



Understanding the Use of Media Aesthetic Elements in the Guardian Post and the Post Newspapers, Cameroon

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Abstract: This study seeks to understand the use of media aesthetic elements in The Guardian Post and The Post Newspapers in Cameroon. The use of aesthetics in newspapers is vital to appeal readership. The qualitative research design considering a mixed method of qualitative content analysis and in-depth interview was applied to study the issue. Purposive sampling was used to select two private English language newspapers owing to their practicalities and expertise in the application of aesthetics in producing the newspapers as well as the high solicitation of these newspapers for information, wide coverage and readership across Cameroon. Findings reveal that the two newspapers use bold lead stories, layout, balance, contrast, proportion, unity, typography, photographs and colour in the presentation of news and other editorial materials to attract clients with colour presented as the most used aesthetic technique employed by both newspapers not only to attract customers but to create contrast and to communicate additional information on news stories as well as to present a unique identity of the newspaper. The study further reveals that even though aesthetics is used to attract readers, what keeps the readers loyal to a newspaper is not mostly the beauty but the contents of the newspaper.

Keywords: Newspapers, Aesthetics Elements, Readers, Content, Cameroon

1. INTRODUCTION

Social scientists and scholars in the humanities have laid less emphasis in the study of aesthetics as very few studies have been carried out on media aesthetics and especially in Cameroon. The common adage that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder seems to be affecting this area of study. According to Manovich (2017, p.7), “the concepts of beauty and aesthetic have been almost completely neglected in theories of the media. One regularly finds little or no analysis of media aesthetics in media studies textbooks or in the works of major media theorists after the middle of the 20th century. Instead, many media scholars in recent decades especially in English speaking countries have focused on the content of media and its social and political effects, and ignored the forms of media artefacts.”

If Manovich is critical of the modest attention given to aesthetics in media inquiry, he does recognise and seek to develop the extent to which it is a key and explicit ingredient of training in many forms of media production. Even if the word itself is sometimes not used, the options, resources and techniques for shaping an artefact pleasingly – be it a television narrative, news photograph, webpage or radio special effect relate directly to self-conscious aesthetic recipes of craft-art competence, which at various levels of explicit codification seek to guide ways both of being conventional and of being original. As Manovich (2017) further notes, versions of some of these guidelines are now widely used by ‘proletarians’ in their construction, enhancement, arrangement and online transmission of texts, sounds, pictures and images. It is on this basis that this study assessed the various media aesthetic techniques used by The Guardian Post and The Post Newspapers, two privately owned newspapers in Cameroon to attract customers, which media aesthetic technique is used most and what informs the newspaper’s decision to utilise these various techniques. This study has not only added to the academic discussion on media aesthetics, but it has also provoked and sustained the debate on media aesthetic.

The concept of aesthetics has gone through various metamorphoses and has become a more encompassing concept different from when it was first propounded by early philosophers like Plato.

Plato casually looked at aesthetics to mean beauty. Recently, social scientists and scholars in the humanities are not limiting the word aesthetics to the traditional philosophical concept of Plato which focused on the understanding and appreciation of beauty and with man's ability to judge beauty with some degree of consistency. The concept of aesthetics has continued to enjoy universality. Zettl (2005) illustrates this universality in his home decoration, car speed limit, and dressing analogies. He explains that aesthetic feeling is no longer a visual but a sensory or perceptual issue. The universality of the concept of aesthetics has made aesthetics a major factor and consideration in newspaper editing generally and newspaper photograph editing in particular. Zettl as cited in Akpan (1987) observes that the concept has also morphed from a theory of Arts to 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 (2014) holds that an object of communication is said to be aesthetic if such an object gives pleasure and enjoyment to the onlooker or audience. Aesthetics is the attractiveness of the media content or the pleasure it gives to the audience through meaningful appeal to the appropriate sense organ (Senam, 2012). Aesthetics is a product of creativity (Udoh, Senam, Abasiama, 2021).

Akpan (1987) further posits that aesthetics stresses an essential, intimate, purposeful relationship between life and art. Extrapolating from this definition, it is very evident that the concept has evolved over time. According to Merriam-Webster.com (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 sensory-emotional values sometimes called judgement of sentiment and taste. It is a critical reflection on art, culture and nature.

According to Akpan and Etuk (1990, 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. Nwanne (2011) corroborates that aesthetics suggest all the professional and skilful manipulation of messages to ensure that they appear more arresting, pleasing, persuasive and memorable to the reader. Unlike Nwanne (2011), 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. Nwanne's viewpoint focuses on how aesthetics is viewed in the print media.

Akpan (2011) further sustains his argument on aesthetics as a 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. This paper focuses on print media aesthetics. Ikpe (2003) emphasizes that aesthetics is feelings received or expressed through the human senses. These include all levels of sensations, sense of perception, direct or indirect sensual experience, sense appeal, sense involvement and sense rejection in an organisational experience. Thus, feeling reflects the capacity to be energised or motivated to purchase or read a newspaper. In this case, one must see the presentation of the newspaper so as to trigger judgement from the senses that will enhance meaning sharing or a distortion of the message as Udoh (2014) affirms that a newspaper editor therefore requires proper understanding of the aesthetic characteristics and the contextual functions of page elements, particularly photo elements, combining them knowledgeably into artistic patterns that clarify, intensify and interpret the significant experience. Alom (2018) argues that aesthetics has the power of drawing the readers to feel and experience what the artists have felt and experienced. Supporting this view Johnson (2004) 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.

According to Udoakah (2000), effective communication should be seen as the art of exchanging messages with people, in the forms that can evoke human feelings appropriate to the messages. These feelings form the aesthetic experience essential for meaning sharing (Udoakah, 2000). Thus effective communication goes beyond the receiver ability to share meaning with the encoder. Its ability to

arouse the feelings in the receiver makes for mutuality in the communication process. This is only possible via aesthetics. Udoakah (2000, p.44) as cited in Eliseo Vivas (1955) clarifies the aesthetic experience by describing it as that "...rapt attention which involves the intransitive apprehension of an object's immanent meanings and values in their full presentational immediacy."

2. AESTHETIC IN THE PRINT MEDIA

Efficient layout and design of a newspaper are keys to survival of any publication given the overgrowing competition in newspaper industry (Alom, 2020). Makwen (2022) attests that since the liberalisation of public life in Cameroon, aesthetics, techniques and ethics have characterised the evolution of journalism. The enactment of Law N° 90/52 of 19 December 1990 relating to freedoms of mass communication in Cameroon witnessed newspaper plurality and fragmentation (Tanjong, 2012); a situation resorting to newspaper personality, with need for aesthetic features which reflect unique identity of newspapers in the news stand. Cameroon has more than 600 newspapers (Nforngwa, 2013) and there is need to produce not only professional content but appealing copy for readers' attention. Just like the other mass communication mediums, several aesthetics techniques are used to grab the attention of the reader, make the print media appealing, and cause the clientele to peruse through the pages of the newspaper. Alom (2020) asserts that newspaper patronage across the world is influenced by efficient and coherent blend of aesthetic elements and a poorly planned newspaper despite its contents risks being whisked away by readers.

Understanding the basis of aesthetics is very essential for newspaper editorial staff as aesthetics is what breeds creativity in newspaper publishing (Alom, 2020). Like Baskette and Sissors (1977) opine, when a newspaper editor arranges news, pictures and other stories on a page, he is, in effect, packaging his product. According to them, there is great similarity between editors' and manufacturers' packages because 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. Alom (2020) reiterates that an editor aids the reader when he arranges news content in an orderly and easy-to-read manner. He emphasised that the responsibility of achieving aesthetics in the production and management of the newspaper rest more on the manager and/or the editors than the subordinates in the establishment. Also, Alom (2020) spelt out from his study that the major newspapers in Nigeria make use of more than one form of aesthetics to present their information including; layout/design, balance, contrast, proportion, unity, typography, graphics and colour. To a large extent, the readership of any print media according to the findings starts from views of the print material, with the layout being of great interest from the days of planning the page using the dummy until the recent introduction of the computerised page layout mechanism. Creativity in headlines breeds aesthetic feelings as Udoh, Senam and Abasiama (2021) affirmed that an aesthetically appealing headline does not only give an aesthetic personality to a newspaper, radio or television, but is capable of also winning more patronage. They highlighted hope exists for stakeholders in news headline production enterprise to view headlining not only as an art, but as an art that should produce an aesthetic feeling in the minds of the audience. Furthermore, Nwanne (2011) underpins that the major forms that can enhance aesthetics include page planning, sharp print, colour printing, and pictorial presentation, while Anim (2003) outlines eight vital aesthetics elements that characterise the print media including:

Layout/Design: Anim (2003) describes Layout, also called the design as the packaging or how the news stories, pictures, advertisements, and so on, are positioned to create orderliness and facilitate reading for the consumer. Baskette and Sissors (1977) maintain that Designs exist primarily to facilitate readership as a newspaper is composed of many stories, pictures, features and advertisements and if they are haphazardly placed within the newspaper or on any given page, they become a deterrent to reading since the effect created is confusing.

Balance: Baskette and Sissors (1977) 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) supports that balance is concerned with the establishment of equilibrium on the page, by balancing layout elements on opposite sides of the page; mostly the top against the bottom.

Contrast: Baskette and Sissors (1977) assert that contrast 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 onlookers to know that they are different.

Proportion as posited by Baskette and Sissors (1977) 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.

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 (Anim, 2003).

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 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 (Anim, 2003).

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 (Anim, 2003).

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 (Anim, 2003).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communication, be it intrapersonal, interpersonal, group communication, international communication or mass communication is the core of humanity as it enhances the transmission of culture (beliefs, values, norms) and roles across generations. At each stage of the communication process, man has been experimenting and adopting different conventional and unorthodox strategies to convey information through thoughts, messages, speeches, visuals, signals, writings or behaviour (Verderner & Verderber, 2002). Among the plethora of conventional signals used by the mass media to communicate is aesthetics. This is because of man's constant quest for beauty and how aesthetics appeal to humanity. Man and aesthetics coexist to ensure communicative commonality. So when aesthetic values do not enhance meaning sharing, there is bound to be dissonance in the communication efforts (Umor & Nana, 2016).

The Media Ecology Theory, propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1964 was used to understand the use of media aesthetics in The Guardian Post and the Post Newspapers. The theory states that changes in media technology alter and shape our symbolic world. Going by the theory, society cannot escape the influence of communication technology. The theory has the following core assumptions:

- Media infuse every act and action in society.
- We cannot escape media in our lives.
- Media fix our perceptions and organise our experiences.
- We are manipulated by what we watch on television/ media influences our attitudes and belief systems.
- Media tie the world together.

Inferring from the Media Ecology Theory, it is evident that private newspapers use the various techniques of aesthetics to manipulate what we see and read on the papers which cumulatively influences our attitudes and belief systems.

4. METHODOLOGY

In order to understand media aesthetics in the print media, the qualitative research design was used as it focused on practical experiences of participants interviewed in natural settings; and recognised the participants as experts of media aesthetics practices in their settings (Van Manen, 1997; Creswell, 1994). An in-depth interview of two participants from The Guardian Post and The Post Newspapers, two private English language newspapers in Cameroon was done to get in-depth information about the use of aesthetics in the print media. These newspapers are highly solicited for information across the country and have a wide coverage and readership (Messagerie de Presse du Cameroun, 2018). The newspapers were also content analysed to identify the aesthetic elements used in the papers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants as it permitted the researchers to select individuals whose experiences were useful for the purpose of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). A recorder and field notes was used to record the information from the participants. The interviews were employed to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each participant (Turner, 2010) following the prescriptions of Anim's (2003) and Baskette and Sissors (1977). Editors were interviewed to understand why and how their newspapers used specific designs. Data was analysed using manual thematic analysis which according to Braun and Clark (2006) is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. This method allowed the researcher to appropriately scrutinise the participants' point of view (Creswell, 1994).

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1. How did The Guardian Post and the Post Newspapers Use Media Aesthetic to Attract Customers?

Aesthetics is used differently by different newspapers. The Post and The Guardian Post, two privately-owned newspapers in Cameroon employed media aesthetics to attract customers and hold their attention. Using Anim's (2003) eight vital aesthetics elements that characterise the print media, findings reveal that The Post and The Guardian Post used the following aesthetic elements in their newspapers: bold lead stories, layout, balance, contrast, proportion, unity, typography, photographs and colour.

5.2. Bold Lead Stories as a Form of Aesthetics

In a bid to hold the audience's attention particularly on the newsstands, *The Guardian Post Newspaper* employs the aesthetics form of Bold Lead Story with some of the keywords in the headlines capitalised while the others words are in initial cases. It is a similar technique used by *The Post Newspaper* which also uses the Bold Lead Story technique with very new word in the headlines capitalised. The participants attest that:

“Bold Lead Story technique is a bait for the customers. It makes the paper stand out in the newspaper stands among the other newspapers on the same stand. This technique has been very successful for our marketing strategy of the newspaper over the years”. Participant 1 (2022, November 8)

“This aesthetics technique was adopted by the founding fathers of the newspaper and has become part of its trademark and identity over the years. The bold lead story aesthetic technique with every new word in the newspaper headline beginning with an initial gives the newspaper a unique identity and makes it stand out among other newspapers on the stand.” Participant 2 (2022, November 13)

5.3. Layout/Design

The layout or design aesthetics technique is used by both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers to attract readers. *The Guardian Post* presents itself to its readers with a coloured front page layout design spreads across the newspaper. It is dominated by red and black colours which are used to boldly write out the banner headlines and other sub-headlines. Commenting on the use of layout/design as an aesthetics technique, participant 1 emphasize:

*“Layout/design is the gateway into the newspaper. A poorly laid-out or designed newspaper will not even be look at by the customer or reader no matter the content it carries. So we have learned over the years to properly conceive the layout or design of the front page of the newspaper to be able to grab the attention of the reader at the first glance of the paper.”*Participant 1 (2022, November 8).

The Post on the other hand employs the layout/design aesthetics technique in a simpler but effective manner with a coloured bold font name of the paper that covers three-quarter of the top of the front page with tersely written banner headline and sub-headlines with each word beginning in uppercase. The paper’s layout/design is dominated by colours such as red, black, white and magenta, with riders sometime adding to the aesthetics effect of the paper. Commenting on the paper’s use of the layout/design aesthetics technique, participant 2 said:

*“Our layout/design decisions are always informed by the image we want to create in a potential reader’s mind and how presentable we also want the newspaper to appear on the stands. Newspaper readers buy what they see and how it appears and appeals to them. Our desire to make it appealing to readers is fundamental. Again, our design is influenced by our drive to having a unique look among a plethora of other newspapers that exist in Cameroon and even the world at large.”*Participant 2(2022,November 13).

Balance: The way news is interlaced with other editorial materials has an effect on newspaper readership. This explains why both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers make use of the balance aesthetics technique. *The Guardian Post* for example uses the balance aesthetics technique in terms of the placement across the newspaper of both hard and soft news.

*“We use the balance aesthetics technique to strike harmony in our readers. These days’ people are really tired of reading stories about war, famine, earthquake, coup d’état among others of such stories. Today, people want to read stories of hope, innovation, discoveries, and problem solving. That is why we strike a balance in our newspaper through the publication of hard and soft news so that readers can always have an alternative when they peruse through the paper.”*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

The Post utilises the balance aesthetics technique in a holistic manner, giving the reader several alternatives as they gloss through the pages of the newspapers. Their issues are balanced in textual and pictorial representation. The use of pictures accords readers the opportunity to feel relax and relief as the read both the hard and soft news article. While reacting to how *The Post* makes use of this aesthetic technique, participant 2 said:

*“It is informed by our desire to give each style a fair treat so that the audience can be generally satisfied. We also ensure balance in our reports with the pictorial reports and advertisements making room for the entertainment of our reader.”*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Contrast: This is one of the most used media aesthetics techniques employed by both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers wherein print elements are presented side by side. *The Guardian Post* uses the aesthetic technique of contrast more in the various colours used on the issue in the market and also how hard news is laid alongside soft news demonstrating contrast. Asserting on the use of contrast participant 1 said:

*“At The Guardian Post, the most commonly used colours are red, black and blue. The reason is simple. Red and blue are the dominant colours of the paper. Since we print in black and white, we use the red and blue colours mostly on the front page to create contrast. Besides, the name plate of the newspaper is red.”*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

Apart from the use of contrast in colour and news, *The Post* also uses this aesthetic technique in other forms: contrast in font types and size, contrast in opinions and news, contrast in advertorial and messages, contrast in opinion pages and news pages, contrast in the use banner headlines and sub-headlines, contrast in coloured pages and other pictorial elements that aid reading. Observing the use of contrast in *The Post*, participant 2 said:

*“In The Post, we use contrast to bring out colour and style in the various ways the newspaper is laid out. This is also meant to boast readability and avoid redundancy.”*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Proportion: Widely used by both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers, proportion as a media aesthetics technique continue to strive in the print media today as stakeholders lay emphasis on the correct or appropriate relationship between the size, shape, and position of a story in an issue. Like *The Guardian Post Newspaper*, the pages of *The Post Newspaper* are often filled with informative, educative and entertainment articles but the proportion allocated to each story varies depending on the article. Opinions are not accorded the same proportion on the paper like news. Commenting on the use of proportion aesthetics technique in *The Guardian Post*, participant 1 said:

*“The proportion aesthetics technique is used in The Guardian Post depending on the length and importance of the story. Usually, opinions and other stories do not have the same proportion.”*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

Similarly, Participant 2 said:

“The use of proportion as an aesthetic technique in The Post Newspaper is influenced by the desire to make each aesthetic feature represented in the right quality that brings variety. From feature stories to politics, economic, culture, human right and opinions we accorded these different items different proportion depending on the importance we attach to the issue.” Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Unity: The editors of *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers are very keen and particular about the aesthetic technique of unity. News items are placed in such a way that it conveys the same message to avoid confusing the readers. Commenting of the unity as an aesthetics technique:

*“In every issue of The Guardian Post we ensure that unity is achieved from the navigation of one idea to the next. We are conscious of the fact that if things that relate are not arranged chronically from one stage to the other, it may end up miscommunicating instead of communicating.”*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

*“Unity throughout an issue of The Post is treated as important as the fact of a news item. If unity is sacrificed misinformation may set it and a wrong understanding and interpretation given to a story. The Post effectively makes use of this aesthetics technique through the departmentalisation of news pages: political page, cultural page, opinion page, health page, cultural page, sports page...this is to ensure that similar news items are brought together.”*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Typography: It is one of the aesthetics techniques used by both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers to great effect. A critical look at *The Guardian Post* would reveal that the paper makes use of varied typographical elements: font types and typefaces to convey different meanings to situations. Commenting on the use of typography in *The Guardian Post*:

*“Typography is a highly technical aspect of newspapering and I cannot boast of having a wide mastery of it. Over the years, and with the experience I have gathered working very closely with the layout technicians, we should different font types and typefaces to communicate different issues. The font types we used for our banner headlines (Century Gothic and Calibri) are not the same we used for our sub-headlines (Times New Roman and Arial Narrow). Also the font types we used for captions, advertorials, immemoriams are different. This does not only distinguish the paper from others but it also adds beauty.”*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

Just like *The Guardian Post*, *The Post* also employs diverse typographical element to convey intentions and to make reading pleasurable and less cumbersome. In some cases, news in *The Post* takes same font type whereas the size differs in some aspects depending on the length of the article. Talking about the use of typography as an aesthetics technique, participant 2 said:

*“Typography is just not utilised haphazardly. It is well thought out, the intention you want to communicate and the desired reaction you intend to get. For example, we use Arial Black with bold characters for our banner headlines to make the headlines stand out and readable from a distance. We use Arial Narrow for our sub-headlines to achieve uniformity and we use Times New Roman for our captions. We also use some decorative font types like Bradley Hand ITC and Bookman Old Style for advertisement messages and immemoriem. All these give the paper a special aesthetic look.”*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Photographs: The journalistic axiom that a picture is worth a thousand words adequately describes the use of photographs in both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers. These photographs are sometimes carefully and artistically arranged in contrast to each other to create aesthetic appeal. Most often, since both papers are printed in black and white but for the front and back pages and sometimes the centrespread, occasionally these publications are printed in colour sometimes due to a request from an advertiser or a special edition of the publication, photographs that appear in colour often stand out. In fact, the photographs are used to convey news on their own on strategic pages of the newspaper. Sometime, a particular page or group of pages are dedicated only for pictures and are titled 'Photo-News.' This often comes up during special events. *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers sometimes use pictures to complement the news item and such photographs are properly captioned.

*"Any print article at The Guardian Post without a newsy photograph is an incomplete article. While we encourage reporters to take news pictures, we also lay emphasis on photographs that compliment news articles. So to us, photographs are an indispensable aesthetic technique."*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

*"Pictures are used to enhance how the story is told. They help add colour and also tell the story especially to readers who just flip through the paper. In fact, photographs are used to convey news on their own on strategic pages of the newspaper. In The Post, we also arranged photographs in contrast to each other to create emotional appeal."*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Colour: From a cursory look at newspapers from the stands, colour seems to be the foremost aesthetic technique employed by newspaper houses across the world to attract customers. This seems to be the case for both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers. It is through the utilisation of colours in a news paper that aesthetic feelings are also felt and the unique identity of the newspapers communicated:

*"Colours are what define a newspaper and give the newspaper its identity. At The Guardian Post, the most commonly used colours are red, black and blue. The reason is simple. Red and black are our primary colours. Since we print in black and white, we use the red colour to create contrast. Besides, the name plate of the newspaper is red."*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

*"Colours are the gateway into our newspaper. It is the first thing that the reader or customers comes in contact with. So the choice of colours used in the newspaper can either attract a customer to buy the newspaper or puts the customer off. At The Post, we ensure that we remain meticulous in the way of choosing our colours. This explains why for close to three decades we remain consistent with the use of our traditional colours which are black and red."*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

Among the eight aesthetic elements in print media, findings also revealed that both *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers mostly use the colour aesthetic technique to attract customers, create contrast:

*"All colours have a special effect on the audience especially when it comes to the media. So to stand out and attract readers, there is need to use colours that appeal to them and in The Guardian Post, the most commonly used colours are red, black and blue. The reason is simple. Red and blue are the dominant colours used. Since we print in black and white, we use the red colour to create contrast. Besides, the name plate of the newspaper is."*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

*"Black and red are the most used colours in the paper because the colours have been the paper's traditional colours for almost three decades."*Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

The two editors of the two publications were unanimous that apart from being the most used aesthetic technique, colours depict additional information:

*"Colours are often not used only for beauty. Oftentimes, we use black on some major stories to portray a message of sadness or a sad incident. For instance, within the context of the conflict in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, we report deaths using black. This is so for incidents such as the Ekondo Titi school attack, the Kumba school massacre, the Babessi bloodbath in which 15 soldiers were killed and the inter-community conflict in the Far North pitting the Arab Chaos and the Mousgoums."*Participant 1(2022, November 8).

The participant of *The Post* also affirmed that apart from the aesthetical part of it, colours also communicate a deeper meaning to an issue:

“For serious stories especially stories which have a negative bearing or implications on the citizens, we use the red colour. For other stories and sometimes those that dwell on sad memories, we use the black colour to communicate such information.”Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

The study also found out that though aesthetics attracts readers of newspapers, what actually keeps the reader loyal to the newspaper is quality content. Responding to the question of what keeps a newspaper reader loyal to a particular newspaper, is the aesthetics or the content?

“Content is the most important. Loyal readers go for content and credibility. The effect of aesthetics in keeping a reader loyal to a newspaper is limited. A newspaper with the best aesthetics without content (credible) cannot stand the test of time in attracting readers.”Participant 1(2022, November 8).

“Readers’ attention is often caught by aesthetics, but it is the content that keeps them glued to a particular newspaper. In my opinion, aesthetics act like the bait and the content is the thing that keeps readers because at the end of the day, they buy newspapers to read and not to admire.”Participant 2 (2022, November 13).

6. DISCUSSION

This paper seeks to find out how *The Guardian Post* and *The Post* newspapers, two privately owned English language newspapers in Cameroon, use media aesthetics in their newspapers to attract and retain the interest of their customers. The study reveals that both newspapers employ the eight aesthetic elements that characterised aesthetics in print media as highlighted by Anim (2003), Alom (2020) including: bold lead stories, layout, balance, contrast, proportion, unity, typography, photographs and colour to attract attention and retain the interest of newspaper readers. Participants of this study mentioned colour as a unique aesthetic element that does not only help to attract readers’ attention, but also creates contrast and communicates additional information on news stories as well as presents a unique identity of the newspapers as the newspapers use unique colours in the design of their papers to portray their personality.

Findings also reveal that aesthetic elements used such as: coloured bold font name, bold lead story technique, banner headline and sub headlines (with each word beginning in uppercase) are properly conceived to appeal to readers’ attention. Udoh et al. (2021) attest that aesthetically appealing headlines does not only breed personality but wins patronage for the paper.

Nwanne (2011) asserts that balance is concerned with the establishment of equilibrium on the page; findings supports that this equilibrium strikes harmony in the readers and is achieved in terms of placement of content of hard and soft news stories across the newspaper, textual and pictorial representation as well as striking the balance between information and entertainment with the use of advertisement and pictorial reports to appeal readers. This finding is supported by Akpan & Etuk (1990) who claimed that beauty has to do with the intentions of the artist.

It is also evident in the findings that the use of proportion as a print media aesthetic element varies depending on the length and importance of stories, as opinions and stories based on facts have varying proportion (Baskette & Sissors, 1977). Similarly, findings indicate that unity is based on consistency in the presentation of ideas to avoid confusion (Anim, 2003). Unity is also achieved through the presentation of pictures to compliment news articles in order to enhance credibility of news stories presented. Typography adds beauty and different font types and typefaces are used to communicate different issues in order to achieve desired effects (Alom, 2018; Johnson, 2004). Substantially, findings disclose that although aesthetics attract readers to newspapers, what actually keep readers interest and make them loyal to a newspaper is the quality of content contained in the newspaper with credibility of the content of prime importance.

7. CONCLUSION

As communication continues to evolve with time, the concept of media aesthetics has become even more relevant and indispensable in assisting the surfeit of media organs stand out among the lots. This paper examines two private newspapers (*The Guardian Post News paper* and *The Post Newspaper*) in Cameroon utilise aesthetics in the presentation of news and other editorial materials to attract clients. Using McLuhan's (1964) Media Ecology Theory, findings revealed that both newspapers make use of different media aesthetic elements including: bold lead stories, layout, balance, contrast, proportion, unity, typography, photographs and colour with colour as the most used aesthetic technique employed by both newspapers to attract customers. Though the research established a significant usage of media aesthetic techniques in the presentation of news and other editorial materials, it is evident that what actually keeps readers' interest and makes them loyal to a newspaper is the quality of content contained in the newspaper with credibility of the content of prime importance. It therefore behoves on print media organs to understand that as they lay emphasis on the aesthetics of their publications, similar or greater attention should also be accorded to the content of the publications because aesthetics attracts readers but quality content keeps them.

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