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5. References should be in A.P.A. Style
6. Any paper submitted should not be presented to any other publication.
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# FUNCTIONALITY OF PICTURES IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS



*Olusola Oyero & Olaolu Amodu*

## *Abstract*

*Pictures are a major part of our lives because we are surrounded by them wherever we turn. They have uses ranging from social to official. Almost every printed material has pictures displayed on it in one form or the other, and newspapers are no exceptions. In fact, the newspaper industry is one of the largest users of still pictures. Nevertheless, considering that the newspaper has been plagued from inception with inability to effectively sustain readers' attention, it becomes necessary to examine the increasing trend in the use of pictures. While some are of the opinion that pictures aid readership, others consider them irrelevant. This study, therefore, set out to newspapers' use of pictures and people's perception of the functions of these pictures. The theoretical foundation of this work was laid on agenda-setting and uses and gratification theories. Both content analysis and survey were used to generate data for this study. For the content analysis, the Punch, the Guardian, Vanguard and This Day newspapers were used and a total of 208 respondents participated in the survey. Our findings revealed that most of the pictures analysed focused on economic issues, personalities and politics. We also discovered that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that pictures alone are not adequate as news contents.*

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**Keywords:** Pictures, newspaper, functionality.

## INTRODUCTION

Picture is a visual representation or image painted, drawn, photographed, or otherwise rendered on a flat surface. It can also be defined as a visible image, especially one on a flat surface or screen (The FreeDictionary). Pictures are ubiquitous in our lives. We are bombarded with photographic imagery throughout waking hours. Most of us contribute to making some of the billions of pictures made every year. One of the reasons people cannot do without pictures is because of the aesthetics of photography; but pictures go a longer way than just aesthetics, they are used as a vital means of communication in that they are a perfect way of communication.

The newspaper industry is one of the largest users of still pictures today. Almost every newspaper picked up on a given day will have at least one photograph on the front page and other pictures inside and Nigerian newspapers are not left out in this race. A good example is *the Guardian* newspaper. Usually, these pictures are gotten from their photojournalists but some newspapers buy their pictures from agencies that specialize in supplying pictures for publications.

Photographs are one of the components of all major national newspapers in Nigeria and all over the world. All Nigerian newspapers publish pictures on a daily basis. Although it is not easy to ascertain the number of people who read through this picture stories, it appears that many readers of newspapers are attracted to these papers because the pictures try as much as possible to elaborate the news.

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The way photos are used vary; some stand alone as story with a cutline and others are part of a photo essay. Most photographs however accompany stories, so they must coordinate well with those stories. Photographs serve several functions in the newspapers. All are important, but communication is the most important function. Levin (1981) emphasizes on the fact that unless a picture communicates something newsworthy, it cannot be said that such a picture has performed a certain function. Some other functions of photographs include credibility, visual appeal and vitality.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Since the inception of newspaper, a major problem has been how to sustain the readers' attention. The very catching explanatory effects of pictures in newspapers have been about its usefulness. Sometimes one wonders what the fate of the readers would have been without pictorial images which help translate or explain concepts and a given message. There have been speculations however that those pictures sometimes are irrelevant as they make the newspapers too colorful and childish. It is against this background that this study attempted to identify the types and content of pictures found in Nigerian newspapers and find out the perception of people on the function of these pictures.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework for this paper is based on the agenda-setting and uses and gratification theories of the media. Agenda-setting implies that mass media pre-determines what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. It does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we actually think: but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about (Folarin, 2005).

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According to Miller (2005), the modern concept of agenda setting is often attributed to Walter Lippmann who argued that the mass media create images of event in our minds and that policy makers should be cognizant of those "pictures in people's heads". Furthermore, Cohen (1963) as cited by Miller (2005, p.270) notes that the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. It, therefore, follows from this part that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors and publishers of the papers they read. This theory is good at explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. Although different people may feel differently about the issue at hand, most people feel the same issues are important.

Uses and gratification theory perceives the recipient as actively influencing the effect process, since he selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of his needs beliefs e.t.c. According to Blumler and Katz (1974), uses and gratification theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The theorist says that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills his/her needs. Uses and gratifications assume that the users have alternate choices to satisfy their need.

According to the theory, media consumers have a free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them. Values are clearly seen by the fact that they believe that media consumers can choose

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the influence media have on them as well as the idea that users choose media alternatives merely as a means to an end. Uses and gratification is the optimist's view of the media. The theory takes out the possibility that the media can have an unconscious influence over our lives and how we view the world. The idea that we simply use the media to satisfy a given need does not seem to fully recognize the power of the media in today's society.

In this context, the uses and gratification theory can be seen in the case where an individual chooses to define the function of a particular picture which he has seen in the newspaper in order to fit into his own understanding. With regards to this study, the Nigerian press serves as the eyes and ears of members of the community by publishing pictures to accompany stories in order to give the readers an insight to the story. By the agenda setting and uses and gratification function of the Nigerian press, they determine pictures to publish and help the reader to make meaning of these pictures and see what function these pictures portray.

There are different types of picture stories. According to Integrated Publishing (n. d.), they include:

**1 Illustrated Text:** For this type of picture story, the text or story is written first, and then one or more photographs are used to illustrate or dramatize, its content. In reality, this is not a true picture story, since the photographs are incidental, rather than an integral part of the text. The photographs are used to dress up the page, make it attractive, give it character or establish a mood. Many magazines use the illustrated text format. They frequently introduce each story with a single illustration, full page size that serves to attract the readers' attention and leads them into reading the story.

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- 2 **Photo-Text Combination:** As the name shows, the photo-text combination type of picture story uses a combination of both photographs and text. However, the photographs carry the weight of the story. The story is told primarily by related photographs arranged in some form of continuity. The text is important and provides worthwhile information relative to the photographs, but it is subordinate to the photographs. This is the easiest type of photograph story to develop.
  - 3 **Pure Picture Story:** In the pure picture story, there is no text except for a brief introduction outline. Of the seven picture story types, the pure picture story is the most difficult to develop. It is frequently presented in sequences of photographs taken at brief intervals. Pure picture stories are normally used only when the action is simple and familiar enough to the average reader so that no lengthy word description is required.
  - 4 **Picture Story within Text:** The picture story within text actually presents two separate but related stories. One story is told in words, the other in photographs. Both are complete in themselves, the text may be used without the picture and the picture story may be used without the text. Nevertheless, the combination of the two in a single layout makes the spread much more effective than either would be alone.
  - 5 **Single Picture Story:** The single picture story is the most basic form of photojournalism. Single photographs, filled with impact, allow the viewer to "feel" the action and thus become involved with the subject. The single picture story is similar to the lead photograph used in a longer picture story. It sums up the subject, evokes some emotion or keys the action or the setting.
  - 6 **Abstract Picture:** One may be objective or subjective in his/her
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approach to a subject; this is considered an abstract picture approach.

When you use the objective approach, you try to record the subject as faithfully as possible, presenting the subject for the viewer's own interpretation. When your approach is subjective, you engage your own feelings in your work. You approach the subject from the standpoint of your reactions. A photograph that captures an abstract idea or emotion conveys to viewers something with which they can identify. It stimulates their imagination.

- 7 **Informal Portrait:** These are strong, expressive informal portraits that come from successful interaction between the photojournalist and the subject. They convey the character and personality of the subject honestly. With few exceptions, the informal portrait shot cannot be in a studio where the subject is posing. In this situation the subject may appear very formal and withdrawn. The informal portrait is best made when the subject is candid. In other words, it is photographing the subject in familiar surroundings, such as his home or place of work. In these surroundings the subject's hands, gestures and facial expressions begin to convey character and personality. The informal portrait is an excellent medium for relieving the boredom of the plastic formal portraits. It best taken with two or three photographs. When you start, your subject will very likely be uneasy and tense. However, as you shoot, the subject will usually begin to relax. The eyes (which must be in sharp focus) and the mouth are the important parts of the informal portrait. They are where the expressions, unique to each person, are revealed.

Picture serves some useful purposes in newspapers. Carney and Levin (2002) identified major functions of pictures:

- 1 **Credibility:** a photograph makes whatever is pictured seem more
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- 1 Credibility: a photograph makes whatever is pictured seem more real and true. It lends credibility to the story as people are more inclined to what they see than what they read
- 2 Visual appeal: pictures are visual magnets, drawing readers into a page or a story. For this reason, pictures often serve as entry points. Part of a picture's visual appeal is the variety it adds to a layout. The contrast between a picture and copy is exciting and eye-catching. This is why pictures are usually the dominant element on a page or spread.
- 3 Vitality: a picture adds life-vitality-to a story in a way no illustration can match. Even a mug shot do wonders as it makes readers feel as though the person in the story is real. Sometimes a story has vitality, but it needs a picture to highlight that vitality. Pictures are especially suited to bringing out the action on human interest in a story.
- 4 Aesthetics: aesthetics has to do with the beauty which is being portrayed in the picture. Pictures add so much beauty to the story and also the newspaper as reader may be attracted to the newspaper just because of the beauty of the picture.

Graber (1996, p.2), in his work *Say it with pictures*, further analyses the functions of pictures in newspaper thus:

*Because words and pictures are merely building blocks from which different meanings are constructed, cues about the context are essential. In newspaper stories, pictures clearly depict familiar persons, locations or situations which are used to contextualize the story. A combination of both words and pictures makes messages more*

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*memorable than purely verbal text, particularly when the pictures contain substantial amount of dramatic information.*

Two types of explanation have been offered by scholars on the importance of pictures. One relates to the fact that pictures arouse reader's interest and attention to a greater extent because they give the readers a sense of participation or at least witnessing it personally which makes it easier to identify with people and situations and become emotionally involved. The second is that pictures make it easier to retrieve stored information from memory. Paivio (1998, p.387) believes that this happens because pictures are encoded in terms of both their graphics and written content. The presence of an additional memory code for picture items would enhance their probability of being recalled because if one was forgotten or simply unavailable for retrieval, the other could be used instead. Pryluck (1976, p.220) asserts that pictures present more details than words do and provide a better grasp of relationship. This clarification allows readers to form accurate visual memories of unfamiliar people and event and to reverse flawed impression.

Even when readers are able to compensate for the missing pictures by drawing visual memories, these are rarely as vivid and accurate as the images people are able to construct from seeing the pictures. Imaging what a presidential inauguration or the inside of a spacecraft might look like is not nearly as realistic as seeing pictures of the real ceremony or the vehicle.

Friday (2002) further states that minimally, pictures point to the world as it appeared at sometime, under certain conditions. Because pictures record the appearance of object in a manner closely akin to the way in which the world presents itself in ordinary perceptual experience,

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they show us the world as it was (even if we misunderstand the significance of what it shows) and are therefore evidence of the way the world was. What he tries to explain here is that pictures show us exactly what the event looks like but in some cases, most people get to misinterpret such pictures making it look unreal.

Following this, Walton (2002) is able to demonstrate that pictures in newspaper exhibit a natural dependence on the world they picture. This he interprets as visual experience of what pictures depict is naturally dependent on the way the events look. Garber (1996. p.40) states:

*Audience find it easier to extract meanings from picture stories rather than merely print forms largely because pictures present the essential story fact and context more clearly without over-whelming details that may be tedious and often difficult to grasp. For instance, pictures in the newspaper can provide information about the extent of the injuries suffered by the victims of a bombing attack, as well as their age, ethnicity and socio-economic background.*

The above statement tries to prove the fact that pictures tell a lot about a story rather than just the words contained in the news story.

### **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The study design for this research is content analysis and survey methods. Content analysis is a prescribed system which is systematic, objective and quantitative in nature. It is used in the extraction of data from any form of communication (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, Walizer and Huffman, 1978). Content analysis was used to analyse types and subjects of pictures in the selected newspapers. Survey was used to find out the extent to which the readers paid attention and understood the messages conveyed by newspapers' pictures, as well as their perception of the functionality of those pictures.

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Four Nigerian newspapers: *Punch*, *the Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* were selected for this study. These papers were chosen because of their country wide acceptance and readership, availability of copies for analysis, wide usage of pictures in stories and large circulation rate. A total of 80 issues were analysed. This was arrived at by random selection of 20 issues from each of the newspapers in the month of January 2008. The unit of analysis for the content analysis was picture news on any subject with exclusion of pictures from advertisements. They were measured for type of pictures, subject of the picture and the source of the picture.

Similarly, a total of 208 respondents were used for the survey. The respondents were students of Covenant University, Ota in Nigeria. The literacy level of the students and their access to read newspapers informed their choice for the study. The students were chosen through a stratified sampling technique, thus covering the three colleges that existed in the institution.

## Result

**Table 1: Distribution of Picture Stories based on Issues**

Subjects	Frequency	Percentage
Politics	79	11.5%
Education	58	8.5%
Economy	174	25.4%
Sport	74	10.8%
Religion	29	4.2%
Science and Technology	15	2.2%
Conflict/War	18	2.6%
Personality/People	108	15.7%
Disaster	18	2.6%
Commerce/Industry	18	2.6%
Culture/Ethnicity	20	2.9%
Health	30	4.4%
Corruption	1	0.1%
Crime	13	1.9%
Foreign Issues	31	4.5%
Total	686	100.0%

From the above table, it is seen that the selected newspapers used picture news on all types of stories. Stories on economy had the highest number of pictures with 25.4%; followed by pictures on people/personalities with 15.7%. Politics and education had 11.5% and 8.5% respectively. Foreign issues, health and religion came with 4.5%, 4.4% and 4.2% in that order. In all, it was economy that had the highest number pictures among all the issues while corruption had the least.

**Table 2: Distribution of Pictures according to Types**

Picture Type	Frequency	Percentage
Pure Picture Story	97	14.1%
Picture Text Within Text	49	7.1%
Single Picture Story	276	40.2%
Abstract Picture	79	11.5%
Photo-Text Combination	26	3.8%
Illustrated Text	159	23.2%
Total	686	100.0%

Table 2 shows the types of pictures that the newspapers used. Six types of pictures were identified. The picture story that was most commonly used in reporting was the single picture which formed 40.2%, followed by illustrated text with 23.3%. Others included pure picture story (14.1%), picture text within text (7.1%) and abstract picture with 11.4%. Photo text combination was the least used with 3.8%.

**Table 3: Sources of Newspapers Pictures**

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Local	535	78%
Foreign	151	22%
Total	686	100%

Table 3 shows the sources where the newspapers got their picture from. We see that 78% were locally sources while the remaining 22% was obtained from foreign sources. This could be because the newspapers covered more local news than foreign ones.

**Table 4: Respondents' Level of Attention to Newspapers Pictures**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Moderateery Low	8	4.2%
Low	20	10.5%
Moderate	22	11.6%
High	112	58.9%
Very High	28	14.7%
Total	190	100.0%

Table 4 indicates that 4.2% respondents paid very low attention to newspaper pictures, 10.5% paid a low attention, 11.6% gave moderate attention to pictures, 58.9% gave high attention to pictures while 14.7% paid very high attention to newspaper pictures. Hence, most of the respondents paid attention to pictures in the newspapers.

**Table 5: Respondents Understanding of Pictures Messages**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	124	65.3%
No	66	34.7%
Total	190	100.0%

Table 5 shows that most of the respondents understood the messages carried by pictures in the newspapers. Sixty-five per cent (65.3%) of the respondents claimed they understood the message as against 34.7% who did not. Thus this table shows that most of the respondents understand the messages portrayed by these pictures.

**Table 6: Readers' Perception of the Purpose of Pictures in Newspapers**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Aid understanding	29	15.3%
Entertainments	13	6.8%
Encourages Readership	15	7.9%
Identifies of Personalities	13	6.8%
Summarises the Story	12	6.3%
Gives credibility	51	26.8%
None	57	30.0%
Total	190	100%



Table 6 shows the different perception of respondents to the pictures in the newspapers. A total of 29 respondents (15.3%) stated that pictures aided better understanding of the story, 6.8%belived pictures were basically for entertainment purpose, 7.9% also gave their response that the pictures encouraged readership of the newspapers. Another 6.8% of the respondents believed that the pictures were there just to identify important personalities that made the news, 26.8% felt the pictures were to give credibility to the story while 30.0% did not know the purpose of pictures. From the findings, we see that majority of the respondents have understanding of the purpose of the pictures

**Table 7: Readers' Views on Adequacy of Pictures as News Content**

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	6.8%
Agree	19	10%
Undecided	54	28.4%
Disagree	74	39%
Strongly Disagree	30	15.8%
Total	190	100%

Table 7 shows the opinion of the readers on whether the pictures are enough as news content. Of the respondents that participated in the study, 10.0% and 6.8% strongly agreed and agreed that pictures were adequate while 39% and 15.8% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. However, 28.4% respondents could not decide. Nevertheless, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that pictures were not adequate as news content.

## DISCUSSION

Our findings show that most pictures analysed focused on economy. Various pictures seen were centered on meetings or fora on economic

discussion. This shows the significance of economy to national development. The second highest category of pictures was those on personalities. This, of course, is not strange because one of the things newspapers do is to show the faces of individuals that are quoted in news reports especially prominent persons. In this way, the newspapers strive to measure up with television which has the power of sound and visual. Politics and education had the same number of pictures. One would have thought that politics would have a very high number of pictures but that was not the case. This may be because the period of analysis was not characterized by much political activities. Other issues did not have much picture news on them.

Looking at the types of pictures used, single picture stories had the highest. This is expected because it is mostly used in journalism. Illustrated pictures also had some place in their analysis, following single picture story. Nevertheless, all types of pictures were used by the newspapers analysed. Besides, we saw that most of the pictures used were locally sourced with 78% while only 22% were foreign pictures.

Our data also showed that respondents paid high attention to pictures. This is of course normal because pictures normally attract attention. In the same way the pictures communicate effectively because most respondents understood the message conveyed by those pictures. However it is interesting to note that 34.7% of the respondents did not get the messages conveyed by the pictures. This may be due to the fact that many of the readers did not follow through curtilip or the caption to get the message of the pictures.

The respondents also believed that pictures served different purposes. Majority of them also believed that pictures also gave credibility

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to news, aided understanding of the news content and encouraged readers to read. Others thought pictures entertained, helped to identify personalities and summarized news stories. However, 80% of the correspondents did not think pictures performed any of those functions.

Finally, majority of the correspondents believed that pictures alone were not adequate as news contents. In other words, there is need for news stories to supply full details of news content. This goes further to show that pictures only serve the purpose of completing news content.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study has examined the content and functionality of pictures in Nigerian newspapers. Most of the pictures analysed were centred on economic issue, followed by personalities and politics. It is believed that the performance of the newspapers in this regard is in order. However, they need to do more by concentrating on issues instead of focussing on personalities. Besides, it is also necessary for the newspapers to put measures in place to increase readers attention to their pictures. This is very important since pictures alone are vehicle of effective communication. It is therefore necessary that pictures are given rightful places on the pages of the newspapers with adequate information, rather than just being used as a traditional necessity for publication.

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