theory describes how people tend to organise visual elements into groups or unified wholes when certain principles are applied. Gestalt theory is based on the tenet that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Business Dictionary (2017) defines it as a theory that proposes that what is 'seen' is what appears to the seer and not what may 'actually be there,' and that the nature of a unified whole is not understood by analysing its parts. According to Utriainen (2012), the major theorists of the Gestalt School were Max Wertheimer, Christian von Ehrenfels, Wolfgang Kohler, Kurt Koffka, and Kurt Lewin. Wertheimer (1944, p. 84) summed up the thesis behind the theory when he asserted: "There are contexts in which what is happening in the whole cannot be deduced from the characteristics of the separate pieces, but conversely; what happens to a part of the whole is, in clear-cut cases, determined by the laws of the inner structure of its whole."

Wertheimer's postulation was that the characteristics of an object could be observed from two perspectives: either as a whole or in parts. When observed from the perspective of the whole, the characteristics that are associated with the parts are lost in the observation. However, when the object is observed in parts, different pictures or scenarios that could not be observed immediately become evident. From the point of view of behaviour, a typical example is that of spectators watching a football match. Footballers become the centre of attraction while the football field they are playing on is lost to memory. This is the figure-ground concept of Gestalt theory. Soegaard (2017) has listed six principles that are associated with Gestalt perception theory. These are the principles of similarity, proximity, common fate, good continuation, closure, area, and symmetry. In the first principle, which

is also called the law of similarity, Soegaard observes that the eye tends to perceive similar events in a design as a complete picture, shape, or group, even when those elements are separated.

The shape, size, or colour of the elements are also said to influence similarity. Thus, when an object with a high degree of similarity is mixed with a group of dissimilar objects, the brain is said to devote time and energy to creating a link between them so that it can try to understand their relationship with each other. The second principle of Gestalt perception is proximity. According to Soegaard (2017), this law describes how the human eye perceives connections between visual elements. Thus, elements that are close to each other are perceived to be related, especially when compared to those that are far away. The law of proximity allows the newspaper page reader, for instance, to use white space to build relationships between other elements on the page.

The third Gestalt principle is that of common fate. Rutledge (2009), explains that the principle is vital to human perception of how things around them are or are not related to one another. They tend to perceive elements moving in the same direction as being more related than elements that are stationary or that move in different directions. The principle of common fate is, therefore, vital to our perception of how the things around us are or are not related to one another. Good continuation is the fourth Gestalt principle of perception. According to Soegaard (2017), the law stipulates that the human eye follows a pattern of lines, curves, or a sequence of shapes to determine the relationship between design elements. Thus, when we view a design layout, our eyes tend to draw a line that connects different elements. The Gestalt principle of closure applies when a complete figure is seen even when part of the information is missing. Skaalid (1999) remarks that the law of closure is evident when humans see black circles covered by a white triangle, though it could just have been three incomplete circles joined together. Area and symmetry as Gestalt principles of perception refer to instances where humans perceive a smaller square to be on top of another figure as opposed to a whole in the larger shape. The principle of symmetry is illustrated in instances where the whole figure is perceived rather than the individual parts that make up the whole figure. The understanding of Gestalt principles is particularly useful because it enables us to play with the principles of similarity to determine the sizes of headlines; or the principle of continuation to navigate the news pages of the newspapers.

The Uses and Gratification Theory: This theory is regarded as one of the few precious theories that have been developed by mass media scholars. Lin (1996) is of the opinion that the theory describes media behaviour from the point of view of the audience members, and acknowledges that audience members control their decisions on media use. The theory was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1940s based on the initial observations of Herzog's research. It posits that audiences seek out gratification from the media and patronise those that publish content that fulfills their needs. Arnett, Larson, and Offer (1995, p. 200) explain that the theory has a five-fold orientation. These are: (i) the psychological needs that help to shape (ii) why people use the media and that motivate people to (iii) engage in media use behaviours (iv) derive gratifications, and (v) fulfill those intrinsic needs, within the confines of a particular socio-cultural environment.

This perspective, however, opens up two major considerations. The first is that individuals differ along several psychological dimensions, which in turn prompt them to make different choices about which media to patronise. The second consideration is that even when individuals are exposed to similar media contents, they are bound to respond to these contents in different ways, depending on their characteristics or circumstances. Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008) are of the view that the theory contends that the audience member is active and makes a choice in his or her use of media messages, while the mass media are in competition with other sources of need satisfaction. Research in Uses and Gratification Theory has developed in several stages since the 1940s through the 1990s, with the modern version encapsulating the notion of the active audience. Windahl (1981), cited in Ruggiero (2000, p. 7), argues that the notion of activeness of the audience creates the picture of an audience as 'super-rational and very selective.' He asserts, however, that it would be more beneficial to emphasise similarities in the perspectives of the communicator and the audience than dwell on only the communicator.

Egede and Chuks-Nwosu (2013) posit that, though accounts of the origin of the theory are varied, its early studies focused on the role of the mass media in propaganda and persuasion. They list four stages in the development of uses and gratification theory, with the earliest form beginning with Herta Herzog's 1944 classification of the reasons why people chose specific types of media. The second stage involved Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail's 1964 study of people's motives for watching certain political programmes on television, while the third stage is associated with the interest surrounding uses and gratifications theory and the link between the reason why media is used and the achieved gratification. The fourth stage is regarded as the development of the uses and gratification model by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch. In the explanation of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), the theory holds that people are active users of the media and that they select how they use such media. Uses and gratification research often centres on the 'active audience' assumption, which is why Levy and Windahl (1984) remark that the activities of the audience cover "a range of possible orientations to the communication process, a range that varies across phases of the communication sequence."

Application of expressive layout design elements in Nigerian newspapers

Newspaper layout is not just about placing more photographs and colours on a page to attract people at the newsstand; it goes beyond that. Several studies have been conducted to determine where readers' eyes go in pictures or other elements on a page, and the outcomes of these studies have helped news page designers determine where to place elements on the news pages. Another defining feature of modern newspaper designs is the concept of textual aesthetics. Udoh and Obot (2013) define this as the skillful presentation of the written word in news and features in such a manner that the reader derives some pleasure or satisfaction from going through it. This is in direct contrast to the regular print's visual aesthetics, which have been concerned with the layout's planning, which has always focused on principles of balance, contrast, and other design elements. Early newspapers in Nigeria were not bothered about the use of headlines or even aesthetic page designs, but as Aliagan (2006) explains, they began to use one column headlines for their stories. Such headlines were written in upper case or capital letters, and then evolved into lower case with the first letters in caps, which is the format in some dailies. With few exceptions, virtually all the daily newspapers in Nigeria at the moment publish headlines in upper and lower case.

Apart from this, newspapers now make use of photographs or information graphics on their pages, a phenomenon that was not part of the bargain in the production of early newspapers. Udoh and Obot (2013) affirm that there is nowhere in the world where early newspapers used pictures to communicate messages to their respective audiences. Citing *Iwe Irohin* in Nigeria, they assert that the publication in its first and early editions carried scanty photographs or illustrations, stressing that the newspaper was essentially textual, with the only feature that competed with texts being the headlines. Equally noteworthy is the fact that early newspapers in Nigeria were not published with a considerable degree of graphic design consciousness. Ijeh (2015, p. 58) explains that two forms of photographic elements now dominate Nigerian newspapers. These are the 'stand-alone' and 'picture news' stories. A stand-alone photograph is described as an independent photo on a page with its caption. Its essence is that it tells its own story and does not wait to be explained by the surrounding news or feature story before it is understood by readers. On their part, picture based stories are those in which photographs are displayed to authenticate the veracity of the stories and make them better understood. Photographs were not regular features in early newspapers because of technological challenges. Westley (1972) observes that the use of photographic materials in newspapers was made possible by the invention of the camera itself and the etching process in the nineteenth century. According to Westley, the zinc etched screened half tone that was first experimented with in London in 1907 facilitated the reproduction of photographs on newspapers in all its variations of gray and black.

Two forms of graphic design are dominant in the visual designs of newspapers in Nigeria. These are the flavour and informational graphics. Skirbekk (2011, p. 21) defines 'flavour' graphics as those that serve the same purposes as photography, while 'informational' graphics are those that are used when a story cannot be told by words with photographs or flavour illustrations alone. Citing Evans (1978), he asserts that informational graphics have the additional feature of visually explaining spatial

relationships, in the process simplifying and giving the reader a better understanding of the story. These two forms of illustrative materials have continued to dominate newspaper design in Nigeria. Cairo (2008) defines infographic elements as an all-inclusive and always up-to-date diagrammatic representation of data or information that is presented in the form of a diagram. Sancho (2001) aligns with this and posits that infographic elements represent an informative contribution carried out by means of typographic elements that can facilitate readers' understanding of events, actions, or news of significance and can serve as a substitute for text. It is also described by Santaella (2008) as a post-photographic paradigm, a postulation that suggests that it offers more support to newspaper readers than news photography. The use of infographic elements on newspaper pages offers the reader and the journalist countless possibilities that should be explored. The new challenge these newspapers face, however, is the incorporation of infographics in their publications. Pinto (2017) explains that the challenge emerged from the field of journalism following observation of how the reader consumes information from the newspapers and the demands for fast and efficient communication. The benefit of infographic elements on newspaper pages is that they provide immediate and sometimes more interactive ways of communicating with the reader.

White spaces. The visual formats of modern newspapers have changed dramatically from the virtual texts that dominated early newspapers in Nigeria. The major direction of noticeable change is the extensive use of white spaces and associated reduction of text in newspaper designs. Design itself is identified as the deliberate arrangement of objects to achieve a predetermined effect. It is a visual composition, and just as verbal or written compositions are woven around a subject matter, artistic or visual designs are arranged to express an idea or ideas. White spaces are empty areas on a newspaper page that may be covered either by colour or white, opaque or transparent, but without text on them. They owe their origins to the Second World War-era censorship of newspapers in Australia. The *Newspaper Design History* (2004) describes white spaces as products of open defiance, which started at the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* of Australia in April 1944. It indicates that the newspaper began to leave open spaces on pages to show that stories meant for such spaces were removed by censors.

In the newspaper's edition of April 17, 1944, for instance, head and shoulder photographs of the Australian Minister of Information who ordered the censorship, as well as those of the author of the statement that was censored, were published. Two empty columns designed vertically down, representing where the censored story was earlier displayed and later removed, were printed as white spaces. The need for white space is based on a number of factors. One of these is the shift of focus by publishers from hard information to colour and entertainment. Robertson (2000) is of the view that in a media-saturated era, competition for readers' eyes in the mass media has meant quick visual summaries made through the visual code, in which white spaces play an important part. The implication of this is that at the newsstands, readers rarely spend time reading dense and cluttered pages but go for those pages that have outstanding features that they can easily relate to.

The benefit inherent in the trend of extensive use of white spaces is that it enables the busy reader to read the paper easily. It is also used by designers to convey an image of sophistication and elegance (Boulton, 2007; Jones, 2010). The implication of this is that people in higher strata of society tend to regard cluttered pages as unsophisticated, especially where issues of branding are concerned. Another reason for the use of white space is the need to allow text to breathe. This is treated from psychological and even physical perspectives, where overcrowding of available spaces creates inconveniences and discomfort for people. *Design Matters* (2007) remarks that "when text crowds all the way to the edge, it leaves us feeling crowded or cramped." A generous application of white space on a page creates the impression that the editor values the content of his page and would go the extra mile to avoid the clutter that crammed and crowded pages provide. White space is applied in two forms. These are active white spaces and passive white spaces. Ciripitca (2016) defines active white space as one that ensures a better structure and layout in design because it gives focus to the content area, while passive white space is the default space left out at the borders or in between content to make it readable. Boulton (2007, p. 4) is of the opinion that white spaces are used to create balanced, harmonious layouts. He notes: "It can also take the reader on a journey through the design in the same way a

photographer leaves 'looking room' in a portrait shot by positioning the subject off the centre of the frame and having them look into the remaining space." Turnbull (2011) defines it as the spacing between different elements on a page that contains nothing. While some designers regard it as negative space, others prefer it as positive space. Either way, it serves the same purpose: mould and define what positive space is all about. It is, therefore, not to be seen as the left over space that no content was provided for but as a deliberate space left to invite readers to the page. Jones (2010) argues that though the name suggests that the space might be white, it does not necessarily mean that the spaces must be white. What constitutes white space, therefore, is simply the empty spaces that surround the texts on a given newspaper page. Such spaces include those around margins, gutters, images, graphics, columns, and lines of type.

Colour printing. Full colour printing of newspapers took off in 1954, with the *St. Petersburg (Florida) Times* printing its news pages in colour. Dutery (2014), citing The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, observes that by 1982, *USA Today*, had been introduced as a full colour national newspaper. Although the first printing press in Nigeria, the Hope Waddel Press, was set up at Calabar in 1846 by Hope Waddel and Samuel Edgerly, it took almost 150 years before full colour printing of newspapers could take off. The evolution of the printing industry has witnessed considerable dynamism, as investments moved from the letter press to the composing machine and later to web offset printing. Equally dynamic has been the fact that printing technology has progressed to the digital stage, where printing can be authorised by computers through Computer to Plate (CTP) technology. As Afolabi (2015) observes, the inauguration of the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company in 1925 to publish the *Nigerian Daily Times* marked a turning point in the growth of the industry. This is because it led to the purchase of a second hand Demy Wharfadale printing machine, guillotine, and type accessories for use in the paper's publishing business.

In the area of colour printing, Afolabi explains that commercial colour separation was experimented with in Lagos around 1969–70. Academy Press is listed as one of the leading lights in the experimentation with colour separation and colour printing of magazines and journals in the late 1960s. Noteworthy is the fact that newspaper publishers did not venture into full colour printing until the 1990s, though they printed colour insertions. Among the newspapers that took the lead in the introduction of full colour printing in Nigeria were *Thisday* and the defunct *Concord* newspapers. *This day*, indeed, prides itself on being the first to introduce full colour printing in Nigeria. Other newspapers, such as *Vanguard* and *The Punch*, are also notable in this direction, as they started with the initial printing of some pages in colour in the 1990s. Today, virtually all the newspapers in the country print a substantial number of their pages in full colour. Contemporary colour production entails directing the image setting equipment to produce films in primary colours. These four colours are cyan, magenta, yellow, and black and white. Black and white is regarded as the backup or key color, hence the acronym CMYK. This process is different from the spot colour printing in use before the development of digital printing. At the time of printing with spot colours, known as RGB (red, green, and blue), photographs were taken three times to register or filter these spot colours or paints.

Visual design principles: What should be noted, however, is that visual layout design principles have not changed. The basic foundations of visual newspaper make-up are still premised on balance, contrast, unity, and proportion (Westley, 1972; Osho, 2007). Balance is observed in two forms: formal and informal. Formal balance exhibits a methodical or square arrangement of stories and page furniture so that symmetry is observed. Though simple to describe, it is not tenable because it elicits the replication of page elements or furniture to ensure that editorial presentations are not skewed in any direction. Under the formal balance layout design, if materials that are placed on the upper left hand extend across five columns, for instance, the opposite materials on the bottom right also have to be seen to be similar to what is on the top left corner.

Westley (1972) remarks that the major fault associated with formal balance is that such visual designs tend to force the news into a previously designed space. This means that the balanced page is designed before-hand with news or other editorial materials fitted into the earlier prescribed design spaces. As a result of this fault line, many newspaper designers adopt an informal balance in their visual

compositions. This approach involves drawing vertical and horizontal lines across the page and marking its centre-point. In this way, the page is divided into quarters and halves. Editorial materials are displayed in all the quarters proportionately so that no quarter or half overpowers the other. The principle of contrast in newspaper design involves the arrangement of elements in such a way that a reader is able to rank the stories according to their level of importance. Moreover, Osho (2007) explains that the distinguishing feature of a contrasting page is that the page is made to appear lively and interesting because the elements are different from one another. Thus, a square-sized element is contrasted with a rectangular or triangular object, a dark background with a light background, and a bold headline with a light headline. Agreeing with Osho, Westley (1972) argues that contrast can be sourced from two major elements: type size and type design. While type size emphasises the difference between display lines and body lines, type design is concerned with styles (Roman italics, type families, and weight). Degrees of condensation can also serve as a measurable factor in the provision of contrast on a page.

On its part, proportion is the principle of newspaper design by which comparative relationships are measured. Osho (2007) explains that the goal of the designer is to ensure that the shapes or sizes of elements are measured with those of others and that materials are placed in a way that would make them pleasing to the eye. Aliagan (2006) aligns with this argument. He asserts, however, that the basic feature of a proportional layout is that it considers the size and shape of each element in relation to the others. On its part, the principle of unity in newspaper design is the consideration that there must be harmonious relationships in the use of all elements. Osho (2007) is of the view that for elements on a page to be considered to have unity, they must create a simple impression and not be seen to be fighting one another. Such a page may use types of the same family or be consistent in its use of whatever types are adopted for the headlines or body text.

Eye-tracking research on newspaper readership

Wartenberg and Holmqvist (2005) compared designers' predictions and readers' behaviour in their case study on daily newspaper layouts. Their methodology included getting designers in 17 daily newspapers to provide their predictions regarding the visual behaviour of their readers, and observing the visual behaviour of 26 participants who were exposed to reading selected spreads of the daily newspapers. The designers partitioned their spreads into 16 areas of interest (AOIs), such as local news stories, foreign news stories, crime news stories, photographs, features, fact boxes, and columns. They also ranked the AOI readers in numerical order. On their part, the percentage of time that readers dwelt on specific AOIs was also determined and classified as observation time. The second sub-study determined participants' visual behaviour when reading the newspaper spreads. Wartenberg and Holmqvist explain that the selected spreads were placed on cardboard, and participants were asked to read the newspapers as they would have done in real life settings. During this period, their eye movements were recorded using a head tracker, a light weight head mounted device, to record points of gaze on the spread. The results of the study indicated that most designers partitioned their AOIs so that they coincided with whole articles, that is, either as news or features. In the second sub-study, the result was that participants read the paper as if they did so in their natural settings, with 61 per cent indicating that they were not disturbed by the eye tracking equipment. The majority, or 73 per cent, said they read the newspaper spreads as if they were in a normal setting.

The psychological concept of eye tracking during newspaper readership is a relatively recent phenomenon. Its methodology provides insight into how readers perceive newspaper spreads. Holmqvist and Wartenberg (2005, p. 2), who cited a study by Widman and Polansky (1990), assert that, while eye tracking during newspaper reading offers precise information 50 times per second on where readers are looking, the implication of this innovation is that the bigger the size of the display item on a newspaper page, the greater the possibility of its being seen and remembered. Their position aligns with the Poynter eye tracking research, which shows that, most readers enter newspapers with front page headlines and large photos (Stark, 2014). What is discernible from the eye tracking studies is that newspaper publishers have begun to consider the visual outlook of their newspapers as products that should be properly packaged to attract readers or consumers.

Findings from the eye tracking study by De Haan, Kruikemeier, Lecheler, Smit, and van der Nat (2018) that measured the use of direct attention to visualisations on three different news platforms: print newspapers, e-newspapers on tablets, and news websites offer two major outcomes. These include the fact that news consumers do indeed read news visualisations, regardless of the platforms on which the visuals were published. It also showed that visualisations were appreciated by readers if integrated into news stories. The result also supports the postulations of Sturken and Cartwright (2001) that there has been an evolution from static to interactive infographics that has occurred in the last decade and needs to be adapted to. In static visualisation narratives (or news photography), graphics, charts, maps, and texts are mixed to empower story telling, while the background or related details are provided by the image. Thus, Nigerian newspapers have to adapt to the use of more infographic elements to attract readers to their titles. A study on newspaper reading with eye-tracking data from readers' actual interactions conducted by Holsanova, Rahm, and Holmqvis (2006) found that readers enter newspapers from two major perspectives. The first is that people read newspapers from a socio-semiotic perspective, while the second is through the application of an eye-tracking perspective to examine entry points and reading paths.

Generally, socio-semiotic research is concerned with the placement of eye-catching headlines in large font sizes and styles, as well as expressive photographs against a red background. These combine to grab the attention of the reader. Newspaper reading through entry points and entry paths is associated with paratexts, a concept coined by Genette (1997) to embody a group of practices and discourses of all kinds that are of common interest or a convergence of effects that seem to be more important to the reader. Holsanova, Rahm, and Holmqvis (2006) define paratext as thresholds to the texts, or a notion for the different accompanying texts that connect to the main texts and can function as a starting point, or an invitation to the reader. Paratexts, thus provide a central notion for creating, recreating, and interpreting newspaper spread semiotics.

The challenge of newspaper readership

Newspapers' target audiences are made up of consumers or readers to whom the newspaper copies are distributed. These target audiences are formed from different groups and include youth, adults, men, and women. They have their own political biases, including languages, habits, behaviours, and preferences. Newspaper editors and designers understand the audience that they serve. As a result, the following journalistic questions should be answered while determining how they design the news pages: The first question is based on who the readers are likely to be, and reflects the categorisation of those that read the newspaper's pages. This is followed by the 'what' question, which is concerned with what the potential reader wants to know about the arrangement of news elements on the page. The third question is 'where' the story is placed on the page. If the most important story to the reader is placed in an inconspicuous position, it might be lost to the interested reader. Also important to the reader is 'how' the editor or page designer displays the story of interest. The use of expressive furniture elements to display the story is bound to guarantee its readability at first sight.

Understanding the relationship between the audience and the public becomes obscure as one tends to view all aspects of the audience as matters of public or civic significance. This is because the relationship of audiences to media contents is found to be constantly mediated by culture or cultural identity. A number of basic questions flow from these notions. They include such questions as: Must audience members be assembled in a contemporary era? Can an individual be construed as representing an audience? Can the media exist without an audience? And must audience members be treated as passive listeners or spectators? On the first question, Ang (1991) describes the notion of the audience being a form of assembly as simply that of a temporary collective brought into existence by a given medium, such as the newspaper. Yeatman (2011, p. 652), in elaborating on the concept of an assembly, remarks that an assemblage is a dynamic and not entirely stable configuration lasting for a period of time and that it involves "connective processes that may either enhance or inhibit, reinforce or hinder the involved processes" in audience formation. This concept is amplified by Hasan (2010), who describes the media audience as more than a conventionalised crowd but rather a collectivity, an aggregate of persons who are readers, listeners, or viewers of different media or their various

components. His view that the collectivity is not gathered at one place or point in time aligns with that of Martins Allor (1988), cited in Ang (1991), who challenges the notion that there is, indeed, nothing like the audience.

To the second question of whether an individual can constitute an audience, the answer can be found through an examination of the original etymology of the word. Moores (1993), cited in D'Antonio (2016), explains that the word 'to give audience' in its original usage is derived from the context of an individual giving a face-to-face verbal communication to someone. He argues that the term later became associated with the collective label of consumers of mass mediated messages. As a result, it has become a bit difficult to specify where the term begins and ends. But we can reduce the difficulty by aligning with Nightingale (2011), cited in D'Antonio (2016), who tied the definition of the term to cultural and social contexts. Nightingale postulates that, from a research perspective, audience is always context- and text bound, and that people are not audience by nature but by culture.

Can there be any medium without an audience? This is another critical question that has to be answered if we are to lay claim to any understanding of the concept of the audience. What is salient is that the audience and the media are different yet interdependent phenomena. McQuail (2012, p. 399) paints an audience scenario that depicts the role of the audience right from its early origins. These characteristics are:

- ✓ planning and organisation of viewing and listening as well as of the performances themselves
- ✓ events with a public and 'popular' character
- ✓ secular (thus not religious) content of performance: for entertainment, education, and vicarious emotional experience
- ✓ specialisation in the roles of authors, performers, and spectators
- ✓ physical location of the performance and spectator experience.

McQuail's classification suggests that because of diversity, in terms of media content and social behaviour, modern audiences do not provide for elements of public assembly, though they are in a 'state of continuous existence'. The existence of the audience, therefore, presupposes the fact that there must be a medium to serve it. But the major issue of discourse would be whether the particular audience exists for the given medium, given the fact that a theatre hall, for instance, exists for the cinema, not the newspaper or magazine, and vice versa. Relationships between the media and the audience find support in D'Antonio's (2016) postulation that media events are also audience events since they require people to hang out in media time-space where they physically, mentally, and emotionally engage with media materials, technologies, and power structures. Furthermore, she argues that being part of the audience indicates that, though one is not involved in the production of the media event, one has instead become a consumer or recipient of the information from the media. This notion postulates that if there were no media events, there would be no audience, and if there were no audiences, there would be no media. There is, however, a new dynamic change that has become noticeable. This is the emergence of a 'new audience' and the supposed 'death' of the 'former audience'. In elaborating on the new phenomenon, Rosen (2006) assumes that the concept of the "death of the 'former audience'" means that members of the audience have now also become communicators. Thus, 'the people who were formerly called the audience' (TPFKATA) or those on the receiving end of the media system that ran in a linear, one-way broadcasting style have moved away from this scenario as they have now equally become communicators.

The last question is: must audience members be treated as passive readers or spectators? This concept apparently flows from the assumption in the mass society era that the mass media had virtually unlimited power over audiences. During that era, it was believed that members of the audience were passive listeners or receivers of communications directed at them. Messages from the mass media were assumed to have the effect of a hypodermic needle or magic bullet, such that when injected or shot at the receivers, they were received without objection or produced the expected effects. The audience was

wholly assumed to be passive and received these messages as sitting ducks. Baran and Davis (2012) list some of the assumptions of the mass society era, including the following:

- the media are a powerful force within society that can subvert essential norms and values and thus undermine the social order.
- the media are able to directly influence the minds of average people, transforming their views of the social world.
- average people are vulnerable to media manipulation because, in mass society, they are cut off and isolated from traditional social institutions that previously protected them from manipulation.

These assumptions, also known as direct effects, created the impression that average people were powerless and unable not only to defend themselves from media assaults but also to determine what they needed. They argue that, based on these assumptions, critics have continued to think of innocent teenage members of the audience as helpless before the supposed manipulative power of media content. Over the last few decades, however, media research appears to have moved the understanding of the reception of media messages from the all-powerful behavioural assumption to the notion of an active audience. Baran and Davis (2012), for example, explain that the active audience theories focus on what people do with media messages rather than what the mass media do to audiences. This is a "uses and gratifications" approach. Meijer and Kormelink (2019, p. 4) indicate that this has become a dominant approach within journalism studies. They assert that the Uses and Gratifications approach posits that "audiences actively seek out gratifications from news media, such as surveillance, entertainment, and social interaction."

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that eye tracking research has brought about a better understanding of the visual behaviour of newspaper audiences. Apart from providing insight into the areas of interest (AOIs) of newspaper readers, it also offers information on the percentage of time that readers dwell on specific areas such as local news, foreign news stories, crime news stories, photographs, features, fact boxes, and columns. Furthermore, there has been a transition of the newspaper audience from 'attentive, receptive, but relatively passive set of readers' to active participants in the media space. This follows the emergence of a 'new audience' and the supposed 'death of the former audience.' This is because the new audience is now involved in the communication process as they have now also become communicators, having left the hitherto linear, one-way broadcasting style of information dissemination. Moreover, the extensive use of white spaces and associated reduction of text in newspapers, the application of colour printing, and dynamic visual layouts and designs have led to increased readership among newspaper audiences. Newspapers that seek to enhance their readability are, therefore, encouraged to adopt infographic elements on their news pages.

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