

Review

Pattern of stand-alone picture usage in Nigeria's newspapers: A content analysis of *Daily Sun* and *The Guardian*

Greg H. Ezeah^{1*}, Nwachukwu A. Chidiebere¹ and Ndoma J. Brown²

¹Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

²Department of Mass Communication, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: herbertgreg@yahoo.com, Tel.: +2348037728393.

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In the world over, stand-alone pictures have become regular features of newspapers. There are however principles that guide their usage. This study examined the patterns of stand-alone picture usage in two Nigerian newspapers. It specifically sought to find out the extent to which Nigerian newspapers are using stand-alone pictures; whether they follow conventional practices in the use of such pictures and whether they are consistent with the way they handle stand-alone pictures. A content analysis of 122 editions of *Daily Sun* and *The Guardian* newspapers showed that there was a great use of stand-alone pictures by the two newspapers, with *Daily Sun* accounting for 503 pictures and *the Guardian*, 210. Findings also showed that though the newspapers employed conventional practices in disassociating such pictures from other page elements, they were not consistent in doing so. It was recommended that Nigerian newspapers should use stand-alone pictures sparingly, to show proper disassociation and to an extent be consistent in the use of disassociating devices to avoid confusing readers.

Key words: Patterns, stand-alone pictures, newspapers, content analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Roger Fenton's feat in visual journalism marked the beginning of the marriage of photography and journalism, leading to the birth of photojournalism. This remarkable fact was encapsulated by Okoro and Nnadiukwu (2000), when it was realized that Roger Fenton, a photographer made history in 1855, when he covered the Crimean war. He performed this feat using five cameras, seven hundred glass plates, four houses and a wagon which served as a dark room. Some of the more than 300 negatives he brought back from the war were later printed in *The Illustrated London News*.

Photojournalism is defined by Okoro (2002) as "the communication of news, information, education, ideas, etc to the target audience with the aim of influencing such target audience to act in a particular manner or direction." What this means therefore is that the photojournalist tells his story through pictures just as a news writer tells stories with words. To Kashi (2011), photojournalism is a unique and powerful form of visual storytelling originally created for print magazines and newspapers but has now

morphed into multimedia and even documentary film making.

Pictures have become such indispensable features of newspapers and magazines that one would consider it as being strange if newspapers are filled with textual matter without pictures. Pictures are news. They tell their own story, complement textual matter, attract and sustain readers' interest. Okoro (2002) gives a short list of what a picture should do in telling the story:

1. Arrest and sustain the viewers' attention.
2. Tell the news in graphic terms.
3. Tell the story more than words can tell.
4. Beautify the page that carries it.

Statements like "a picture is worth more than a thousand words", "the picture says it first", "seeing is believing" and "pictures don't lie" remain popular to this day. Although there are many digitalized efforts which will challenge those statements today, they are enshrined in the *prima*

facie as objectivity in news reportorial.

Pictures have aesthetic value. They are beauty spots, but that is not all. Their value also lies in their ability to communicate. It is not only that pictures tell the news, they have also redefined the nature of news. Dominick (2011) says that, photojournalism changed the definition of news itself. Increasingly, news became that which could be shown. Accidents, natural disasters, demonstration, and riots were natural photo opportunities.

News pictures because they communicate, are not used haphazardly. From the choice of pictures to their placement on news pages, nothing is left to chance. There are time-honored conventions that guide the use of pictures, so that communication distortion does not occur, a situation that can confuse readers and viewers. Since pictures usually accompany stories, Ukonu (2007) says that the newspaper editor needs to treat a picture in ways that show whether it is related or not related to a story. Pictures are used in a number of ways to present news. Ukonu (2007) continued by adding other characteristics such as:

(a) Teasers: Small photos usually at the front or back pages used to direct attention to inside stories photographed from more than one viewpoint.

(b) Picture series: A series appear as a group of related photos taken at different times but discussing the same issue.

(c) Photo sequence: A group of related photos taken from the same viewpoint and covering a short span.

(d) A single photo: One picture frame, which may stand alone to tell own story or to amplify another story.

Reque et al. (2001) defines stand-alone picture as “a photo and its caption that serve as a mini-story; not related to a specific story on the page”. This visual acrobatics as stand-alone pictures in Nigeria newspapers take the centre-stage of this work.

Statement of the problem

Pictures attract readers to newspaper stories. They also tell their own story. People naturally expect that pictures on news pages are related to those stories. But stand-alone pictures which appear sometimes on news pages are not related to any story. Since they are predominantly used by newspapers, certain precautionary devices should be introduced to help readers avoid confusion. Against this backdrop, this work studies the use of stand-alone pictures in Nigerian newspapers on whether they follow applicable principles of design in the selection of such pictures to aid effective communication.

Objectives

1. To ascertain whether Nigerian newspapers are using

stand-alone pictures.

2. To find out if the newspapers follow conventional practice in the use of stand-alone pictures.

3. To find out if newspapers are consistent in the way they handle stand-alone pictures.

Research questions

i. To what extent are Nigerian newspapers using stand-alone pictures?

ii. Do they follow conventional practices in the use of stand-alone pictures?

iii. Are Nigerian newspapers consistent in the way they handle stand-alone pictures?

Theoretical framework

This work is under-girded by the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. This theory was propounded by Richard E. Mayer in 1997. The theory has three basic assumptions:

1. There are two separate channels (auditory and visual) for processing information (sometimes referred to as Dual-Coding theory).

2. Each channel has a limited (finite) capacity.

3. Learning is an active process of filtering, selecting, organizing, and integrating information based upon prior knowledge.

The principle known as the Multimedia Principle, according to Mayer (2001), states that people learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone. But it also states that the human brain does not interpret a multimedia presentation in a mutually exclusive fashion, but rather the elements are selected, then organized to logically produce a mental construct. Care is taken therefore, to avoid overloading a processing channel. The theory is concerned with providing design principles including coherent verbal, pictorial information, guiding the learners to select words and images, and reducing the load for a single processing channel.

This theory is relevant to our study in that newspapers employ multimedia (words, pictures, and info-graphics) to inform their audiences. Constructively, it is important as the theory states, to arrange all the media in a way that will promote understanding and not create distress for the learner.

METHODOLOGY

The research method employed in this study was content analysis, which allows a systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of written, printed and transcribed communication. Content analysis is defined by Kerlinger

Table 1. Extent in which Nigerian Newspapers use stand-alone pictures.

Newspaper	November	December	Total
<i>Daily Sun</i>	254 (71.8%)	329 (74.9%)	583 (73.5%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	100 (28.2%)	110 (25.1%)	210 (26.5%)
Total	354 (100%)	439 (100%)	793 (100%)

Table 2. Conventional practices in the use of stand-alone pictures.

Newspaper	Stand-alone pix	Stand-alone pix	Total
<i>Daily Sun</i>	206 (59.4%)	377 (84.5%)	583 (73.5%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	141 (40.6%)	69 (15.5%)	210 (26.5%)
Total	347 (100%)	446 (100%)	793 (100%)

(2000, as cited in Wimmer and Dominick 2003) as a “method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables”.

Population

The population of this study was Nigerian Newspapers while the 122 editions of *Daily Sun* and *The Guardian* newspapers for the months of November and December, 2012 were selected as samples. A census of all 122 editions was taken. Both newspapers were chosen first for their national spread and secondly for the type of audiences they cater to: *The Guardian* regarded as the flagship of Nigerian newspapers is seen as an elitist newspaper while *Daily Sun* caters to the masses.

DATA PRESENTATION

All 122 editions of the two newspapers were studied, considering the two-month period covered by the study. Stand-alone pictures on news pages were studied. Coding was done under three categories: Pictures that showed disassociation, those that showed association and finally those that could not be clearly categorized.

RQ1: To what extent are Nigerian Newspapers using stand-alone pictures?

Data presented in Table 1 shows that *Daily Sun* newspaper used 254 and 329 stand-alone pictures in the months of November 2012 and December 2012 respectively which gives a total of 583 pictures for the period under study. *The Guardian* on the other hand used 100 stand-alone pictures in November 2012 and 110 in December 2012 giving a total of 210 pictures used in the

period under study.

RQ2: Do they follow conventional practices in the use of stand-alone pictures?

Table 2 shows that out of the 583 standalone pictures used by *Daily Sun* in the two months studied, 206 were properly disassociated from other page elements while 377 were not disassociated. *The Guardian* had 210 stand-alone pictures in the period studied, out of which 141 showed disassociation while 69 pictures showed association with page elements.

RQ3: Are newspapers consistent in the way they handle stand-alone pictures?

Table 3 shows that of the 206 stand-alone pictures showing disassociation in the *Daily Sun*, there was inconsistency in the disassociation of 86 pictures. In *The Guardian*, there was inconsistency in the disassociating of 23 pictures.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The focus of this study was to find out how stand-alone pictures are used in Nigerian newspapers. *Daily Sun* and *The Guardian* as two Nigerian dailies were content analyzed. The findings of the research were analyzed on the basis of the research questions. The study showed that in the two months studied, the two newspapers (*The Guardian* and *Daily Sun*) used a total of 793 stand-alone pictures in their news pages. Out of this figure, *Daily Sun* used 583 representing 73.5% of the pictures while *the Guardian* Published 210 representing 26.5%. This shows that *Daily Sun* used more stand-alone pictures than *The Guardian*. It was found out that there was a lavish use of stand-alone pictures by the two newspapers. There was hardly any news page in the *Daily Sun* especially without

Table 3. Consistency in handling stand-alone pictures.

Newspaper	Inconsistency in the use of disassociating devices
<i>Daily Sun</i>	86 (78.9%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	23 (21.1%)
Total	109 (100%)

a stand-alone picture.

Furthermore, it was found out that the two newspapers to some extent employed conventional devices used in disassociating stand-alone pictures from other elements in their pages. Such devices included boxing the standalone pictures, avoiding the running of headlines across such unrelated pictures, using heavy rules to disassociate unrelated elements, etc.

Of the 793 stand-alone pictures in *The Guardian* and *Daily Sun*, only 347 were disassociated. This represented 43.8% of the total. Out of the number of pictures that presented disassociation, *Daily Sun* accounted for 206 (59.4%) while *The Guardian* had 141 (40.6%).

Moreover, the study showed that the two newspapers were not consistent in application of the aforementioned design principles usually employed in the use of stand-alone pictures. Sometimes, such pictures were boxed appropriately; at other times they were either not boxed or the rules were not bold enough to show disassociation. Sometimes the headlines ran across the pictures and at other times, below them. This type of inconsistency had the potential to leave readers in confusion. There were 109 pictures in the two newspapers that showed inconsistent use of disassociating devices. Of this number, *Daily Sun* had 86 while *The Guardian* had 23.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pictures have become indispensable to the print media. Without them reading of newspapers would become a boring exercise; an uphill task instead of pleasure. Pictures usually accompany stories, in which case they are related to and as such complement them. But sometimes newspapers also publish pictures not related to any story. Such pictures stand alone, to tell their own stories, for which they are called stand-alone pictures.

When the choice is made to run a stand-alone picture, the page designer faces the challenge of ensuring that the picture is adequately disassociated from other page elements, especially the story that appears beneath or

above it. This is to avoid misleading and frustrating readers who might conclude that the newspaper has published the picture in error.

Considering the potential confusion that a carelessly handled stand-alone picture can leave on the minds of readers, it is recommended that:

1. Newspapers use stand alone pictures sparingly. Instead of over reliance on file photos, action and relevant pictures should accompany stories.
2. Where stand-alone pictures become very necessary, care must be taken to show appropriate disassociation. Editors must remember that people do not read newspapers with a manual of newspapers design principles beside them. There will always be readers who know nothing about the use of boxes and rules to show disassociation.
3. Newspaper editors should also be consistent in their design styles so that over time their readers can become conversant with their style of showing association and disassociation in regard to stand-alone pictures, so that such pictures do not end up distorting instead of enhancing communication.

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