Review

Use of photo-manipulation techniques in enhancing magazine cover portraiture: Lessons for journalistic graphics in Nigeria

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Evidence of the information age includes the flexibility, availability, accessibility and affordability of information, consequently expounding the frontiers of Graphic Design as well as all the tools of its practice. It is noted that publishing is one of such areas benefiting from digital transformation. Attempt is being made in this article to highlight the role of a few photo-manipulation in developing a standard magazine front cover, from the technological to the creative points-of-view. A critical assessment of some prominent photo-manipulation tasks and their aesthetic, functional and other far reaching implications are carried out. The essence being to elicit fundamental lessons Nigerian journalistic graphic designers can learn, especially with a view towards enhancing their professional standing (technically and ethically) and advancing the attainment of the information technology age.

Key words: Graphic design, photo-manipulation, magazine cover, journalistic graphics, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that almost all facets of human endeavor today have been affected by information technology. Indices of the advent of the information age include the dramatic enhancement of the capacity of media in all ramifications. Research reveals that the flexibility, availability, accessibility and affordability of information; are among key manifestations of this dominance, occurring through the convergence of diverse dissemination tools and channels in the digital revolution. This offers a unique platform for expanding the capacity of traditional media like: TV, cinema, newspaper, magazine, telephone and the emerging new media (the internet, mobile telephony and interactive satellite broadcasting). Publishing is the umbrella terminology referring to the production of the digital contents used by media such as audio (music), audio-visual (movies) or visual (visual effects, screen saver etc.). According to The Free Dictionary (2012), publishing entails preparing and issuing (printed material) for public distribution or sale. The outcome of which is posters, books, magazines, brochures, newspapers or advertisement commercials, movies, jingles and special effects.

Publishing is carried out by a team of technicians ranging from writers, sound engineers, computer programmers, lithographers, cameramen, editors and graphic designers, information technologists, photographers, social psychologists, printers and marketers. Interestingly, advances in hardware and software technologies have in recent years drastically transformed the methods and materials of digital media contents design, production and dissemination (Azi, 1999).

Such advances have not only enhanced productivity (in terms of output), but also the flexibility of information management to all stakeholders (technicians). This is especially relevant to the graphic designers whose traditional roles of typesetting, page layout (manual cut-and-paste), plate making, printing and finishing (binding, trimming and packaging) have been transformed with

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digital automation.

Bear (2012) affirms that before the invention of desktop publishing (DTP) software the tasks involved in desktop publishing were done manually, however the software specifically allow for combining and rearranging text and images and creating digital files. Most of these software packages that come with inbuilt predesigned templates facilitate and enhance the creation of page layouts. Further cutting edge technologies have evolved that push the publishing frontiers higher with the capacities to digitally colour separate, print, trim, collate and finish (packaging) in one process.

For instance, according to Trukmann’s (2012) the Xerox 4 Colour iGen digital printing machine which is now available for businesses of any size, offers a fast and affordable short run digital printing process. Creating superior quality, professionally printed and finished pieces such as brochures, newsletters, catalogues, handouts to name a few. ADS Worldwide Ltd. (2012) ascertains that The Xerox iGen press technology does not use plates or film and requires little set-up time, thus making it very cost-effective for short production runs and products requiring variable data.

It is noteworthy that when such technologies combine with the expressive capacity of human creative ingenuity, for instance in magazine design, be it at the cover or inner layouts, the outcome is exquisite. Of course, designing a magazine layout generally is undoubtedly a daunting task. Cover design requires even much more, it is part of a long process, creativity and skills in typography, guides, visual communication, aesthetics, principles and elements of design, logic and so on (Vasile, 2012). Also, according to Insua (2012) a designer’s basic skill should be his/her capacity to absorb, understand and recreate the information given to be expressed into a clear, concise and effective visual solution, capable of providing the viewer with a fresh new perspective. Wu (2009) argues that “the art of graphic design is continually evolving with society, fashion, technology and politics.” Adding also, “styles and colors are inspired by everywhere around the environment and in turn snapshots can be seen of such evolving culture in the designs of the recent past.”

The goal of this article therefore is to examine the processes involved in magazine cover design, with specific reference to the designer’s capacity to edit the main image to fit specific aesthetic and utilitarian challenges. The essence is towards solving an impending visual challenge and meeting broader functional requirements of a given publication. This is to be carried out through different photo-manipulation processes, from resizing and repositioning of a photograph to adjusting its brightness, contrast and colour balance filters. It is also applicable in photo-editing a damaged picture or integrating nonexistent elements, towards enriching the visual metaphor and storytelling capacities of the image.

This is accomplished using software packages like: Adobe Photoshop, CorelDraw and InDesign (Azi 2012).

Of course, it is in consideration of these digital technology advances that Creative Skillset (2012b) argues “publishing is going through a sustained period of change and development.” Against which backdrop, this article advocates for the enhancement of the creative craftmanship of publishing in Nigeria to meet global standards, this is especial relevant with regards to magazine publication. Given the current explosion in magazine publication in Nigeria, it is noted that dozens of special interest titles have been added to the traditional Newswatch, Tell, Newsweek magazines, like: Arise, Flair, Mode, New African Woman, Yl, True Love, FAB, Pop Africana, Elan etc (Plate 1 (a), (b). (c)). For which key stakeholders include: graphic designers, artists, journalists, government, creative writers and printers.

PARTS OF A MAGAZINE FRONT COVER

Key parts of a magazine cover design include: masthead (also called: title, logotype, logo or nameplate); dateline; main image (photograph); model credit; cover lines, main cover line; left third; bar code and selling line (see Plates 1 and 2 below). According to Quinn (2012b) however over the years the design structure of magazine cover might have been tweaked to exploit new printing techniques; that is switched from full face to a body shot; used illustration rather than photography; moved the target readership age up or down; or simply freshened things up. Characteristically, magazines are periodicals, hence published in regular schedule. They contain variety of articles and are usually financed by advertising, purchase price and subscriptions. Magazine have been good sources of information and entertainment, for instance a fashion magazine, art magazine, design magazine, cookery magazine, car magazine, health magazine, product magazine, sports magazine, computer magazine and many more (Acebedo, 2012).

However, contrary to the saying you cannot read a book by its cover, magazine designers strive to make sale through offering a promising cover, by attracting reader’s attention using the most skillful portrayal of the summary of key inner contents on the cover page. Insua (2012) argues that magazine covers not only offer information about what is inside a particular issue, they also provide significant cultural cues about social, political, economic and cultural trends. With these significant functions in mind, the need cannot be over-emphasized for graphic designers to produce befitting magazine cover pages with adequately captivating visual imagery and complementary textual contents. Care however must be taken by the designers, not to mislead the beholder with forged concepts, unnecessary exaggerations or extreme unnatural fantasies. Capabilities and liberties availed to the artists and designers of magazine covers.
DESIGNING A GOOD MAGAZINE FRONT COVER

According to Berg (2012), “magazine publishers, editors and circulation directors know the importance of the cover image as both a newsstand impulse buy and as a brand.” Also, that “80% of consumer magazines’ newsstand sales are determined by what is shown on the cover, a fact that can mean the difference between a magazine’s success and failure over time.” The cover image and design reinforce the brand, as an important identification factor because the average reader spends only three to five seconds scanning a magazine cover before deciding whether or not to buy that issue.

Morla (2010) argues that although in magazine cover design, words are as important as images, however images can be more powerful than words. Although, Reed (2011) alluded to the fact that there is no secret success formula to designing a magazine cover, however submits the following as elements to look out for when creating covers:

(i) Clever, provocative, fun
(ii) Simple
(iii) Edgy content
(iv) Compelling cover lines
(v) Bold visuals

In fact, a good designer must surprise as well as inform a beholder. Hence, to make a magazine remarkable artistic and marketable, magazine cover designs deserve a closer study. This challenge is even more critical for the developing world like Africa, where the practice of journalistic publishing is still far from reaching the peak of its development. Morcos (1999) observed that most publications have a small readership and fewer advertisements, hence are strapped financially; this makes it difficult to keep up with changing technology. Vasile (2012) asserts the importance of consistency in magazine cover design, not only from one page to another, but also from one edition to the next one. Adding that all the big brands such as: Cosmopolitan, FHM, Reader’s Digest, Men’s Health or Sports Illustrated, have a style that have lasted a long time (see magazine cover Reader’s Digest, Men’s Health that all the big brands such as: another, but also from one edition to the next one. Adding magazine cover design, not only from one page to (2012) asserts the importance of consistency in

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PHOTO-MANIPULATION PROCEDURES

In digital editing, photographs are usually taken with a digital camera and input directly into a computer, however transparencies, negatives or printed photographs may also be digitized via a scanner. Images may also be obtained from stock photography databases. With the advent of personal computers, graphics tablets, scanners and digital cameras; the techniques of image editing have been transformed beyond the traditional darkroom procedures onto a handful of hi-tech devices and manipulation skills. Photo manipulation is often much more explicit than subtle alterations to color balance or contrast this may involve overlaying a head onto a different body, changing the colour of a shirt or even enhancing the textual feeling of an image.

Of course, the technical procedure for photo-manipulation span from being a fun seeking activity to a stunning exhibition of intense artistic mastery. During which processes, image editing software are used to apply effects on an image until the desired result is achieved, such an image may have little or no resemblance to the original photograph (or photographs in the case of compositing) from which it originated (Ask Define, 2012).

THE ROLE OF PHOTO-MANIPULATION IN MAGAZINE COVER DESIGN

In publishing a book, magazine, brochure, newspaper, pamphlet or leaflet, relevant images are used to complement inner textual contents. However, seldom do pictures exist to fit exact dimensions and purposes for the proposed published items, for instance, most times it is observed, design spaces allotted for photographic images and other complementary elements may either be too large or too small. Hence, requiring a form of manipulation or editing so as to fit design specifications of such a publication. Also, the quality of the image may require some form of retouching in order to make it appropriate for the specific purpose it is meant for.

According to Lim (2012) image editing encompasses the processes of altering images. Employing photo-manipulation or photo-editing techniques empowers the designer with the capacity to reshape a photographic image to fit specific needs like newspaper, magazine or web publication at a point in time. Photo manipulation is one of the most creative art forms to come out of the
digital age (Outlaw, 2011). According to Grant (2012) photo manipulation is an ever evolving collaboration between photography and graphic design, combining certain elements to create a unique image that can convince even the most experienced set of eyes and requiring very creative set of skills. Of course, manipulation of a photograph gives a realistic view of an unreal posture, which offers designers the tool to be able to express their inner creative skills.

Technically, raster graphics editor is used as primary tool to edit a digital image through processes that include: manipulating, enhancing, transforming, applying effects and filters and file formats converting. Image editing has become a common activity that everyone is engaged in, including non-professional designers; this is due to the technological advancement that has place variety of amateur digital cameras and DeskJet printers on creative and curious every tables. Also, a lot of free software programmes can be downloaded online. All of which developments make the task of editing family or personal pictures no longer a difficult nut to crack. This development is one of the most significant benefits of the digital age; its capacity to make for ample availability, affordability and flexibility of information.

It is important to state however that irrespective of this opportunity availed by digital technology; the quest for competent designers who would handle high-end professional photo-manipulation challenges still remains unfulfilled. Of course, whether the need is to simply crop a photograph or more professionally retouch a damaged part or even altering certain components to meet a set goal the need for exceptional creative ability cannot be overlooked. As Gralla (2010) puts it “sometimes your pictures turn out less than perfect and you have to adjust their color, remove red-eye or alter the dimensions, photo editors can do all of those things and more.” Adding that “even if you are a professional photographer, your pictures still could use the occasional touch-up and certainly software exist that are up to the task. In all, it is needless to overstress the significance of technical competence digitally and creatively, especially in accomplishing design reputation in magazine publications.

Dozens of photo-manipulation software programmes exist for all requirements and competency levels. These include: Picasa, Opera, Nero, Photoscape, CorelDraw, HP Photosmart Essential, Adobe Photoshop/Illustrator, Free Image Editor, ACDSsee, Ulead PhotoImpact, EPSON Easy Photo Print, jetAudio, Neroo Multimedia Suite, Photo! Editor, Phantasmagoria, InDesign, Image Analyzer, Artweaver, Active Pixels, Evan’s Image Editor and MAGIX Xtreme Photo Designer to mention a few (Plate 7).

Gube (2009) conducted a survey of 150 respondents via the website ‘Six Revisions’ in a quest to know the ‘best image editing software’ currently in the market and found the top 5 to be: Photoshop, GNU Image Manipulation Programme (GIMP), Fireworks, Inkscape and Pixelmator.

SELECTED PHOTO-MANIPULATION DESIGNS

Over the years dozens of designers have been involved in the art of photo-manipulation, creating visually stunning editorially effective magazines covers. It is noteworthy however, while some of these creative works become award-winning master pieces, others turn out as controversial. For instance, The American Society of Magazine Editors announced the winners of the best magazine cover design as The October 3, 2011 issue of New York Magazine - entitled “Is She Just Too Old For This?” Magazine editors plucked it from a group of thirty finalists in various categories (The Huffington Post, 2012; Miller, 2011). See Plate 8 (a, b) (below) entitled “is she just too old for this?” and “are you mom enough?”

Some of the best contemporary photo-manipulation artists and designers include: Karol Kolodziski, Christophe Huet, Jill Greenberg, Clive Biley, Koen Denmuynck, Jonathan Foerster, Craig Shields, Justin Maller, Chris Haines, Jennifer Farley, Cristiano Siqueira, Alberto Seveso, Jerico Santander, Eduardo Rodrigues, David Waters to mention a few.

LESSONS FOR JOURNALISTIC GRAPHIC DESIGNERS IN NIGERIA

Journalistic graphics designers are involved in the appropriate selection, manipulation and use of graphic images to enhance information present for publications. These skills often require the use of photographic and textual images. Hence, in addition to writing a successful journalist report, the graphic journalist must be visually literate and creative. The essence is in order to be able to appropriately apply visual images and translate visual languages for a magazine publication. It is fundamental that as social engineers of public information, journalists should keep abreast with the knowledge of creativity, visual communication and graphic design principles and their application to publishing.

Stovall (n.d.) argues that purpose and content should be the chief considerations in the design of a graphic work, not the ability of a computer programme to design a fancy or pleasing picture; design should always give way to function. Accurate presentation of information is the chief goal of a graphic journalist. In fact, just as good journalistic writing often takes the simplest form possible, so also should good graphics be simple (Azi, 1999). Against which backdrop, Nigerian magazine journalists should note that although photo-manipulation is a desirable graphic tool for resizing, editing, repositioning of magazine cover photographic or other images, care must be taken not to use the tool for unethical practices.

It is advisable that extreme illogical and unnecessary
CONCLUSION

Photo-manipulation is a development whose advent dates back to traditional darkroom as well as lithographic processes however digital technology advances are dramatically transforming its development. The outcome would forever affect the outlook of magazine publications remarkably. This advancement the Nigerian journalistic graphic designers can creatively and carefully take advantage of, in repositioning their practice and business in a digital age. It is noted that while on the one hand, photo-manipulation can be a positive design tool for visual accentuation, however care must be taken not to misuse these craft towards falsehood, irrelevant exaggerations or triggering unnecessary controversies.

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