White Spaces as Design Vehicle for Navigation of Contemporary Nigerian Daily Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers in Nigeria are becoming more conscious of the need to adapt to modern design formats in their bid to appeal to consumers. This study sought to discover the current design patterns of four of the leading national daily newspapers in Nigeria: Vanguard, Punch, Sun, and Leadership, from September 2014 to August 2015. The emphasis was on the use of white spaces as a design vehicle to improve the navigation of newspaper pages and make them more reader-friendly. The study was anchored on the Gestalt theory of visual perception, and adopted the visual analysis method of research. The information obtained from the newspapers sampled was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 and frequency, percentage score, average, and ratios. The exciting discovery was that Nigerian newspapers were adapting to the design vehicle of micro and macro white spaces to enhance the readership of their titles. Based on the findings, recommendations were made, including that the newspapers be reformatted to create special design vehicles that would usher in white spaces to enable such pages to breathe.

Key Words: Design vehicles, micro and macro white spaces, newspaper page navigation, reader-friendliness, visual analysis.

Introduction

Early newspaper publishers in Nigeria were obviously not bothered by the visual appearance of their publications. This was not peculiar as the global readership at the time was equally uncritical of the visual appearance of the early newspapers. A number of factors account for this scenario, but two of the issues that exacerbated the phenomenon were technological challenges and the absence or lack of eye tracking studies on newspaper readership. *The Lagos Observer,* which was published by J. Bagan Benjamin in 1886, was designed in three columns. Its April 17, 1886 edition (cited in Duyile, 2007), had no headlines, but published labels to designate specific advertisements. The absence of headlines in *The Lagos Weekly Record*, published by John Payne Jackson in 1890, is also notable. The January 1918 edition presents a paper with a nameplate set in italics that ran across the top of the paper. Labels that served as headings were also set across two-thirds of the page. The remaining section of the page was divided into three columns, where specific services were advertised. Another paper of the era, *The African Messenge,* published by

Ernest Ikoli in 1921, was separated into four columns for advertisements, with each slot being given a label.

The Nigerian Pioneer of January 14, 1921, featured a nameplate that was approximately two inches deep, while both the labels and text ran across the paper. There was no separation into columns. Even the *Nigerian Daily Times* edition of June 1, 1926, did not feature substantive headlines. The paper was separated into four columns, with labels in caps and mini heads in upper and lower caps. However, as the 1930s progressed, newspapers began to reflect professional ideals. *The Nigerian Eastern Mail,* founded in October 1940 by J. V. Clinton in Calabar, Cross River State, and billed as "the Voice of the East", was divided into four columns. Its visual design reflected a vertical layout and appeared to have understood the need for white space in its designs. The nameplate was typeset in italics. On its part, *The Southern Nigeria Defender,* published in 1944 in Warri, Delta State, appreciated the ideals of professional design. Its nameplate ran across four of the five columns with a promotional headline above the masthead. Each of the three stories had a headline with a two-column photograph to illustrate the page. *The West African Pilot* of January 2, 1943, was published in six columns. The space for its nameplate ran across the six columns with a depth of two inches. It was sandwiched by two advertisements on the left and on the right. A promotional headline was displayed across the nameplate's six columns, and another immediately below it. Each of the stories had a headline above it, while two head and shoulder photographs were also displayed along with these stories. *The Nigerian Citizen*, published weekly at Zaria, Kaduna State, which started in September 1948 by Alhaji Abubakar Imam, was designed in five columns. The nameplate spread across two columns with a depth of two inches and was displayed prominently on the top left corner of the page. The lead story was displayed horizontally across three columns with a three-decked headline set in caps, and the associated riders also in caps. An associated photograph was displayed on half a column's width with a depth of three inches.

When the *Nigerian Tribune* appeared on the streets of Ibadan in November 1949, it ran in four columns. The nameplate spread across three columns, while the lead headline was set in all caps with the rider in upper and lower case types. In the 1960s, newspaper publishers appeared to have begun to take considerable interest in the design of their publications. *The Nigerian Morning Post* edition of May 1963 had the name plate designed across two columns, each two inches deep. It was displayed in the top left corner of the paper. The front page headline had a kicker set at 36 points, while the lead headline was set at 84 points across four columns on two decks, with the third deck consuming the full six columns. The *Daily Express* described itself as a wholly independent newspaper, uncontrolled by any government, political party, or foreign interest. Its edition of November 26, 1971, had the nameplate on top, set across five of its seven columns, with a depth of one and a half inches. The nameplate was sandwiched on both sides by classified advertisements.

The lead story was set across two columns in terms of layout design, with a 72 point Times Roman cap headline. There were seven stories of various sizes, and apart from the micro white space offered along the leadings of the headline, the paper’s designers appeared to be interested only in ensuring that the available news was given to the readers. The *New Nigerian* newspaper, which was established in 1966, also featured unique designs. Its edition of February 14, 1987, cited in Duyile (2007), had the nameplate spread across four of its six columns and measured one and a half inches deep. It ran its editorial comments in a single vertical column on the left side of the front page and other stories in the remaining five columns. The lead headline

was set at 72 points in Sans Serif bold cap, with other headlines set on the same typeface but of diverse point sizes as well as a three-column photograph to serve as furniture of attraction. The adoption of professional newspaper page design followed advancements in printing technology and access to such design techniques.

Visual formats of modern Nigerian Newspapers

In comparing newspaper visual designs of the 1920s and 1930s with contemporary visual designs, it is observed that quite a lot of changes have come into play. As Aliagan (2006) remarks, the early newspapers did not publish headlines. Compared to what is observed in contemporary Nigerian newspapers, early newspapers were not attractive because the publishers or editors were only concerned with conveying the news to the readers and not with whether they were readable or reader-friendly. Aliagan explains that it was much later that Nigerian newspapers began to apply one-column headlines to their stories. Headlines were written in upper case or capital letters and then evolved into lower case with the first letters in caps, which is the format in some dailies such as *Thisday* and *Leadership*, among others. With few exceptions, virtually all the daily newspapers in Nigeria at the moment publish upper- and lower-case headlines.

White spaces. The visual formats of modern newspapers have changed dramatically from the virtual texts that dominated early newspapers in Nigeria. The major direction of noticeable change is the extensive use of white spaces and the associated reduction of text in newspaper designs. Design itself is identified as the deliberate arrangement of objects to achieve a predetermined effect. It is a visual composition, and just as verbal or written compositions are woven around a subject matter, artistic or visual designs are arranged to express an idea or ideas.

White spaces are empty areas on a newspaper page that may be covered either by colour or white, opaque or transparent, but without any text on them. They owe their origins to the Second World War censorship of newspapers in Australia. The Newspaper Design History (2004) describes white spaces as products of open defiance, which started at the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* of Australia in April 1944. It indicates that the newspaper began to leave open spaces on pages to show that stories meant for such spaces were removed by censors. In the newspaper's edition of April 17, 1944, for instance, head and shoulder photographs of the Australian Minister of Information who ordered the censorship as well as those of the author of the statement that was censored were published. Two empty columns designed vertically, representing where the censored story was earlier displayed and later removed, were printed as white spaces.

The need for white space is rooted in a number of factors. One of these is the shift of focus by publishers from hard information to colour and entertainment. Robertson (2000) is of the view that in a media-saturated era, competition for readers' eyes in the mass media has meant quick visual summaries made through the visual code, in which white spaces play an important part. The implication of this is that at the newsstand, readers rarely spend time reading dense and cluttered pages but go for those pages that have outstanding features that they can easily relate to. The benefit inherent in the trend toward extensive use of white spaces is that it enables the busy reader to read the paper easily. It is also used by designers to convey an image of sophistication and elegance (Boulton, 2007; Jones, 2010). This means that people in higher strata of society tend to regard cluttered pages as unsophisticated, especially where issues of branding are concerned. Another reason for the use of white space is the need to allow text to breathe. This is treated from psychological and even physical perspectives, where overcrowding of available

spaces creates inconveniences and discomfort for people. Soegaard (2021) describes it as a great tool to balance design elements on a page and organise content for an effective visual communication experience. It is thus, an instrument that works to hold readers' attention and, by striving to separate the words from the pictures, keeps each page from looking busy. On its part, Design Matters (2007) explains that "when text crowds all the way to the edge, it leaves us feeling crowded or cramped."

Generous use of white space on a page creates the impression that you value the content of your page and would go the extra mile to avoid the clutter that crammed and crowded pages provide. Macro white space represents the space between major elements on a page, while micro white space is used to designate spaces between smaller or minor elements on a page. White space is applied in two forms. These are active and passive white spaces. Boulton (2007) describes active white spaces as design elements that are used to enhance page structure and assist the reader in navigating the newspaper page's contents. Passive white spaces, on their part, are used to improve the aesthetics of the newspaper's layout without offering any serious guidance to the reader on the content flow or order of the page. Ciripitca (2016) defines active white space as one that ensures a better structure and layout in design because it gives focus to the content area, while passive white space is the default space left out at the borders or in between content to make it readable. Boulton (2007) is of the view that white spaces are used to create balanced, harmonious layouts. He explains that "it can also take the reader on a journey through the design in the same way a photographer leaves 'looking room' in a portrait shot by positioning the subject off the centre of the frame and having them look into the remaining space."

Furthermore, Turnbull (2011) views white space as the spacing between different elements on a page that contains nothing. However, while some designers regard it as negative space, others prefer to have it as positive space. Either way, it serves the same purpose: to define and mould what positive space is all about. As a result, it should not be regarded as a waste of space for which no content was provided but rather as a deliberate space left to invite readers to the page. Jones (2010) argues that though the name suggests that the space might be white, it does not necessarily mean that the spaces must be white. What constitutes white space, therefore, is simply the empty spaces that surround the texts on a given newspaper page. Such spaces include those around margins, gutters, images, graphics, columns, and lines of type.

The Gestalt Theory of Visual Perception

This study is anchored in the Gestalt theory of visual perception. The Gestalt theory is best described as a pattern or form of joined or arranged structure or format, and owes its origins to German scholars, otherwise known as the Berlin School, in the 1920s. The theory attempts to describe how people tend to organise visual elements into groups or unified wholes when certain principles are applied. Business Dictionary (2017) defines it as a theory that proposes that what is 'seen' is what appears to be there and not what may 'actually be there' and that the nature of a unified whole is not understood by analysing its parts. According to Utriainen (2012), the Gestalt School's major theorists were Max Wertheimer, Christian von Ehrenfels, Wolfgang Kohler, Kurt Koffka, and Kurt Lewin. Gestalt theory is anchored on the tenet that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Wertheimer (1944, p. 84) summed up the thesis behind the theory when he noted: "There are contexts in which what is happening in the whole cannot be deduced from the

characteristics of the separate pieces, but conversely; what happens to a part of the whole is, in clear-cut cases, determined by the laws of the inner structure of its whole."

Wertheimer's postulation was that the characteristics of an object could be observed from two perspectives: either as a whole or in parts. When observed from the perspective of the whole, the characteristics that are associated with the parts are lost in the observation. However, when the object is observed in parts, different pictures or scenarios that could not be observed immediately become evident. From the point of view of behaviour, a typical example is that of spectators watching a football match. Footballers become the centre of attention while the football field they are playing on is lost to memory. This is the figure-ground concept of Gestalt theory. Soegaard (2017) lists six principles that are associated with Gestalt perception theory. These are the principles of similarity, proximity, common fate, good continuation, closure, area, and symmetry. In the first principle, which is also called the law of similarity, he observes that the eye tends to perceive similar events in a design as a complete picture, shape, or group, even when those elements are separated. The shape, size, or colour of the elements are also said to influence similarity. Thus, when an object with a high degree of similarity is mixed with a group of dissimilar objects, the brain is said to devote time and energy to creating a link between them so that it can try to understand their relationship with each other.

The second principle of Gestalt perception is proximity. According to Soegaard (2017), this law describes how the human eye perceives connections between visual elements. Thus, elements that are close to each other are perceived as related, especially when compared to those that are far away. The law of proximity allows the newspaper page reader, for instance, to use white space to build relationships between other elements on the page. The third Gestalt principle is that of common fate. Rutledge (2009) notes that the principle is vital to human perception of how things around them are or are not related to one another. They tend to perceive elements moving in the same direction as being more related than elements that are stationary or that move in different directions. The principle of common fate is, therefore, vital to our perception of how the things around us are or are not related to one another. Good continuation is the fourth Gestalt principle of perception. As Soegaard (2017) has explained, the law stipulates that the human eye follows a pattern of lines, curves, or shapes in sequence to determine relationships between design elements. Thus, when we view a design layout, our eyes tend to draw a line that connects different elements.

The Gestalt principle of closure applies when a complete figure is seen even when part of the information is missing. Skaalid (1999) remarks that the law of closure is evident when humans see black circles covered by a white triangle, though it could just have been three incomplete circles joined together. Area and symmetry, as Gestalt principles of perception, refer to instances where humans perceive a smaller square to be on top of the other figure as opposed to a whole in the larger shape. Skaalid explains that the principle of symmetry describes instances where the whole figure is perceived rather than the individual parts that make up the whole figure. The theory is suitable for the objectives of this study, which are to investigate the specific patterns of the newspaper formats and see how the visual designs differ from one title to another. The understanding of Gestalt principles is particularly useful because it enables us to play with the principles of similarity to determine the sizes of headlines; or the principle of continuation to navigate the news pages of the newspapers.

Methodology

The study is essentially a form of visual analysis research. According to Sayre (2005), the purpose of visual analysis is to recognise and understand the visual choices that were made in creating the work of art that is being studied. The content categories are made up of colour, line, texture, size, images, diagrams, pictures, and tables. Vanderdonct (2003) describes the visual design method as the arrangement of information items in a way that is visually attractive, perceptive, and easily understandable. A modified sampling technique was adopted for this work.

Twenty four issues of *Vanguard,* 24 issues of *The Punch*, 24 issues of The *Daily Sun*, and 24 issues of *Leadership* were sampled for this study over a period of 12 months, from September 2014 to August 2015. *Vanguard* and *Leadership* were presented to the newsstands as compact tabloids, while *The Punch* and *Daily Sun* donned the toga of red top or poster tabloid brands. These resulted in a sample size of 96 issues of the selected newspapers. The population of the four daily newspapers during the period was 1,048, made up of 261 issues of *Vanguard*, 261 issues of *The Punch*, 263 issues of the *Daily Sun,* and 263 issues of *Leadership*. All the newspapers under review also published Saturday and Sunday editions as substantive titles, which were not counted as part of the sampled population.

Issues of *Vanguard* published every first and third Monday of the months under study, *The Punch* every first and third Tuesday, The *Daily Sun* every first and third Wednesday, and *Leadership* every first and third Thursday, were examined. The sizes of news photographs and infographics were determined on the basis of the number of columns as well as the depth used, and these were calculated in inches. The statistical software package employed for the comparative analysis is Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, with the aid of frequency, percentage score, average, and ratio for the information obtained from the Nigerian newspapers sampled.

Results

Use of white spaces on front pages

Table 1. ***Use of micro and macro white spaces on the front pages of the four newspapers***

	FRONT PAGE			
	VANGUARD	*THE PUNCH*	*DAILY SUN*	*LEADERSHIP*
NAME PLATE DESIGN	13.50”	7.875”	7.875”	13.50”
WHITE SPACE: MACRO	22 (91.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	22 (91.7%)
MICRO	2 (8.3%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	2 (8.3%)
PHOTOGRAPHS/INFOGRAPHS	24 (27)	24 (28)	24 (20)	24 (25)
COLOUR	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)
POINT SIZE: HIGHEST	96	72	96	96
LOWEST	18	18	18	18

White spaces on the front pages of *Vanguard*: The newspaper used a combination of macro and micro white spaces on its front pages during the period. These were evident in the leadings between headlines and texts. According to the result of the analysis in Table 1, the newspaper's front pages had a ratio of 91.7 per cent application of macro white spaces to 8.3 per cent of micro white spaces.

White spaces on the front pages of *The Punch:* The newspaper applied a preponderance of micro white spaces, which were evident in the leading between promo headlines. Table 1 of the front page analysis indicates the newspaper did not apply macro white spacing on its front pages during the period.

White spaces on the front pages of the *Daily Sun*: The newspaper applied both micro and macro white spaces on its front pages. In Table 1, which depicts front page analysis, the newspaper's ranking among the newspapers under study in the use of white spaces showed that the newspaper did not apply macro white spaces on its front pages.

White spaces on the front pages of *Leadership*: White spaces on the newspaper's front pages were observed mostly between texts, headlines, and photographs. Table 1, which indicates the use of front page analysis of white spaces, shows the newspaper's performance with a ratio of 91.7 per cent for macro white spaces and 8.3 per cent for micro white spaces.

Use of white spaces on news pages

Table 2. Use of micro and macro white spaces on the news pages of the four newspapers

	NEWS PAGES			
	VANGUARD	*THE PUNCH*	*DAILY SUN*	*LEADERSHIP*
WHITE SPACE: MACRO	14 (58.3%)	0 (0 %)	3 (12.5%)	12 (50%)
MICRO	10 (41.7%)	24 (100%)	21 (87.5%)	12 (50%)
COLOUR	8 (33.3%)	22 (91.7%)	5 (20.8%)	14 (58.3%)
NONCOLOUR (BW)	16 (66.7%)	2 (8.3%)	19 (79.2%)	10 (41.7%)
PHOTOGRAPHS/INFOGRAPHS	24 (3½cols x 4")	24(4cols x 3½")	24(4colsx 3½")	24(3½cols x 4")
POINT SIZE OF THE HEADLINES: HIGHEST	36	36	36	40
LOWEST	18	18	18	18
NEWS HOLES: HIGHEST	40"	35"	30"	35"
LOWEST	5"	5"	5"	3½"
LAYOUT DESIGNS: HORIZONTAL	22 (91.7%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)
VERTICAL	2 (8.3%)	0%	0%	0%
SUBHEADS	4	0.00	0.00	0.00

LOGO TYPES	[30] (100%)	[30] (100%)	[30] (100%)	[30] (100%)

White spaces on the news pages of *Vanguard*: The newspaper's adaptation of macro white spaces on news pages was achieved through the design of special vehicles that created a half inch of space to separate lead stories from other subsidiary news stories. These spaces were usually twice or three times the size of gutter margins, which are treated as micro white spaces. Equally observable was the fact that ample spaces were provided to serve as headroom or breathing space to separate the headlines from the texts. On Table 2*, Vanguard* was ranked with a score of 58.3 per cent for its application of macro white spaces on the news pages, and 41.7 per cent for micro white spaces.

White spaces on the news pages of *The Punch*: The newspaper applied a preponderance of micro white spaces on its news pages. No design vehicle was observed that could have delivered macro white spaces on its news pages. Only gutter margins were observed on its news pages. Micro white spaces were available in the leading between headlines and texts. On Table 2, the newspaper had a 100 per cent score in its application of micro white spaces on the news pages.

White spaces on the news pages of the *Daily Sun*: The newspaper applied a combination of macro and micro white spaces on its news pages during the period of the study. It initially created a design vehicle for the application of macro white spaces, but did not sustain this, as it was no longer visible after the first three months of the study. On Table 2, the newspaper recorded a 12.5 per cent score in the application of macro white spaces and 87.5 per cent use of macro white spaces.

White spaces on the news pages of *Leadership*: The newspaper applied a fair combination of macro and micro white spaces on its news pages. A special design vehicle was observed on its pages, and these offered up to three inches of white space with a width of up to one inch on the news pages. Ample spaces, or 'head room' were provided as a lead between headlines and texts, and even besides photographs. On Table 2, *Leadership* had a 50 per cent score in the use of macro white spaces and a 50 per cent of micro white spaces on its news pages.

Use of white spaces on opinion pages

Table 3. Use of micro and macro white spaces on the opinion pages of the four newspapers

	OPINIONS			
	VANGUARD	*THE PUNCH*	*DAILY SUN*	*LEADERSHIP*
WHITE SPACE: MACRO	14 (58.3%)	1. 0%	2 (8.3%)	10 (45.5%)
MICRO	10 (41.7%)	24 (100%)	22 (91.7%)	12 (54.5%)
PHOTOGRAPH/INFO GRAPHICS	0.00	0.00	0.00	24(2.25"x 1½")

HEADLINES POINT SIZES: HIGHEST	36	36	36	36
LOWEST	24	24	24	24
NEWS HOLES: HIGHEST	40”	25”	35”	27”
LOWEST	20”	18”	20”	14”
PULL QUOTES	32	0.00	8	14

White spaces on *Vanguard* opinion pages: The newspaper published an average of two opinion pages in each of the 24 editions examined. These two pages each contained two opinion articles, for a total of 96 opinions, 48 of which were examined during the period. The white spaces observed on these pages ranged from macro to micro. The spaces allocated to pull quotes, whether in single columns of Australian white space format or in double columns, constituted macro white spaces. The spaces observed in gutter margins and leading between headlines and texts served as micro white spaces. The spaces observed for pull quotes ranged from 1½ inches to 3½ inches deep across single columns that were either two inches or 2½ inches wide. On Table 3, *Vanguard* recorded a ratio of 58.3 per cent use of macro white spaces on its opinion pages, and 41.7 per cent of micro white spaces.

White spaces on *The Punch's* opinion pages: The newspaper ran an average of two opinion pages, each featuring two opinion articles. This meant that 96 articles were published during the period, while 48 were examined. Micro white spaces were observed on these pages, mostly in the category of gutter margins and leading between headlines and texts. During the period of the study, the newspaper’s 24 issues examined featured 100 per cent use of micro white space and no coverage that met the macro white space classification.

White spaces on the *Daily Sun* opinion pages: The newspaper ran an average of two opinion pages, each featuring two opinion articles. It featured 96 articles during the period, out of which 48 were examined. Micro white spaces were observed on these pages, especially in the category of gutter margins and leading between headlines and texts. On Table 3, *Daily Sun* had two white space classifications in the macro white space format, representing 8.3 per cent and 22 in the micro white space classification, representing 91.7 per cent.

White spaces on *Leadership* opinion pages: The newspaper featured an average of one opinion page per issue during the period. On each of these pages, three opinion articles were published, for a total of 66. The newspaper published opinions on 22 of the 24 editions examined. Of these, it featured a special design vehicle for the use of macro white spaces in an average of one out of three opinions. The design vehicle presented a white space measuring 5 ½ inches deep by one inch wide, which was used for the paper's pull quotes. The other two articles had no provision for white spaces. Table 3 shows 45.5 per cent coverage classified as macro white space and 54.5 per cent of micro white space use in the opinion pages during the period.

Use of white spaces on back pages

Table 4. Use of micro and macro white spaces on the back pages of the four newspapers

	BACK PAGES			
	VANGUARD	*THE PUNCH*	*DAILY SUN*	*LEADERSHIP*
NAME PLATE DESIGN	5.25”	4.5”	6”	3”
WHITE SPACE: MACRO	10 (40%)	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	15 (62.5%)
MICRO	14 (60%)	19 (80%)	19 (80%)	9 (37.5%)
COLOUR	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	23 (95.8%)
NON COLOUR (B/W)	0.00	0.00	0.00	1 (4.2%)
POINT SIZES OF HEADLINES: HIGHEST	72	36	48	48
LOWEST	18	30	36	36
PHOTOGRAPHS/INFO-GRAPHICS	24 (13colsx16”)	24 (5.5cols x7”)	24 (6colsx12”)	24 (6colsx12”)
NEWS HOLES: HIGHEST	12”	25”	42”	42”
LOWEST	3”	22”	35”	38”
PULL QUOTES	0.00	0.00	4	24
SUB-HEADS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

White spaces on the back pages of *Vanguard:* The newspaper's back pages were used for coverage of sports during the period. They offered a combination of macro and micro white spaces, with 40 per cent for macro and 60 per cent for micro white spaces respectively. These were evident in leading between headlines and texts as well as in the gutter margins.

White spaces on the back pages of *The Punch*: The newspaper's back pages were used for opinions by columnists. They had a combination of micro and macro white spaces. The macro white spaces were evident in the balance of space besides the mastheads, which spanned six inches by 1¼ inches deep. The spaces were used for promotion of sports news pages and were displayed with subject photos that measured 1½ column by 1¼ inches deep. The microwhite spaces were evident in the gutter margins and leading between headlines and texts. The ratio of macro to micro white spaces on the back pages of *The Punch* was 20 per cent for macro white spaces and 80 per cent for micro white spaces.

White spaces on the back pages of the *Daily Sun*: The newspaper's back pages were used for opinions by columnists. They had combinations of macro and micro white spaces. The macro white spaces were evident in the balance of space besides the logotype of the columnists, while the micro white spaces were evident in gutter margins and leading between headlines and texts. The newspaper featured 20 per cent use of macro white spaces and 80 per cent use of micro white spaces on its back pages during the period.

White spaces on the back pages of *Leadership*: The newspaper's back pages were used for opinions by columnists. The title had special design vehicles that created macro white spaces on the left and right flanks of the pages. The design vehicle provided macro white spaces measuring nine inches deep by one inch wide on both sides of the pages, and under the columnists' logo type designs. The ratio of macro to micro white spaces on the back pages of *Leadership* was 15:9 or 62.5 per cent in favour of macro white spaces and 37.5 per cent of micro white spaces during the period.

Discussion

The study examined the use of white spaces in Nigerian newspapers, with focus on *Vanguard, The Punch, Daily Sun,* and *Leadership*. The results of the study indicate that there was a preponderant use of micro white spaces on the front pages of the newspapers. Three of the four newspapers applied a combination of micro and macro white spaces on their front pages, while micro white space was dominant on the front pages of one of the newspapers. Findings on the news pages showed that while the two compact top tabloid newspapers applied a considerable percentage of macro white spaces, the two red top tabloids had relatively low application as their pages were dominated by micro white spaces. A similar pattern was observed in the use of white spaces on the opinion pages, where the two red-top tabloid newspapers applied micro white spaces while the two compact tabloid newspapers had appreciable percentages of macro white spaces. On the back pages, the dominance of micro white spaces was equally evident, especially in the two red-top tabloids, while the compact tabloids applied more macro white spaces. The application of macro white spaces by the two compact tabloid newspapers points to the desire of the newspapers to rebrand their titles along the lines of sophistication and the desire to allow the texts to breathe. The trend is that newspapers are now designed with ample white spaces and relatively few texts to enable them to breathe. This is the essence of macro and micro white spaces. The newspapers that did not provide for macro white spaces may have indicated that they were not only unable to understand contemporary factors that aid newspaper readership but that they also continued to live with the notion that white spaces were negative spaces.

These findings are in line with our theoretical framework of Gestalt theory of visual perception, which posits that separate newspaper units or design shapes can be joined to yield meaning to readers. Furthermore, they support the results of Boulton's (2007) study that white spaces perform the same function that a stand-alone or good news photograph does on a page. This is because while a news photograph provides 'looking room' in a portrait by positioning the subject off the centre of the frame, white space leads readers through the design by having them look into the remaining space. Robertson (2000) remarks that readers' interests have shifted to those that have outstanding features they can relate to. This, in essence, means that competition, the high cost of newspapers, and the current economic recession have combined to force newspaper readers or buyers to discriminate in favour of quality and only buy those newspapers that they feel are attractive and meet their needs. The second reason is that the artistic use of macro white space on news pages enables such newspapers to exude an aura of elegance and sophistication. Boulton (2007) is of the view that designers use the element of white space to create a feeling of sophistication and elegance for upscale brands. According to this viewpoint, cluttered pages are regarded as unsophisticated, especially in regards to brand management.

A number of design vehicles are available that can lead to the improvement of the visual design of Nigerian newspapers. The use of macro white spaces on pages stands out as one of

these vehicles because of its potential to enhance visual designs or improve newspapers' visual appearances. This means that white spaces can change the staid or unappealing appearances of newspapers on newsstands and make them more reader-friendly. The presence of ample or macro white space on a page is a major reader-friendly element in contemporary newspapers. Design Matters (2007), has noted that when text crowds all the way to the edge, it leaves readers feeling crowded and cramped. Newspapers that crowd or cramp their news pages apparently do so in the vain hope that if those pages were not filled, they would be wasted or become negative spaces. In the light of contemporary trends, newspapers that have not allowed white spaces beyond gutter margins have to rethink the disservice of not meeting the needs of their readers. De Haan, Kruikemeier, Lecheler, Smit, and van der Nat's (2018) eye-tracking study that measured the use of direct attention to visualisations on three different news platforms: print newspapers, e-newspapers on tablets, and news websites held that news consumers do indeed read news visualisations, regardless of the platforms on which the visuals were published. Besides, the outcome of De Haan et al*'s* study was that visualisations were appreciated by readers if integrated into news stories.

A newspaper can, therefore, describe itself as a sophisticated luxury brand by introducing white spaces and other elements that meet the needs of its target audience. To achieve this new level of design effectiveness, Nigerian newspaper producers or editors must appropriately edit their textual materials in such a way that there is less text and more of the photographic and white space elements. This is the way to go. Writers would have to be persuaded to go for shorter but meaningful scripts so that the pages would become less wordy and have space to breathe.

Conclusion

Some commentators had argued, before now, that Nigerian newspapers were not adapting to contemporary trends in newspaper designs by applying appropriate design vehicles to make their titles reader-friendly. On the other hand, others postulated that the rate of application of these design vehicles by newspapers in the country was abysmally low. Even as these contentions raged, the issue required empirical testing for confirmation, or authentication. This was the motivation for the study and the outcome led to the following conclusions: Three of the four major daily newspapers sampled - *Vanguard, Daily Sun,* and *Leadership* - representing 75 per cent, applied a combination of micro and macro white spaces on the front pages, news pages, opinion pages, and back pages. The fourth newspaper, *The Punch,* used a preponderance of micro white space on its pages. These findings show clearly that some newspapers have not fully understood that by filling newspaper columns with text with no breathing spaces left, they have not advanced the ease of reading of their contents by their readers. Those newspapers that have not applied macro white spaces on their pages continue to hang on to the old notion that white space is negative space.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that the newspapers should, as a matter of priority, redesign their publications, and train their sub-editors or page designers on contemporary newspaper page layout designs to make the newspapers reader-friendly. This will enable them to update their skills, meet current trends and present readable newspapers on the newsstands.

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