

Aesthetic Attitude and Newspaper Selection among Nigerian Academics

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Abstract:

This study sought to find out whether or not aesthetics is a factor in newspaper selection by academics in South-South Nigeria as well as assesses the applicability of certain aesthetic elements by select newspapers in Nigeria. Two research techniques were adopted – aesthetic content analysis and opinion survey. The aesthetic content analysis is adapted from the content analysis procedure. For the survey, the questionnaire was used as the instrument. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 381 respondents from the 32 institutions of higher learning in the six states of the South South Geopolitical Zone of the Country. These were used to find out whether aesthetics is a factor in newspaper selection by the respondents. The aesthetic analysis was carried out on six national newspapers, using certain newspaper aesthetic categories namely: balance, contrast, dynamics, focus, unity and proportion. Major findings show that most academics in South South Nigeria are significantly familiar with the concept and principles of newspaper aesthetics; significantly motivated by aesthetic contents of their selected newspapers; and are attracted to most of the aesthetic elements used in the newspapers. The six newspapers, to a great extent, followed the aesthetic principles of modern newspaper production.

Key words: *Aesthetic element, aesthetic attitude, aesthetic behaviour, aesthetic judgement, newspaper aesthetics.*

Introduction

Because of its importance, application of aesthetic principles is no longer restricted to one subject area, hence the continued advocacy for its applicability in as many subject areas as possible.

When the application is made, what may constitute the aesthetic principles, indices or elements for the subject would have to be decided by the researcher or scholar, “usually through convictions and arguments”, (Johnson 2004, p.

41). Many researchers in Nigeria and somewhere else share in this observation. Ikpe (2003, p. 5) creates the aesthetic and its elements in “Organisational Corporate Culture: Indicators and Displayers”, thus: “all behaviours, entities, processes, procedures, rules values, etc, symbolically constricted and projected for the accomplishment of a common goal(s) can be seen as aesthetic elements in an organization when they are properly manipulated to produce some feelings, reaction, sense perception”. Should Ikpe’s position be translated to the realm of newspaper production, then everything and every process and procedure in the newspaper production would constitute the requisite elements meant to be manipulated to give birth to the aesthetic in newspaper.

Anim (2003, p.63) writes on “the aesthetic value of newspaper layout”, and identifies aesthetic elements to include the objectives of the layout, balance, contrast, typography, graphics and colour. Anim further asserts that for newspaper to thrive, a consideration of the aesthetic and its application is essential. This position corroborates Zettl’s (1990, p.25)

assertion that: “aesthetics, as applied to the media, has long, left the domain of the traditional, philosophical concept” and deals primarily with the understanding and perception of beauty and an ability to judge beauty with some consistency”..

Udoakah (1996) in making a case for the aesthetic in print media concludes that aesthetics as it concerns the media of mass communication is not a matter of film, radio and television alone. He says the print media are bound by the same imperative. In other words, print media possess and have been actively using aesthetic elements, which should be studied properly. Wilson (1996, p. 27) in his “dialectics on traditional media aesthetics” posits that although traditional media arts may appear from a Western model or perception to be lacking in aesthetics, “the instruments, the skills involved, have their own unique aesthetic elements that are manipulated for effect. Udosen (1996) identifies lines, shapes, forms, mass texture and colour, as the basic elements in architectural designs and planning. Interestingly, these elements too, have their place in newspapers production. The only difference is

in the area of manipulation to meet a newspaper's needs; otherwise everything discussed by Udosen applies to newspaper aesthetic needs. Similarly, newspaper design and planning share corollaries with what Udosen (1996) identifies as basic principles of design and planning, namely balance, proportion, unity, rhythm and emphasis. It is through the application of these principles that designs have their convincing "designness", to borrow Emmanuel Akpan's (1987) coinage. This study therefore agrees with Udosen that any design, including newspaper design, must create some sensory feelings, if it must be something with aesthetic content.

In agreement with Akpan (1987), the realm of mass communication is identical with the realm of man's deliberate control of that world of materials and movements among which man must make a home. It is also identical with that inner world of random impulses and automatic processes which constitute man's inner being. What does a television or film theatrical group producer know about his environment? What does he particularly have in his environment that could be useful to him in the task of sharing significant

experience with others? For the purpose of clarifying, intensifying and interpreting experience, the television theatre producer or director tries to manipulate light, colour, space, motion, time and make up. These aesthetic elements, as supported by Zettl (2005), and Akpan (1987) are the producer's or director's building materials. He manipulates these elements in order to be able to command serious attention by rendering it alive. He manipulates the elements in such a way that he compels the eye to stop and find pleasure in the beholding, the ear to hear for the sheer sake of listening, the mind to attend for the keen, impractical pleasure of discovery or suspense or surprise.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study were:

1. Are academics are generally familiar with the concept, elements and principles of newspapers aesthetics?
2. Does aesthetics motivate them to read newspapers?
3. Which particular aesthetic elements mostly attract the academics' attention to newspapers?

4. Do the select newspapers follow the aesthetics principles of newspaper production?

Literature Review

In order to discuss and appreciate the concept of aesthetic attitude generally or the attitude of a class of persons toward aesthetics or even aesthetic properties in objects such as newspapers, certain concepts deserve preliminary discussion. Such inter-related concepts are aesthetic knowledge, aesthetic judgement, aesthetic behaviour, and aesthetic experience, as well as aesthetic attitude and aesthetic emotion.

One cannot discuss or deliberate on what one does not know about. Accordingly, a person's ability to decide on whether or not an object possesses certain properties, particularly, aesthetic properties, depends largely on the person's knowledge of the concept of aesthetics. It is this knowledge that prompts one to make an aesthetic choice. The knowledge can either be inherited or acquired. While one usually attends a formal school so as to acquire aesthetic knowledge; one could also inherit aesthetic knowledge or orientation from one's forebears. This, to an

extent, explains the concept of **aesthetic knowledge**.

It is this knowledge or semantic grasp of the aesthetic concept that would enable an individual to analyze and pass **aesthetic judgement** on assumed or real aesthetic values of objects. Judgement of aesthetic value clearly depends on people's ability to rely on their capacity to discriminate at a sensory level. According to Marias (1967), aesthetic knowledge examines what makes something beautiful, sublime, disgusting, fun, cute, silly, entertaining, educating, informing, pretentious, discordant, harmonious, burning, humorous or tragic. One may use taste as the yardstick for aesthetic acceptance. In other words, an object may cease to appeal to one's taste. This could be caused by the arrangement of the elements of aesthetics in that object. While cultures, for instance educational cultures, play a great role in the choice of what is aesthetically sound, it is impossible to legislate on taste. In fact, nobody, no matter how powerful, can legislate on taste because it is a personal thing (Wilson 1996). Aesthetic judgement may go beyond sensory discrimination. For David Hume, as explained in

Marias (1967, p. 380), delicacy of taste is not merely “the ability to detect all the ingredients in a composition”, but also the sensitivity “to pains as well as pleasures, which escape the rest of mankind”, thus, the sensory discrimination is linked to capacity for pleasure.

There is also the concept of **aesthetic behaviour**, which is also both inherited and acquired. As a natural and acquired behaviour, every human being has a degree or level of an aesthetic feeling which leads to a certain behaviour exhibited by the person. The level of aesthetic behavioural sophistication may differ, but every person is born with it. Even the mentally deranged often consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously exhibit certain observable aesthetic feelings, which are basically feelings of pleasure or displeasure, approval or disapproval, satisfaction or dissatisfaction. They can do this through their facial expressions, posture, and any other outward behaviour. The unlettered equally speak of aesthetics and express such feelings in their own right. A difference in people’s aesthetic consciousness is therefore principally in certain people’s ability to study or discuss or analyze the

components of such feelings. This is the acquired aspect of aesthetics behaviour. And this is what perhaps differentiates the aesthetic feeling, understanding or attitude of an educated from the uneducated person; and by extension, that of scholars and that of the generally educated.

Put it simply, every human being potentially recognizes what is good, especially himself, at least at a certain cognitive level. Such beings, often consciously or unconsciously have food, clothing, and shelter choices. At a higher level, they speak of sense perception, beauty, satisfaction, and pleasure, which are supportive or ancillary manifestations of aesthetic dispositions. They speak of high and low taste, and so on. In the same vein, different human beings, depending on their different levels of exposure, may take aesthetic decisions or assume aesthetic attitudes after acquiring such a disposition. Such aesthetic dispositions can be acquired through learning. This perhaps is the reason why there are differences in people’s knowledge and application of the concept of aesthetics, aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic experience and importantly, aesthetic attitude.

There are opinion variations as to the meaning of the concept, and whether **aesthetic attitude** really exists among certain classes of persons, who on daily or periodic basis are exposed to the media. There equally are differences in approach to aesthetic attitude studies. While some persons with aesthetic mindset argue and eventually agree that there is an aesthetic attitude, especially in the media circle, others may be of a different view. In the same vein, there appears to be variations in the aesthetic attitudes of media operators the world over, due to differentials in backgrounds of the operators concerned. Observations show that while some media owners take into consideration the aesthetic worth of the message they put out the audiences, others may not. Similarly, while some media audiences may take into consideration the aesthetic worth of certain media presentations, which is a reflection of such audience's aesthetic attitude or mindset, others may not.

Be that as it may, and to answer some misconceptions about the realities of aesthetic attitude, a few early aesthetic analysts have summarily admitted that there is such a thing as

aesthetic attitude. To such analysts and writers, the concept of aesthetic attitude is worth investigation as there is bound to be certain disagreements as to the realities of the concept. There are three writers and aesthetes whose years of authorship coincide and whose work are applicable in this discourse. Such aesthetes are Hospers (1969), Stolnitz (1969) and Dickie (1969). To Hospers (1969, p. 3), "there is indeed an attitude with which we come to those things which we view aesthetically, an attitude that is sufficiently distinct from all others to be called aesthetic". According to him, to have a "true" or "ideal" aesthetic experience, therefore is to have fascinations or pleasantness off-shooting from an aesthetic attitude. To differentiate between aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience, Hospers (1969, p. 4) quoting Stolnitz on this position, defines aesthetic experience as "the experience one has while the aesthetic attitude is sustained". But Stolnitz while noting that a definition is only a departure point from further enquiry, nonetheless states that: "the aesthetic attitude (is) a disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of

awareness whatever for its own sake above", (Stolnitz 1969, p. 19).

In defence of his position on what the definition does, and in an effort to clear some semantic doubts on his word use, Stolnitz goes ahead to define the key words in his definition. The word, "disinterested", to him, stands for "when a perceiver does not look at an object out of concern for any ulterior purpose which it may serve". And to him, "sympathetic" in the aesthetic experience, means to 'give' the object the "chance" to show it can be interesting", while "attention" to him, involves "to key up our capacities of imagination and emotion to respond to an object" (Stolnitz 1969, p. 20). The aesthetic attitude, as further explained by Stolnitz, can be adopted toward any object of awareness whatever, and any object can be apprehended aesthetically, that is no object is inherently unaesthetic. At this juncture, it becomes expedient to examine what makes an object, and if newspaper can aptly be referred to as an object. Johnson (2004), quoting The Hamlyn Encyclopedic Dictionary, defines object as "something that may be perceived by the senses, especially by sight or touch; a visible or

tangible thing". He further sees an object as "a thing or person to which attention or action is directed...anything that may be presented to the mind". Without much ado, it is clear that newspaper is tangible; it can also be perceived or touched; hence it is an object.

But the issue of aesthetic attitude, as defined and explained by Hospers and Stolnitz, is dismissed as myth, by Dickie (1969, p. 37), who says: "I have argued that the aesthetic attitude is also a myth or at least that its main content, disinterested attention is".

As also supported by Johnson (2004, p. 29), Dickie's position is a very strong one, considering the barrage of examples he cites in his rejection of the attitude theory of aesthetics. For Dickie, "disinterested attention" or "interested attention" makes no deciphering sense to him.

The following is one of Dickie's arguments:

Using Stolnitz' definition of "disinterestedness", the two situations would have to be described as "listening (or reading) with no ulterior purpose" (disinterestedly) and "listening with ulterior purpose" (interestedly) Note that what initially appears to be a perceptual distinction in listening in a certain way (interestedly or

uninterestedly) turns out to be a motivational or intentional distinction – listening for or with a certain purpose. Suppose Jones listens to a piece of music for the purpose of being able to analyze and describe it on an examination the next day and Smith listens with no such ulterior purpose. There is certainly a difference between the motives and intention's of the two men. Jones has an ulterior motive and Smith does not, but this does not mean Jones listening differs from Smith. It is possible that both men enjoy the music attention of either and both may flag and so on (Dickie 1969, p. 38).

From this position, Dickie submits that not only is the so called aesthetic attitude a myth, but also “that the view misleads aesthetics theory, “because the attitude theory is incorrect about the way it sets “the limit of aesthetic relevance... the relation of the critic to the work of art and ... the relation of morality to aesthetic value.”

As the debate continues, one fact tends to remain. It would appear that for persons whose attention is caught by an object of beauty such that he turns to look at it, or stays to watch or read it (as in the case of newspaper) there is something in those persons – perhaps a little aesthetic spasm, which ignites the process that leads to aesthetic experience. Put generally, it could be that

person's educational, economic, or social level or such other demographic variables that make him behave in a certain aesthetic manner.

Closely related to the above-discussed concept is the concept of **aesthetic emotion**. Bell (in Johnson, 2004), opines that works of art provoke a certain emotion in people. Listing many forms of visual arts such as pictures (which, in the context of this study, go with newspaper journalism), sculptures, buildings, pots, carvings and textiles, etc, Bell argues (in Johnson 2004, p. 31) that “anyone capable of feeling” can be provoked by these “visuals”. This provocation is what Bell calls “aesthetic emotion”. He emphasizes that without aesthetic emotion, one cannot have a true aesthetic experience and of course, aesthetic attitude. From this, Bell position would include the presence of aesthetic emotion in an individual before “recognition” or appreciation of what is art, and by extension, what is beautiful, can be attained.

Apart from explaining how aesthetic emotion works, Bell identifies “significant form” as the one quality shared by all objects that provoke aesthetic emotions. And significant

forms come from a combination of the parts of the object. According to Bell, criticism has the function of making people realize the significant form in a work of art. From Bell's perspective, without aesthetic emotion, there can be no significant form. And, without the sense of form, there cannot be good appreciation of the work of art, and by extension, appreciation of an aesthetic piece.

The above presented thesis tends to give a worrisome thought to the newspaper editor or publisher, who, in this context is viewed as an artist, tries to make of his art (newspaper), an aesthetic piece. Should the newspaper be presented before "blind and passive readers" who "lack the power of apprehending" the newspaper art, they might, according to Johnson (2004, p. 32) "make the art seem like it did not merit appreciation". What should be done in this case? Should the newspaper editor or publisher pray that those who buy his newspaper be those who possess sufficient aesthetic emotions? But the editor cannot select his readers in this manner. In most cases, he naturally desires great readership or patronage for his newspaper. He craves for the

consumption of the art and the realization of the journalistic experience. In other words, the editor may be worried about raising adequate readership, but not selecting readers with aesthetic emotions. Perhaps, if the newspaper were thoroughly equipped, aesthetically, it would have evoked some streaks of aesthetic emotions even in the unemotional readers. That is why this study emphasizes on equipping a newspaper aesthetically, because in some cases, readership patterns could change

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored its theoretical underpinning on the Pleasure Theory of aesthetics, and the Individual Differences Theory. This is because both theories form the basis for understanding the formulation of individual attitudes, perception, choices and behaviour towards information disseminated or presented through any medium of communication such as the newspaper. The Pleasure or hedonistic theory of aesthetics summarizes that an art work (eg newspaper) is aesthetic if it gives pleasure or enjoyment to the audience. The individual differences theory on the other hand, has its roots

from the expositions and laboratory experiments on behaviours of classical conditioning learning differences and attitude formation in the late 1950s and 1960s. The theory postulates that each human being has unique psychological traits that result in different reactions of human being to media messages (Bittner, 1989, p. 376). This tenet of individual differences theory is the reason for different reactions of readers towards newspapers in Nigeria. As corroborated by Udoakah (2009), this is also true because readers of newspapers for instance, could come from the same social group or academic environment or background yet will differ in the way they view the content.

From the foregoing, the pleasure theory and the individuals' differences theory appear to be emphasizing on the attention of the media audience (readers of newspapers in this context) and the reasons behind such attention. The two theories therefore provide the springboard on which the study was anchored.

Research Methodology

The two methods used for this study were aesthetic content analysis and opinion survey.

While the adaptation, "aesthetic content analysis", entailed working on the aesthetic content of the select newspapers, the survey aspect of the study entailed using the questionnaire to gather information from respondents about their views on certain aesthetics issues. Osuala (2007, p. 161) confirms that "surveys focus on people, the vital fact of people, and their beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviours". Lecturers in higher institutions in the South South Region of Nigeria formed the respondents. The major reason for drawing respondents from this region is the observed upsurge in the media space by various brands of newspapers as compared with other regions in the country. For instance, an average South South State plays host to at least 15 regularly published newspapers. The total number of lecturers in higher institutions of learning select for this study was 14,119. This figure was too large for any meaningful research; hence the researcher relied on Philip Meyer's statistical guide which is still useful in mass media research. The guide recommends 381 as a researchable sample size for populations between 11,000 and 50,000. The percentage of 381 and 14,119 is 2.7. To obtain the

above sample size of 381 and in order to ensure that each of the 32 institutions were equally represented the researcher systematically chose 2.7% of the respondents from each of the institutions as they each differed in population. So, for the survey aspect of this study, the sample size was 381. The survey method also used the purposive sampling technique to select respondents. The sample came from those institutions offering at least a national diploma. One reason for this choice was that lecturers in such institutions tend to read newspapers from time to time to update their knowledge on issues of national importance. The questionnaire, being the measuring instrument, was administered on respondents who were already educated, hence the tendency for them to understand its content easily, especially the concept of aesthetics.

For the **aesthetic content analysis**, six national dailies, which are regularly in circulation in Nigeria were used. The newspapers were: *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Independent*, *The Sun* and *Daily Champion*. Aesthetic scoring on the six newspapers was carried out using a five-point scale to bring out the aesthetic

categories and their units of analysis as follows: very aesthetically good= 5 points, aesthetically good= 4 points, fairly good= 3 points, fair= 2 points, and poor= 1 point. For the aesthetic analysis of newspapers, the six national newspapers were used as sample size, applying the purposive sampling technique. This was to ensure that only those newspapers with national appeal were selected for the analysis. A typical Monday edition of each of the six newspapers was selected. The selection was uniform, i.e. a particular Monday for all the six newspapers. The reason was that a Monday edition is usually a busy and highly competitive edition of newspapers.

The Aesthetic Categories

The categories for analyzing the contents of the select newspapers were some suggested aesthetic elements. Six aesthetics elements or categories were selected and used for the analysis. The aesthetic categories were structured in such a way that they summarized their units of analysis. These categories were: balance, contrast, focus, dynamics, unity, and proportion.

Balance as an aesthetic principle demands

that items on a news page should be spread in such a manner that no part of a newspaper page is heavier than the rest. A news page for instance should carry headlines and photographs that give the entire page a balanced look. A news page is unbalanced if all headlines are placed in one corner or section of the page. A news page is equally unbalanced if photographs and illustrations are evenly spread or centralized.

Aesthetic **contrast** on a page requires the page planner or designer to place items on the page in such a way that the different items possess distinguishing features. Bigger stories should carry banner headlines, while smaller stories should carry smaller headlines. Also fonts for features, opinions and news stories, as well as column widths of items appearing in the same paper, should contrast from one another for easy reading.

Every newspaper or newspaper page should have a major thing to say to its reader. A news page for instance, must have a title or **focus** headline and story. Such a story has prominence over others, acting as the title of the page. For the front page such a story or headline acts as the title

of the entire edition of the paper. Such a story stands out. A page can also focus on sports, education, health etc. This must be respected.

Dynamics generally refers to the movement which follows good layout. As a reader's eyes glance at a page, they move from top left diagonally down and then into top right. Any page design that is tailored to bring such an eye movement has a dynamic quality and is aesthetic. Dynamics specifically considers the liberal spread of assorted editorial and non-editorial items across the entire edition of a newspaper. It addresses the content variety and richness of a newspaper.

A newspaper page that has **unity** contains items of a similar character or form. Unity also demands that a news page should be for news, not a mixture of news with opinions and unrelated matters. A page with unity promotes concentration, makes reading easy and is aesthetic.

Proportion addresses the question of the size of news contents of a newspaper in relation to ancillary items in the paper. News being the major article of trade in the paper should take most of

the pages. Proportion particularly takes care of the fitness of items into space or page allocated to such items to avoid over-matter or under-matter, over tightening or under-tightening of textual and non-textual matters.

The Units of Analysis

The units of analysis were those details that were later used as raw materials for the broad aesthetic categories or elements explained above.

The units therefore, were:

1. Graphic and headline displays and positioning (balance)

This addresses the issue of whether the graphic items such as photographs and other illustrations were displayed in such a way that one part of a newspaper page was heavier than the rest. Good graphic positioning or displays give rise to a balanced news page for instance. The same thing goes for headline spread. A page lacks beauty if the headlines are tilted to one side of the page irrespective of whether such pages are for news or ancillary matters. Graphic and headline positioning are therefore the basic units or

ingredients for the broad aesthetic category of known as balance.

2. Font size, white space and column (Contrast)

The point size used for a particular story headline or any other matter on a page is aesthetic if it shows contrast between such items and the rest. A headline that is for instance set in bold fonts is clearly differentiated from the one set in shallow fonts thus aesthetic differentiating the items. Also, proper use of white space adds beauty to news page for instance, white spaces usually created through columns allow textual and photographic materials to “breathe” and is aesthetic. Importantly too, editorial items become aesthetic if set in columns. A feature page that contains more than one feature story looks aesthetically better if the stories are set in mixed and contrasting columns. If the upper feature story is set in six columns, the lower story should set in three columns. This shows contrast.

3. Richness/variations in content

(Dynamics)

A newspaper should be rich in content. It should cover a variety of areas such as general news and features as well as the specifics, like education, finance, economy, politics, ICT, agriculture and so on, in such a way that a reader becomes more enlightened after reading. Except for specialized ones, a newspaper that is rich and varied in contents is dynamic and dynamism is an aesthetic element.

4. Grammatical coherence and communicativeness (Unity)

A newspaper that is aesthetic should be produced in such a way that there is flow of thought between paragraphs, giving way for textual contents to be understood at first sight. A reader will not find enough pleasure if he does not understand the link between paragraphs or if he has to consult a dictionary to understand the English words used in the paper. Unity may also cover grammatical correctness. An aesthetic newspaper is written in correct grammar because one of the functions of

the mass media is that of educating the readers grammatically.

5. Message emphasis or stress (Focus)

Every newspaper edition must have a major story to tell the readers. Such a story is what the paper focuses its attention on for the day. It always comes with a headline that is bigger than any other headline on the front page. A newspaper that does not recognize this aesthetic unit or detail and tends to give equal or near equal point size or emphasis to the different headlines irrespective of story weight is flat and unaesthetic. The same thing is applicable to the inside pages of the newspaper. Every inside page that is aesthetic contains a focus or major headline or story that should attract serious attention following the editor's good news judgement.

6. Space management and item fitness (Proportion)

It is not aesthetic to compress a long story into a little space. The same goes for reducing an action photograph into a small

space. This unaesthetic practice appears to be the order of the day among local newspapers in Nigeria. A page is aesthetic

if the items on it are proportionately displayed. This makes for easy and pleasurable reading.

Table 1: Survey Data (Questionnaire)

S/No	Institutions In South South Nigeria	No. of Respondents	Return Rate	%
1	University of Uyo	31	31	100
2	College of Education, Afaha Nsit	6	6	100
3	Akwa Ibom State University	6	6	100
4	Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic	4	4	100
5	Uyo City Polytechnic	1	1	100
6	Heritage Polytechnic	1	1	100
7	University of Calabar	35	34	97
8	CRS UNIVERSITY OF TECH	15	14	93
9	College of Education, Obubra	8	8	100
10	Fed. College of Arts/Science, Ogoja	3	3	100
11	University of Port Harcourt	37	35	94
12	Rivers State University of Science and Technology	17	17	100
13	Rivers State Polytechnic	15	15	100
14	Rivers State College of Arts and Science	2	2	100
15	Rivers State College of Education	5	5	100
16	Federal College of Education (Technical) Amok, Rivers State	6	6	100
18	Niger Delta University of Amasoma, Bayelsa State	14	14	100
19	Fed College of Arts/Science. Yenegoa, Bayelsa State	7	7	100
20	School of Technology, Otuobiri, Bayelsa State	7	7	100
21	University of Benin, Edo State	37	30	81
22	Ambrose Ali Univ. Ekpoma, Edo	15	15	100
23	Igbinedion University	13	13	100
24	Benson Idahosa Univ, Edo	14	14	100
25	Auchi Polytechnic, Edo	6	6	100
26	Shaka Polytechnic, Edo	5	5	100
27	College of Education, Benin, Edo State	6	6	100
28	Delta State University	27	27	100

29	Novena University, Ogume, Delta State	8	8	100
30	Delta State Polytechnic	8	8	100
31	College of Education, Agbor, Delta State	9	9	100
32	Federal College of Technology, Delta State	9	9	100
	Total	381	370	97

Three hundred and eighty-one (381) copies of questionnaire were distributed to lecturers across the 32 institutions of higher learning in South South Nigeria. The total number of copies returned and accepted for analysis was 370. This made a total response rate of 97%.

Table 2: Aesthetic Content Analysis Data (Scoring System)

<u>Unit of Analysis</u>	<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Aesthetic Category</u>					
		B a l a n c e	C o n t r a s t	F o c u s	D y n a m i c s	U n i t y	P r o p o r t i o n
1. Graphic and headline spread (Balance)	The Punch March 3, 2014	4	4	5	4	3	4
2. Font size, white space and column mix (Contrast)	The Guardian March 3, 2014	4	4	4	3	4	4
3. Lead story and headline stress (Focus)	The Sun March 3, 2014	4	4	4	4	4	4
4. Content richness/variation (Dynamics)	Daily Independent March 3, 2014	3	4	4	4	4	4
5. Grammatical coherence and uniformity (Unity)							

6. Space management (Proportion)	Daily Champion March 3, 2014	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Vanguard March 3, 2014	4	4	4	4	4	4

From the table shown above, scoring on each of the aesthetic categories and their units of analysis for the six newspapers for a particular news day (March 3, 2014) was clearly shown. The scoring scale was, very good = 5 points, good = 4 points, fairly good = 3 points, fair = 2 points, and poor = 1 point. Using *Punch* newspaper as an example, the newspaper was adjudged to be good in page balance, good in contrast, very good in focus, and good in page dynamics as aesthetic fields. *Punch* newspaper was also seen to be fair in, unity and good in proportion as aesthetic fields. The remaining five newspapers studied scored as shown above.

Discussion of Findings

Besides concentrating on the uncertainty surrounding aesthetics and newspaper selection by academics in the South South, this study was also worried about the level of adoption and

commitment of newspapers to the use of aesthetics. From the perspective of the survey conducted, major findings of this work showed that most of the academics selected from the South South part of Nigeria were to a great extent familiar with the concept, principles and demands of newspaper aesthetics. The findings also showed that the aesthetic out-look of the newspapers, apart from attracting them, has been a great motivating factor or their selection and patronage of the newspapers. This of course, might have been why the respondents said they always found a great degree of pleasure in reading most of the newspapers selected by them. study. The aspect of “pleasure” in this case reminds us of the Pleasure or Hedonistic Theory of Aesthetics which holds that the beautiful is that thing which gives a unique kind of pleasure or interest or satisfaction, while the aspect of selectivity reminds us of the

relevant theoretical framework used. On the pleasure theory, Akpan and Etuk (1990) affirm that what makes an art work good is that it brings pleasure to the beholder who selects to pay attention to it, and nothing more.

From the perspective of the actual aesthetic (content) analysis of the six national newspapers, it was discovered that all the newspapers were basically aware of their aesthetic expectations. From findings, each of the newspapers scored points that were above average when the assessors made efforts to know how well they each applied the six aesthetic elements. This aesthetic performance, of course, coincided with the assessment earlier given to the newspapers by the respondents. The respondents, had in one of the assessments said that the newspapers were really up and doing in their approach to aesthetic principles.

In relation to the problem statement of this study, the uncertainty that surrounded aesthetics and newspaper selection by academics in the South South has been significantly reduced, as a significant number of the academics were affirmative that aesthetics is a factor in their

newspaper selection. Even though some of the academics said that there were some instances and occasions where they were compelled to ignore the aesthetic content of the newspapers, by reason of certain information found in the poorly designed newspapers, such developments were short-lived as, according to majority of them, newspapers with better aesthetic out-looks soon regained their positions in their newspaper selections. Also, in an attempt to address a part of problem statement, which worried about the level of adoption and commitment of newspapers to the use of aesthetics, the analysis of each of the newspapers' aesthetic contents in a particular edition revealed that all the newspapers were conscious of the basic aesthetic elements and were applying them at a level above average.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be said that even though there are other factors, such as ethnicity, politics, finance, aesthetics remains a great factor in newspaper selection by academics in South South Nigeria. More so, Nigerian newspapers have greatly improved in their aesthetic awareness and output mainly due to the sensitivity of readers

to aesthetic issues. It is however important to note that the aesthetic quality of a newspaper or any other medium of mass communication is determined by how the aesthetic elements of the medium are manipulated to, in the words of Akpan (1987, p. 30) “command the serious attention of the audience,” or repel them. A newspaper's aesthetic appeal is positively felt when the newspaper editors consciously apply the elements, taking into consideration the composition of the target readers who are usually highly educated. It is equally important to point out that no matter how well applied the aesthetic elements are, the newspaper content also determines the interest and appeal, hence the positive patronage enjoyed by most of the select newspapers and similar ones in the country.

In the six newspapers, the aesthetic elements were significantly utilized to enhance their beauty. This is why most of the readers affirmed the high aesthetic quality of the papers. The newspapers carried human angled editorial matters and their ancillaries and the English Language used were communicative. More so, their basic article of trade, which is news tended to provide an

exposition of the hidden or unexplained issues in straight news reports, mainly because of the independent nature of the papers. Rigid selection criteria, as is the case with government owned newspapers, are no longer imposed on elements to make news.

There was none of the academics sampled who said he never read a number of newspapers in a month. This shows the reliability of newspaper reports and the fact that newspapers are significantly patronized by educated people such as academics.

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