

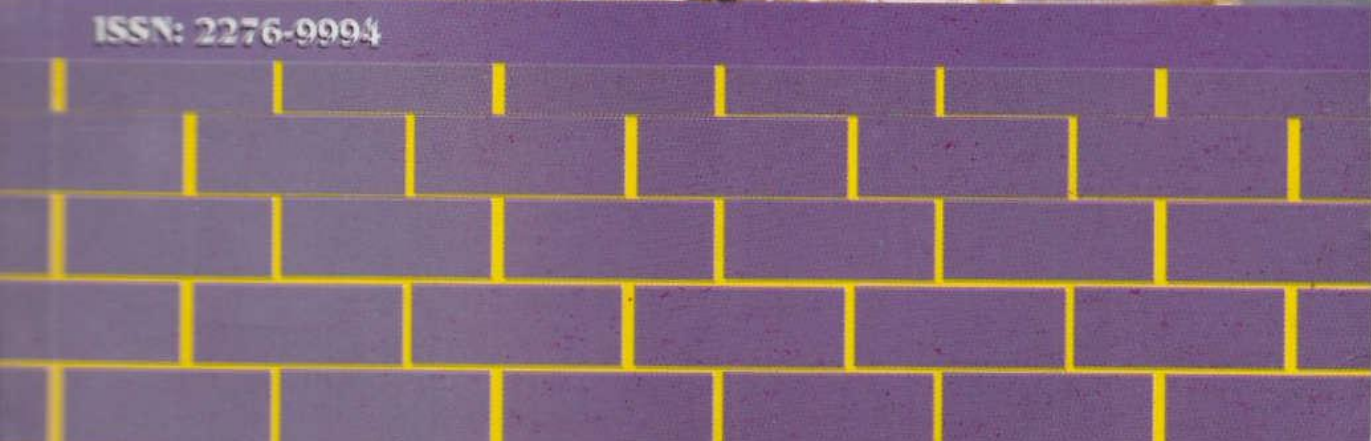


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## **Aesthetics and Rural Community Newspaper Management in South-South Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This article takes a look at management and administrative aesthetic issues that should be considered by newspaper publishers and managers in the course of organizing and supervising the production and publication of a newspaper. While viewing a newspaper house mainly as a professional organisation, this article argues that contemporary aesthetic considerations should not only revolve round newspaper page or content design as may be the case in most print media aesthetic studies; but should also lay emphasis on the ways and manner a newspaper publisher and manager, as the overall boss, harnesses available human and material resources. The article identifies the responsibilities of a typical rural community newspaper manager and redefines his role in relation to the application of suggested aesthetic elements and considerations. The suggested administrative aesthetic indices discussed in the article, are those that are capable of improving the overall work environment in a newspaper house at the managerial level. But to find out the applicability of the aesthetic considerations prescribed in this discourse, an aesthetic assessment of the performances of rural community newspaper managers in developing countries has been presented and discussed, using South-South Nigerian example. The choice of South-South Nigeria is informed by the comparative upsurge in the number of newspapers in that geopolitical zone of the country. Because the study is management-based, it uses survey method where purposively sampled senior members of staff of the respective newspaper establishments under investigation independently assess their managers on their level of adherence to the suggested aesthetic elements. Findings show general negative attitude of most of Nigerian rural community newspaper managers towards managerial and/or administrative aesthetic considerations suggested and discussed in this article.*

**Key Words:** Management, aesthetic considerations, aesthetic survey, management aesthetics, administrative aesthetics, psycho-aesthetics, techno-aesthetics, time-aesthetics, rural community newspaper.

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## **Introduction**

To a person with interest subtler than mere cursory examination of this field of philosophy, aesthetics is all about “physical beauty” in all sense of the word. But with deeper investigations into the meaning of the concept, and in line with the possible intention of the concept’s originator, Alexandra Baumgarten, aesthetics is contemporarily understood to mean, “the product of or pertaining to, sense perception” (Akpan and Etuk, 1990:2). So, with the key word, perception, aesthetics goes beyond physical or visual beauty and explores the active human senses, their actions and how they are manipulated for optimum result, hence its application in this discourse.

The universality of the concept and application of aesthetics is therefore not in doubt. Zettl (2005) illustrates the universality of aesthetics when he notes that the activities such as deciding what to wear, or cleaning up one’s room so that things are put where they belong, choosing what flowers to put on a dinner table; or even judging the speed of one’s car relative to that of others while driving, are basic perceptual and aesthetic activities. In the mass media domain, particularly at the managerial level, the application of aesthetics appears not to be different. A newspaper publisher (manager, director, managing director, editor-in-chief) who, in the course of managing his media outfit, considers how to harness resources by putting right facilities and proper men in their right and proper places and perspectives for optimal performance, is either consciously or unconsciously engaged in an aesthetic activity. At least he needs pleasure and satisfaction in whatever he is doing at that level. And that is where aesthetics comes in.

From the classical era (Kant, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) to contemporary era, not very much has been done in the area of newspaper management aesthetics. There may be a few studies in newspaper aesthetics or newspaper as an aesthetic structure itself, but such studies do not cover management and administration of newspapers. In other words, the aesthetic demands of the newspaper administrator, publisher or manager appears to be neglected by researchers. A look at the following aesthetic studies can attest to the slant and the newness of aesthetic investigations into certain communication areas: broadcasting (Zettl, 2005 and 2009; Akpan and Etuk, 1990, Nkana, 1996, 2003); advertising (Akpan, 1996, Ani, 2008); public relations (Akpan, 2011); print media page design ( Udoakah, 1996 and 2000; Anim, 2003; Batta, 2008; Udoakah and Oliseh, 2009; and Udoh, 2010); organizational communication (Ikpe, 1990); traditional media (Wilson, 1996). Even though there have been works in print media aesthetics in Nigeria, as cited above, such aesthetic investigations are not done on the newspaper publisher or manager as a distinct undertaking. None considers what may be termed as the distinct “aesthetic duties” of a newspaper manager, who may not be directly involved in news writing, editing or page designing.

The fact remains that without proper management, which, in the view of this study, must have some aesthetic undertones, there is hardly any aesthetic production or output. This work therefore stands in the gap as it is specific about management aesthetics, from the angle of those administrative duties of the

publisher of a newspaper outfit. Rather than measure or determine the aesthetics of newspapers, the article addresses the aesthetic elements that should be considered by newspaper managers themselves. This is what differentiates this study from ordinary newspaper aesthetic elements, which include those examined by Udoh (2010, 2012 and 2013). This is the angle that makes this work unique and perhaps new in media aesthetics studies.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Two theories are found apt for this discourse. They are, hedonism otherwise called, pleasure theory; and the democratic-participant theory.

Hedonism, otherwise known as the pleasure theory, treats aesthetics as something beautiful, especially in producing an outstanding feeling of pleasure or satisfaction. The pleasure itself is artistically created and satisfaction aesthetically experienced. According to Akpan, while the independence of pleasure may tilt our appreciation towards the theoretical claims of objectivity, the experience in aesthetic work leaves us on the side of the subjectivist paradigm.

The democratic-participant theory is one of the two theories added to the four original theories of the press propounded by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm in the 1950s. The theory advocates greater attention to the needs, interests, and aspirations of receivers. It advocates that in place of monopolization of media, there should be pluralism, and in place of centralism, there should be decentralization and localism. The theory equally says that there should be horizontal structure of communication, which precipitates immediate feedback, rather than top-down communication structure. In effect, while hedonism stresses pleasure in a communication or aesthetic environment, the democratic-participant theory emphasizes on democratization and by extension, localization of media facilities. The merging point of these two worlds defines the operational framework of this discourse.

### **MEDIA MANAGEMENT, NEWSPAPER AND AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS**

Media management may be described as the co-ordination of human and non-human resources in media organizations like radio houses, television stations, newspaper houses and magazines, so as to achieve set aims and objectives. According to Asema (2011), the news media cannot achieve their aims and objectives without proper control, directing, planning and coordination of activities, which are the duties of a manager.

The human resources are the workers and the personnel that work in the news media. There is the need, therefore, to direct them so that they will take their job seriously. In the print media, particularly the newspaper, there are usually the reporters, editors, news editors, feature editors, circulation managers, and so on. All these are human beings who take part in the business of production, and by extension, management of the newspaper. They themselves therefore need to be satisfactorily managed so that the set aims and objectives could be achieved. The non-human resources are the materials that are used for production. They include the machines, the paper, the ink and the offices.

The concept and content of newspaper, like that of magazine, in Nigeria, appears to have suffered some setbacks. One area of setback is the growing difficulties in distinguishing what a newspaper is and what is not. The confusion or controversy is to a great extent derived from the quality and kinds of contents that should be in a newspaper, and the qualifications and kinds of persons, who should publish, manage, edit or write for such a mass publication. Based on the orientation of persons behind certain definitions, there are thousands of individual and corporate definitions of newspaper today. But a newspaper can generally be viewed as “ a loose publication, usually tabloid or broad in form, containing news and ancillaries such as feature stories and advertisements, published on daily or weekly basis and handled by persons trained in journalism or mass communication” ( Udoh, 2011: 23).

By this view, newspaper is and can be seen as an art and also as a science. As an art, newspaper has a structure and aesthetic qualities. For any news story to be properly assimilated, it must be written or presented in an artistic structure or creative way. When viewed as a science, newspaper has non-conflicting qualities of scientific values of consistency, openness, and systematic process of production.

This discourse, which is predicated on the management aspect of newspaper, mainly sees newspaper from the art perspective because both art and aesthetics are, like Siamese twins, inseparable. As an art form, newspaper, both at management and design levels should possess certain creative qualities capable of giving pleasure to people exposed to it.

Management comprises planning, organizing, leading or directing and controlling an organization for the purpose of coordinating and harmonizing them towards accomplishing a goal (Hasan, 2013: 275). The planning, organizing, leading, coordinating and so on, in this case is on newspaper publishing. Taken together therefore, newspaper management comprises the planning, coordination and harmonizing and harnessing of the resources necessary for the newspaper production. And aesthetic management of a newspaper outfit revolves round a type of management that takes cognizance of all the elements of management that would see to the satisfactory production of a newspaper.

By reason of growing competition among hard copy newspapers themselves and between them and Internet or online newspapers, aesthetics has become a major factor in newspaper management. This because its companion concept, applied media aesthetics, provides criteria for examining how media elements such as balance, contrast, proportion, lighting and motion interact and how people perceive and react to these elemental interactions. Moreover, these criteria allow one to evaluate the relative communication effectiveness of aesthetic production factors step by step while production is in progress. Therefore, the underlying principle when discussing aesthetics and newspaper and its management is that newspaper is an art, and not just a neutral medium. It is a medium that shapes the message to bring about a particular response or behavioral change. The essence of aesthetics in newspaper is to clarify, intensify and interpret events for a heterogeneous audience (readers) in order to help the

audience see the world from a new perspective and experience. This experience is what Akpan and Etuk term aesthetic experience. This therefore requires a newspaper manager, both local and international, to have full understanding of the aesthetic characteristics and potentialities of a rural or urban newspaper, if such a newspaper must clarify, intensify, interpret and effectively communicate significant experience.

### **ISSUES IN RURAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER MANAGEMENT**

Managements are in categories everywhere. According to Hassan (2013), management can be divided into three categories namely: top, middle and lower level management, each of which requires different knowledge, skills, and roles. To Hassan, a top manager should know that he is executive in role, responsible for strategic long term decisions, and must be aware of external factors. And above all, he must possess extensive knowledge of management roles and skills. Whether or not Hassan had aesthetics in mind while making her view in this area known, this is where aesthetics comes in. Middle level managers, according to Hassan, must have a specialized understanding of certain managerial skills that, by implication, will command the serious attention of their staff and prospects. They are responsible for carrying out decisions taken by top level management, besides taking tactical decisions. The lower level managers take short term decisions, which must not conflict with those of their superiors explained above.

Going back to the basics of this discourse, it can be emphasized that like general interest newspapers, the beauty of rural community newspaper management lies on or can be expressed in the ability of the proprietor or manager to harness all the resources at his disposal for the production of an edition of a newspaper. This means that newspaper management is an experience that must be felt; it is an experience that is not only beautiful itself, but aesthetically valuable.

Community newspapers are basically for community development and nothing more. Their contents should as such revolve round issues of development. They thrive in developing countries, where the people lack the basic amenities and facilities such as access roads, clean water, communication media, health facilities, good nutrition and so on. The people suffering from or lacking these basic necessities usually have no means of putting their problem across to government and other service agencies. The media, and specifically, newspaper, being an agent of change and mass mobilization, become a development partner to the rural dweller. They carry messages and information to and from the relevant service provider, especially government, and by so doing become the mouth and ear of the rural dweller.

The way and manner that these media handle this important duty or service therefore become important. And one way of handling this important duty is for the managers of rural community newspapers to apply certain artistic or creative principles for the impacts of their products (newspapers) to be felt. Thus, for any individual or institution that has a vision of or interest in community newspaper management, the knowledge of aesthetic considerations becomes an obvious challenge to deal with, otherwise, the real people who should enjoy such

media facilities will be exposed to newspapers that they could not appreciate. Therefore, the proper coordination and manipulation of certain aesthetic elements at the management level becomes important as the management prowess has a direct bearing on the production quality of a newspaper.

Rural community newspapers which are for rural people should be managed in a professional and aesthetic manner. Besides the known management principles, certain aesthetic principles or considerations need to be brought to bear if the rural community newspaper must, finally, create the desired effect on the reader. The rural community newspaper, according to Anaeto (2008) is not only supposed to act as an instrument of change; it should equally disseminate information, spread knowledge, and educate the masses. It should make its target reader, who is the rural person, ready for change, by first providing them with education. The first person in this development agenda, therefore, is the manager of the rural newspaper outfit, because if he does not know the aesthetic technicalities involved in the management and production of a newspaper, the end product is bound to be misleading. This is why a comprehensive study of aesthetic fields or considerations in newspaper management generally and that of rural community newspaper management specifically, becomes necessary.

## **AESTHETIC ELEMENTS IN NEWSPAPER MANAGEMENT /ADMINISTRATION**

Studies in aesthetics have continuously transcended the traditional aesthetic ambience and is applied in communication and related fields. Perhaps that is why Johnson (2004) is of the view that scholars in different fields now have a right to either identify or create what they think are or should be the aesthetic elements or considerations in their chosen fields of study or subject areas. That is what informs the choice of certain elements of management as aesthetic considerations or issues in this discourse.

Foremost media aesthetics expert, Herbert Zettl, is of the view that for a media director or manager to be at his best, he must first of all see himself as a psychologist, technical adviser and coordinator. These characteristics, which can be made aesthetic, are in tandem with the vision of this discourse. They therefore form part of the suggested aesthetic activities or considerations for a newspaper manager or publisher.

### **Aesthetics in coordination/controlling**

The competent manager must be able to coordinate the many production details processes and procedures. Outstanding writers and editors must be helped or encouraged by him to attain peak performances. That team spirit and mutuality orientation must be inculcated in them, and no other person does this without the full involvement of the manager of the outfit. Members of the production team must be made to feel the positive impact of the day's production; they must be cued to initiate certain production functions and techniques that will ease production, while still paying attention to manipulating elements for heightened aesthetic experience. Controlling or coordinating occurs with the organization processes and structures to effectively and efficiently reach goals and objectives.

This includes ongoing collection of feedback and monitoring and adjustment of systems, processes and structures accordingly. Examples include use of financial controls, policies and procedures, performance management, measures to avoid risks, etc.

### **Aesthetics in planning and organizing**

This consideration appears similar to the one discussed above, but they are not the same. Planning includes identifying goals, objectives, methods, resources needed to carry out methods, responsibilities and dates for completion of tasks. Examples of planning are strategic planning, business planning, project planning, staffing planning, advertising and promotions planning. The office location itself is a product of planning. A community newspaper for instance should be located in the community where most of its readers reside. The office location, according to Anaeto (2008: 91) must be located bearing in mind, "the market, raw material, and residents". Managers should organize resources to achieve goals and optimum fashion. Examples are organizing new departments, human resources, office and file systems, reorganizing businesses, etc. A good newspaper manager sets direction for individuals, groups and the entire organization and importantly influences people to follow the direction. Examples are establishing strategic direction and championing methods of organizational performance management to pursue that direction. A good leader operates by example. This quality must stand out, must be felt, and in the aesthetics coinage of Akpan (1987) "must command the serious attention" of all.

### **Psycho-aesthetics**

A newspaper manager must see himself as a psychologist, an aesthetic psychologist, hence the usage, *psycho-aesthetics*. He is empathic. As an empathizing psychologist, a newspaper manager deals with different manner of persons who may approach newspaper production and management from different perspectives, even though they may share similar professional orientation. He must strive to understand them. Sometimes, a manager may have to deal with an editor or reporter who worries about allowance, or budget. He may happen to manage a head of production who is primarily concerned about technical quality of computers, a reporter who is only interested in political events or is even not interested in writing, and so on. He faces a whole lot of people with diverse psychological make-ups. He has to align them and make them work as a team. Such a manager must be able to control and re-order his psychological orientation for the best results. He should read each of his subordinates like a book, preempting them where necessary. This mental alertness is important and proper manipulation of this quality to achieve anticipated result is aesthetic. A manager who is psychologically stable is easily noticed as such by those close to him, because the way he reasons will show in his outward actions and empathy for others. If a manager reasons aesthetically, he will act aesthetically and this behaviour or psychological readiness does not, at this level, require any scientific measurement. Such behaviour is usually appraised.



### **Techno-aesthetics**

Non-journalists may not function well as newspaper managers. This is because gone are the days when journalists did not require any technical knowhow or professional training to practice well. As a trained journalist, a newspaper manager who, depending on the organizational structure of the establishment, can double as editor-in-chief should possess some technical knowledge and from time to time issue out instructions that the technical crew need for optimal production, hence the coinage, *techno-aesthetics*. In their support of the fact that a manager should be a professional in the field, Mboho and Udousoro (2011: 98), are of the view that the manager should “act as the symphony orchestra conductor; know the sound of each of them and how they can be played to produce good music”. He must find out if the hardware needed for a particular edition of the newspaper is functioning optimally. He should check whether there is adequate and quality ink in the printer and whether the computers meant for that day’s production are functional; whether the rotary machine is in good condition, and whether the different technicians are on duty for the news day; and should know where to go to for technical solution because of the perishable nature of his product, news. He should keep abreast of the latest in newspaper production technology and the satisfaction or pleasure such technology would bring to the users. He must install or think of installing all the equipment and hardware necessary for newspaper production, instead of producing or printing the newspaper in a commercial printing house. This is to prevent a situation where scoops are leaked before they are published. It is aesthetic when technical issues run smoothly in a newspaper establishment. It is aesthetic when a publisher puts his production gadgets in place.

### **Aesthetics in public relations**

At all time, the newspaper manager should build a personality for himself and his establishment. He should be able to relate well with and offer useful advice to editors, reporters and writers in his medium and suggests ways of improvement to performances. The manager must exert those positive attributes that make his subordinates see him as a friend, adviser and leader, and not necessarily their boss. He must not see himself as one super human who should always be high up there supervising production by proxy. One pitfall that is common among newspaper managers is their poor attitudes towards editorial meetings. In these days where anybody who lacks what to do in his earlier chosen field of specialization resorts to newspaper publishing, it becomes a common practice to see reporters and editors not knowing when last they had editorial meeting in preparation for the next edition. As a forum for exchange of ideas, visions and innovations, editorial or editorial board meeting involving the major actors in the editorial department other others in the establishment should be a regular one. It is at such meetings that they know public perception of the establishment because it is a forum for discussions.

Above all, the manager must have a corporate public relations attitude. A corporate attitude expressed and documented as a principle of “treating people right” should permeate the way a newspaper manager handles his internal and

external publics. Members of editorial staff of newspaper organizations usually respect a manager who gives them adequate work incentives such as desk allowances in time, not from a protest. They also perform better and regard their employer higher if their salaries are paid as/when due. According to Akpan (2011: 24), “such an attitude should be largely tolerant and accommodating and not readily given to the compromise of corporate goals”.

### **Aesthetics in organizational communication**

There is a general agreement that well developed communication skills are essential to personal effectiveness in organization, or at least, in managerial, professional, and leadership positions. A review of any survey on skills that organizations worldwide expect of new managers upon assumption of office reveals that communication skills are usually placed somewhere in the list. The kinds of beautiful communication skills that managers should possess in order to meet organizational expectations can be developed through courses in public speaking, interviewing, group discussion, listening and writing. And it is usually in such courses that managers are taught on formal communication skills and flow methods such as downward, upward and horizontal communication (Ikpe, 1990). While downward communication is the flow of messages from the superiors to subordinates in an organization, upward communication is the reverse, and horizontal communication is the literal exchange of messages among people on the same organizational level of authority. According to William (1978), there is strong connection between communication effectiveness and organizational effectiveness. Man cannot not communicate; so also is an organization which is managed by men. All these theories must be put into practice. Media managers must explore, learn and adopt the art of effective organizational communication.

Communication skills also cover the language that the manager should use with his subordinates and even his contemporaries. Television production and aesthetics expert, Zettl (2009), is of the view that efficient, error-free communication between the director and the crew members is facilitated by well understood director’s terminology. The same can be applied in newspaper production. A single inaccurate and un-decoded grammatical directive from a manager can mar a whole edition of a newspaper. Communication is the sharing of meaning and experience: Ineffectively shared meaning or experience is unaesthetic.

### **Aesthetics in research**

A result-seeking newspaper manager should continuously undertake and showcase personal research about trends in page planning, new printing technologies, training opportunities for his editors and general staff and general newspaper administration and production and not rely totally on what other researchers or his subordinates say. He should visit sister media houses and find out what makes such media houses more successful, as well as attend research seminars or organize similar seminars for his workers in their categories. Readership research is *sine qua non* in professionally-minded newspaper

business. Not all line editors know much about what is aesthetically needed of them, especially when such editors are political appointees as in government-owned newspapers. They have to be guided by the manager. Research will help a newspaper manager to break new grounds, explore the pleasure or satisfaction to be derived from such grounds, and adjust in order to stay in business. His subordinates must benefit from and find pleasure in his creative research and similar breakthroughs.

### **Aesthetics in staffing and facilities**

This aesthetic field can be divided into two broad aspects namely, the human and non-human. The human aspect has to do mainly with the staffing. As pointed out earlier, a newspaper house, which is a professional organization, has journalists as the predominating professionals. To enable the rural community newspaper to find its feet and to add beauty to it, the required professionals have to be employed. There is no way a newspaper organization can survive for long and meet public and professional expectations, if half-baked and unqualified persons are in charge of the editorial department. The same thing is applicable to the professional status of those in charge of the ancillary departments such as production, administration, accounting, and advertising. It is unaesthetic to employ a person who has no professional training in journalism or mass communication generally to be the editor of a newspaper. Of course a manager of a newspaper house who has professional training in journalism will not do well if he recruits quacks as his editorial staff members. The same principle applies when it comes to appointment of personnel into supporting departments. For aesthetic reasons, people must fall in their appropriate places. The size of the organization should determine the number of professional and skilled workers to be employed. An aesthetic-minded manager knows the dangers of over and under-recruitment of workers. It is unaesthetic to allow one worker to do the work of seven workers. The principle of division of labour must be applied. It allows for pleasure, and pleasure is a product or an offshoot of an aesthetic experience.

Newspaper business is a serious facility-based and business. Editorial facilities or desks revolve round the specific enclosures or environment where different workers, especially the editors work. Some of the facilities are the offices of the daily editor, weekend editor, news editor, features editor, subeditor, and production editor. Management needs to provide these important offices with basic editorial facilities if the best or the aesthetic must come out of the occupiers. Therefore, modern communication gadgets, equipment and systems ought to be installed or where necessary, be upgraded in all editorial and administrative offices. One cannot expect good editing from a news editor who has no comfortable writing table in his office. He must have access to internet facilities. He must have good dictionaries. He must be made computer-literate. It is equally unaesthetic to allow all the major editorial units in an establishment to operate in one stuffy room or hall as this diminishes the principles of division of labour, and encourages distraction. An aesthetically-minded newspaper house should know that even though they work toward a common goal, it will be

conflicting to allow a news editor, sub editor and production editor to stay in one room and possibly share facilities directly. For maximum performance, each should have some level of operational and facility independence. This is aesthetic.

### **Time-aesthetics**

The newspaper manager must take into consideration the fact that time is an asset and essential factor in newspaper management and production. This gives rise to the coinage, *time-aesthetics*. A dutiful manager must have knowledge of time and its implications. Mboho and Udousoro identify three types of time namely; objective, subjective and biological time. To them objective time is the clock time; subjective time is the psychological time; while biological time is the felt or feeling time. These can be harnessed during newspaper production for intensified aesthetic experience. A creative newspaper manager should inculcate in his editorial staff that spirit of time consciousness, especially the clock time consciousness. Newspapers are time-inclined articles or commodities. They have specific periods of consumption, otherwise their contents become stale and unsold copies keep ridiculously increasing. A manager should know the time interval within which a particular edition should be produced for it to be able to hit the news stand at the appropriate time. Knowledge of this variable will prompt a good newspaper manager to mobilize the different editors on time through provision of production facilities. A morning paper should hit the news stand latest six o'clock in the morning and nothing more; while an evening edition should stick to time. There is nothing aesthetic about a morning newspaper coming out in the afternoon. This practice of lateness is common among newspaper business in Nigeria and other third world countries. It is common to read the first copy of a morning newspaper at 2.00 pm or even later. Some of them hit the newsstand the following day, and the date of publication ridiculously backdated. Good and proper sense of time is a part of professionalism and is equally aesthetic, hence the coinage, *time-aesthetics*. Everything depends on the time spirit of the manager.

### **Aesthetics in marketing and advertising**

Any newspaper that lacks creative marketing strategy may sooner or later fold up. This is because newspapers are commodities which have sales period otherwise they become stale. To succeed in this aspect, the manager must be a marketer of a sort. As a trained mass communicator, the manager should apply the basic marketing skills and strategies taught in school. He must identify the major marketing outlets and explore them. As is the case in the already explained case of politically appointed editors, some government owned newspaper houses may have untrained marketers imposed on them as staff of advertising or marketing department. A manager who knows the value of professionalism resists such an attempt and insists on recruiting trained newspaper marketers. It is aesthetic when things go well in the marketing department. Of course all the efforts of the editors will come to naught if the commodity does not reach the intended consumer. One effort that is worth making but often neglected by

newspaper publishers is using another mass medium to advertise own medium. They do not like paying to their counterparts in the industry. But it pays to do this because the aesthetics or over all makeup of the front page of a particular newspaper is better appreciated when displayed in some other medium. Imagine a colourful advertisement of the front page of *The Punch* during a Nigerian Television Authority (N.T.A.) news programme. What an aesthetic experience and reminder to readers and advertisers! A creative manager knows that his newspaper alone cannot adequately advertise itself; hence he should explore the advertising potentialities of sister media houses or organs and use them to showcase his own medium from time to time. But it must be added that one of the reasons why certain newspaper managers do not employ the advertising potentialities of sister media organizations is poor finishing of their own products, that is their newspapers. This is the more reason why they should strive at putting together everything that will help them produce a newspaper that can be advertised in other media.

### **Field work**

A discourse of this nature would be incomplete without going to the field to find out the level of compliance with the suggested aesthetic elements necessary for proper administration of a modern newspaper establishment in Nigeria and in effect, anywhere. This section therefore shows the method used in arriving at a conclusion of this article, particularly the questions that the fieldwork sought to answer. It must be pointed out that for a meaningful conclusion to be drawn; the research questions formulated for the study were made to have a correlation with the management or administrative aesthetic elements discussed before.

### **Research questions**

The following were the research questions for this study:

1. Do the managers of newspapers in South-South Nigeria apply team spirit in coordinating and planning relevant activities and programmes?
2. Are the managers seen to be paying attention to feelings of staff and other people?
3. Have they provided the needed modern technologies and facilities in key departments of the newspaper establishments?
4. How do the internal and external publics see the administrative styles of these managers?
5. Is there any free flow of information among staff and management of the select establishment?
6. Is the marketing and advertising strategy of the establishments satisfactory to staff and other publics?
7. Is time a major consideration in the running of these establishments?

### **Methodology**

In order to ensure objectivity, the aesthetic indices, suggested and explained above, guided the conduct of this project and were particularly adopted

in this survey method, called, aesthetic survey. The seven aesthetic indices are: aesthetics in coordination and controlling, which suggests that a newspaper publisher or manager should be able to coordinate and manipulate all production details; and aesthetics in planning and organizing, which sees him as a planner and organizer of all relevant human and material resources. There is also what this work refers to as psycho-aesthetics, where the manager should possess the qualities of a psychologist; as well as techno-aesthetics, which demands that a manager should not only have fair knowledge of the latest developments in technology, but should see himself as a technical adviser to all his subordinates. The other aesthetic indices are: aesthetics in public relations, which means the manager should be seen to relate well both within and outside the establishment; and aesthetics in organizational communication, which requires the manager to recognize and apply the principles of business organizational communication, particularly the principle of two-way communication flow. There is also aesthetics in research, which requires the manager to be up-to-date and constant in general research in newspaper management and production; aesthetics in staffing and facilities, which requires him to put professionalism first in staff recruitment and office equipment; time-aesthetics, which suggests that he should be a time conscious person; and aesthetics in marketing and advertising, which suggests the need to advertise and market the newspaper using the proper means.

As a study anchored on applicability of suggested aesthetic elements or principles by newspaper managers or publishers in South South Nigeria, it had two kinds of populations, namely, human and product populations. The human population of the study consisted of staff members of local or rural community newspapers in the South- South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Six states of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, and Rivers make up the South-South zone of the country and the population was drawn from there. Staff members of any properly organized setting is usually divided into two broad categories namely, senior and junior staff. Their qualifications and levels of duties usually set the demarcation between them. For consistency reasons, only the senior members of staff who were all graduates were purposively sampled and made to assess their respective managers or employers aesthetically. An average graduate, who is a senior member of staff, does not only know what aesthetics means; he knows for instance, the quality of facilities needed for optimal performance of a given task; he can assess his boss, given a conducive atmosphere. This justifies the population and sample choices.

Since the emerging rural community newspapers in the zone and the country are primarily private, it was only the privately-owned newspapers that made up the product population of the study. At the time of conducting the survey, each of the six states had at least five operational rural community newspapers with different political, economic and development motives. It is pertinent to point out that, seven newspapers across the states under consideration, hit the news stand on regular basis. In other words, each of the select newspapers hit the news stand at least once a week. The seven newspapers are: *Sensor, Insight, Call, Sermon, Voice, Grassroots News, and Update.*

The data gathering instrument for this study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained questions bordering on the level of compliance with the already discussed aesthetic indices. The essence was for these senior members of staff to use the suggested aesthetic indices to assess the administrative styles of their bosses. And before then, a pretest of the senior staff's familiarity with the concept of aesthetics was carried out, and it was established that they all were significantly familiar to the concept.

Specifically, the questionnaire contained questions anchored on the above suggested administrative aesthetic considerations and the level to which they apply those aesthetic considerations. The researcher did not send the questionnaire to the newspaper managers themselves. Of course the managers could not have assessed themselves as the level of objectivity would have been doubtful and this would have influenced the result and the report. Other data gathering instruments used included direct interviews and observation.

### Findings

Aesthetic scoring was carried out using a five point scale to bring out the aesthetic considerations or categories and the units of analysis already discussed under each category as follows: very aesthetically compliant = 5 points, fairly compliant = 4 points, averagely compliant = 3 points, poor = 2 points; and very poor = 1 point. The aesthetic performances of each of the managers of the seven newspapers were assessed, using the aesthetic considerations or categories, and reconciling them with the demands and realities of modern newspaper management. Using the different aesthetic categories as shown in the table above, the different senior staff members of the seven rural community newspapers in South-South Nigeria were used as respondents and they assessed their managers independently. For all the aesthetic categories used, staff of *Sensor* newspaper scored their manager an average of 3 points on a five point scale, interpreted to be an average aesthetic score, while staff of *Insight* newspaper gave their manager an average of 2 points. Whereas *Call* gave their manager 2 points, *Sermon* manager scored an average of 1 point; and *Voice* newspaper manager scored 2 points. The rest, *Grassroots News* staff scored their boss 2, while *Update* staff scored theirs an average aesthetic grade point of 3.

Even though none of the three newspapers scored up to four or five points on the scale used, *Sensor* and *Update* newspaper managements scored an average of three points in the overall administrative aesthetic considerations, meaning those newspapers are average in administrative aesthetics. But the general findings are that there is insignificant compliance with the suggested aesthetic considerations. The following table contains the summary of findings.

**Table 1: Summary of aesthetic performances of rural community newspaper managers in South-South Nigeria**

<b>Aesthetic categories/Units of analysis</b>	<b>Respondents (senior staff)</b>	<b>Compliance level/score</b>	<b>Interpretation of score</b>
1. Coordinating / controlling (team spirit, resource management)	<b>Sensor</b>	3	Average
2. Planning /organizing (goal identification, focus)	<b>Insight</b>	2	Poor
3. Psycho-aesthetics (mental stability, ability to read and understand staff, situations)	<b>Call</b>	2	Poor
4. Techno-aesthetics (adoption/application of new technology)	<b>Sermon</b>	1	Very poor
5. Public relations(how the public sees establishment, patronage)	<b>Voice</b>	2	Poor
6. Organizational communication(free flow of information)	<b>Grassroots News</b>	2	Poor
7. Research (innovations through training, library provision)	<b>Update</b>	3	Average
8. Editorial facilities(professionalism/ working tools)			
9. Marketing & advertising(application of modern ad/marketing strategies)			
10. Time-aesthetics (adherence to production schedule and deadline)			

**Discussion of findings**

A major reason for carrying out a survey, alongside what could have ended as an ordinary discourse, was that of finding out the extent to which rural community newspaper managers in South South Nigeria comply with the suggested administrative aesthetic elements. It was to ensure completeness of the discourse. And in order to ensure logical conclusion and relative generalization, the article used particular community newspaper managements in Nigeria for the



survey. The aesthetic categories advocated in this work, and their units of analysis which are the practical basis of assessment are summarized in the table. These units of analysis have already been explained and assimilated before the field work.

For the seven research questions constructed in concert with the aesthetic considerations earlier explained, it was found out that none of the questions were answered in the affirmative case. Research Question One, which sought to find out whether managers of newspaper establishments in South-South Nigeria exhibit the suggested aesthetic principle in coordination and general planning, generated a below-average response from the assessors. Question Two, which demanded the assessors to examine the psychological stability of their managers, equally produced a negative result. Most of the respondents said that their managers do not always take the feelings of the workers into consideration while taking certain administrative actions. Research Question Three addressed the provision of facilities to the various departments and units in the newspaper houses. Like the previous responses, it was not positive as almost all the respondents complained about lack of modern facilities in the various departments, especially the editorial department. According to some respondents, there still exists some newspaper outfits in the region where the analogue typewriters are still used in typing news and such other editorial matters. Question Four sought to know how the public (especially the internal public) view their employers. Their general impression is that the managers or employers do not run an open administration. As is typical of a one man business, most of the managers take certain far reaching decisions without the input of their subordinates. They determine most of the newspapers' editorial policies by themselves. The question of free flow of information was contained in Question Five. All the respondents complained of one way information flow in their various establishments; that is from top to bottom. They reported on management – staff information order, and not vice versa on issues of important professional decisions. This is at variance with the Democratic-Participant Theory of the media and specifically, media management.

The question of marketing and advertising aesthetics was addressed in Question Six. It sought to know whether managements follow the suggested aesthetic elements in their marketing and advertising strategies. To some extent, most of the responses in this aspect were in the affirmative, especially in the marketing aspect. They agreed that their managements explored all available markets for their products, hence improved sales. But none of the respondents said their management had for the last one year made a conscious effort to advertize their newspapers in other mass media. The last question, which addressed timeliness as a management factor was equally revealing. The respondents significantly regretted how the morning editions of their newspaper never hit the newsstands in the morning, a violation of the time-aesthetic element suggested in this article. They reported on the freedom enjoyed by all categories of staff in terms of when to resume work on daily basis and so on. These are the real problems.

A careful assessment of the performances of each of the seven newspaper managements selected, in relation to the aesthetic categories and the units of analysis, shows that most of the selected managers of rural community newspapers in South-South Nigeria do not, on the average, follow the administrative aesthetic suggestions discussed in this article. This is not an encouraging development in the newspaper industry as far as this part of the world is concerned. To ensure fairness, the different senior staff members of each establishment were made to examine their managers independently. It would still have led this article somewhere if it interviewed the concerned newspaper managers directly, but there was the fear that an average newspaper manager would not score himself low on the aesthetic scale or ranking. The theory of “self first” would have been applied line, hook and sinker by such managers. In other words, each of them would, as is usually the case in a typical Nigerian leader or manager, have seen himself as the best and the purpose of this investigative aspect of the article would have been defeated.

From the response made by their senior staff members, none of the seven community newspaper managers scored more than three points on a scale of five points; hence it would not be out of place to describe such managers as aesthetically below average as far as newspaper administration is concerned. And to fall below average in aesthetic performance or ranking may not be good enough. Neither is an average performance a good performance, even outside the aesthetic domain. From the details of the findings, it was discovered that most of the managers maintained similar low scores in most of the aesthetic categories used, even when the scorers worked independently. The tendency was for those managers to score poor or very poor in most if not all the categories.

A consequence of this finding is the ongoing plethora of poorly packaged newspapers in circulation in that part of the country. It is common to see an average rural community newspaper in South-South Nigeria that contains foreign and irrelevant news and feature stories as predominant items, especially when such stories are either anti-government or are sensational in nature. Such irrelevant stories oftentimes make front pages. It is equally common to see newspapers in this region, with front pages which are difficult to understand – where headlines are flat, meaningless and illiterate – where all stories are built around an issue that has nothing to offer in terms of rural or community development. The central issue in rural community newspaper should be development – should be on government intervention in road construction or rehabilitation, provision of electricity, health facilities and so on. But this appears not to be the case in these rural community newspapers under study.

There is no makeshift in aesthetics. What is aesthetic is aesthetic in all ramifications. In other words, an aesthetically managed newspaper should strive to be aesthetic in all departments of the assessment, not scoring a high point in one department and scoring zero. There is hardly any way a member of staff would feel satisfied and perform professionally well in a department or desk that lacks basic facilities. They would equally be unsatisfied in a situation where their boss is not accessible, where they do not understand his body language, and so

on. Aesthetics is concerned with pleasurable satisfaction in all significant ramifications.

A theory adopted in this discourse is the hedonistic or pleasure theory, which prescribes that an aesthetic object (management in this case), is that which gives pleasure or satisfaction to the audience (staff, observers etc), besides commanding their serious and faithful attention. This theory, it must be stated, correlates with the research questions which the article made efforts to answer. The findings explained above clearly contradict the pleasure theory. This is because of the state of displeasure and lack of satisfaction experienced even while assessing the aesthetic worth of the seven newspaper managements investigated, and the dissatisfaction that the staff themselves must have had while serving under such managers. In other words, none of the respondents was significantly satisfied with their managements in terms of their managerial and aesthetic skills. Again, this is food for thought for persons who think newspaper management is all about money making.

The democratic-participant theory is another theory that was very relevant in this study. Like the first theory, it has a reasonable correlation with the research questions raised. The theory advocates greater attention, by media managers for instance, to the needs, interests, and aspirations of receivers, which in this case includes staff of an establishment. It advocates that in place of monopolization of media, there should be pluralism, and in place of centralism, there should be decentralization and localism. The theory equally says that there should be horizontal structure of communication, which precipitates immediate feedback, rather than top – down information and communication flow structure. Research question five directly addressed this aspect of the theory. These were also captured in the aesthetic categories used in the study, but the most of the findings are at variance with the suggestions made in the categories. The need for proper organizational information flow was given special attention in the aesthetic categories. But to most media managers, the reverse is the case, and this may adversely affect performance. These are some of the issues that should be taken seriously by newspaper and media managers generally.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations**

From the discussions and arguments so far presented, it is clear that the responsibility of achieving aesthetics in newspaper management and production rests more on the manager than his subordinates in the establishment. This is in respect of the fact that it is mainly the manager who takes the blame when things go wrong in newspaper management and production. But from the findings presented and discussed above, it is clear that the affected publishers of rural community newspapers in Nigeria are not significantly aesthetic in their managerial approaches. A careful reconciliation between the suggested and explained management aesthetic elements, the corresponding research questions and importantly, the actual performance of the respective managers as reported by their subordinates leads to a conclusion that the affected newspapers managers are yet to come to terms with the aesthetic realities in newspaper management. It can be further concluded that since the geographical scope of this investigation is

the region where newspaper business appears to thrive most in Nigeria, it will not be hasty to generalize that this is what is happening in similar establishments in the country.

It must be pointed out once again that there is an upsurge in the number of newspapers published in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country more than any other region of the country. It may be a similar experience or development in other developing countries of the world. But this development should not be a license for unprofessionalism; neither should it be an open invitation for what may be described as managerial and aesthetic anarchy in the newspaper industry.

Accordingly, managerial issues, which set the tone for newspaper production qualities in Nigeria and other developing countries, should not be without aesthetics principles and/or elements suggested in this article. Newspaper managers should realize the importance of two-way communication flow, new technology, timeliness, and good human relations.

As the main man, a newspaper manager or publisher should strive to do everything to promote professionalism and translate his vision into a tangible form and through appropriate medium of delivery. However, high quality production possibilities made available by technological revolution afford the newspaper manager or publisher of today ample opportunity to be more creative in coordinating and ensuring the communication of his newspaper's aesthetic experience to the reading public. With these possibilities, there appears to be no excuse in aesthetic attainment in Nigerian newspaper management generally, and rural community newspaper management and administration in particular.

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