VISUAL DESIGN IN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: INFLUENCES ON SOCIAL CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the Millennium, Africans have continued to be drawn closer to the global stage due to technological penetration from the internet, mobile technology, virtual realities (VR), and recently, the Metaverse of things. Visual imagery from today's entertainments, audiovisuals, graphic illustrations on e-commerce sites, animated movies, music media, immersive learning environments (ILE), and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter and Snapchat have all become mediums that influence the way people live, learn, socialize and do commerce. The purpose of this paper is to discourse on visual design and its influencing power in today's digital age. To explore the above, the researcher compared the civilization and social status of 10 youths classified into two purposive sample groups of 5 people who had a mobile phone and a social media account and 5 others who did not have a mobile phone or a social media account; using observation techniques and a set of questionnaires. The result showed that people who are exposed to visual designs relating to social cultures and worldviews on the internet, digital television and social media platforms were more influenced by them and exhibited lifestyles patterned after them than people who are not. The implication of this research reveals how visual design in technology influences social cultures and patterns, especially across African countries. From fashion to entertainment, education, lifestyle, sports, classism, elitism, arts and technological drive, this paper also examined how visual designers can help push a Pan Africanist influence and narrative for media imagery delivered to Africa and Africans using visual designs in technology by maximizing the strength of Africa's over 200 million youths for the desired growth in the region.

Keywords: Influencing power of visual design, Technological penetration in Africa, Social cultures and worldviews, Visual design in technology, technological mediation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The world is now one social village.

Current data from Statcounter Global Statistics, indicate that as of December 2021, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter social media platforms had an engagement share of 83.46%, 9.11% and 3.06% respectively in Africa with Facebook leading the Mobile Social Media usage share index by 86.25%. Equally, on the authority of Varrella, (2021), Netflix online video streaming platform subscription in Africa increased to 2.6 million by the end of 2021 while the Multichoice Showmax platform had 860 thousand active subscriptions, this is in addition to Multichoice paid Television subscriptions in Africa that was put at 20 million across Africa in 2020. More so, according to a world bank report, half of the over 1 billion population of Africa will be under 25 years old by 2050, a United Nations report also asserted that Africa is ahead in the global shift from landline phones to mobile phones, making the over 650 million mobile internet subscribers actively driven by social media and online e-commerce engagements (Sambira, 2013).

Figure 1: Social Media Statistic in Africa- December 2021

Note. StatCounter is a web traffic analysis website started in 1999. The image is a screenshot from Statcounter.com (2022). Copyright Statcounter 1999-2022.

Figure 2: Mobile social media statistics in Africa- December 2021

Note. StatCounter is a web traffic analysis website started in 1999. The image is a screenshot from Statcounter.com (2022). Copyright Statcounter 1999-2022.

The dynamics and realities of technological penetration in Africa appear to have changed the way Africans interact with each other and the outside world, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) with mobile technology spread in Africa has also transformed the face of communication media from fixed telephone, television, newspaper, radio, mail post and graphic posters to a more dynamic technologically driven digitized platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, the Metaverse

of things, Snapchat, Virtual realities learning (VR), and Augmented realities (AR), which have become mediums of engagements that utilizes dynamic visual designs and influence the way Africans both young and old now live, advertise, learn, socialize and do commerce; as noted by (Sambira, 2013) these disruptive technologies especially the cell phone, has become central to life in Africa.

The University of Notre Dame, Department of Art, Art History & Design (2022) asserts that Visual Communication Design involves an artistic process that ingeniously combines the elements of art and technology to communicate ideas in ways that encourage users to interact with the look and feel of visual content that is capable of persuading, educating, informing and entertaining them. This role of Visual Design as a variable in technology and digital engagement, therefore, remains significant in contemporary digital visual design studies, it evokes its role as a facilitator and intermediary between technology, the digital space, text and the Online Users who depend on Visual Design to give meaning to visualized algorithms and their interactions within the digital spaces.

In this light, this research examines the potency of visual design in technology and its ability to influence social cultures and social patterns in today's digital age. It also highlights ways visual designers can help push a Pan-Africanist visual narrative and media content delivery for Africa and Africans.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ANCHORAGE

To better understand the potency of visual design and its influencing power in today's digital age, a thematic review of some works of literature and theoretical frameworks was adopted to better decipher the milieu of this paper. These will be discussed under two broad themes:

- The perception of text and visual images
- Technological mediation and visual design

2.1 The perception of text and visual design

According to Tomita (2015) "effective communication is an integral part of any instructional design and visual design elements (text, images, colours, photography and illustrations) play a significant part of the process", Chapman (2022), relying on the above definition, asserted that the art of communicating visual design as solutions involve more than just graphical text and images and borders more on 'communication', she elucidates the above definition by distinguishing some of the domains that made up the integrated functions of visual communication design and integrated marketing. Chapman sustained that although Graphics design implies designing for print publications like brochures, magazines, newspapers and catalogues, it also connoted creating typefaces, images, and layouts for online websites and designing advertisement and promotional materials for online platforms. She argued that Visual Design was born out of a blend of graphic design and User Interface Design (UI), and emphasizes the look and feel (aesthetics) of visual forms, Norman as cited in Tomita (2015 p.3) reinforced this position by stating that since human cognition and emotions are strongly linked, visual designers need to consider not only the cognitive aspect of design but also the emotional impulses it exudes; signifying that digital designs as visuals, should not only show graphical forms but also convey emotive stimuli that compel viewers, attract their attention and in retaining such influence behavioural changes.

Barry (2004 p.3-5) standing on the split-brain theory of late Roger Sperry of 1960, which provides a neurological approach to communication and how what we perceive through media affects us, further points us to the concepts of 'media effect'. Barry believes that as one of the streams of influence, the role of contemporary visual media designers is to answer the question of "how the brain enables the mind to prompt behavioural changes in this digital age". This paper agrees with Barry to position that today's visual designer requires an understanding of how perception theory works and how it can be harnessed into the application of colours, text and images for creating effective visual design that can impact contemporary society.

2.2 Technological mediation and visual design

Technological mediation is the use of technology to enhance and influence human relationships in society and daily life. As cited by Verbeek (2015), it explains human interaction with technology and how this shapes human daily practice; Sambira (2013), affirmed this by asserting that African Millennials are actively engaged in the use of mobile technology which enables them to civilize with other socio-cultures and climes. Rosen, Cheever, Rokum, Carrier and Whaling (2013), buttressed that research into technological-based media and the studies into how it influences humans is one of the difficult research areas in academia, noting that the interactions between humans and things are dynamic, spatial and resulting in diverse outcomes.

As noted by Verbeek (2015), "it is not things that are to be designed, but rather the interactions between humans and things", technological mediation according to Verbeek proposes to give the relationship between humans and things directions and that the study of visual design in technology helps visualizers to predict the influence of a product on the human practice. Wu (2017) added that in contemporary society, technology no longer serves human beings as tools but is now embedded with semiotics and artificial intelligence for different social and historical contexts. We can deduce thus that Tomita (2015 p.2) taxonomy of visuals that incorporates photography illustrations, animation, video and virtual reality as surface features of visual designs are technology-media and are empowered by perception to interact with human emotions. Amifor N. J. (2022) believed that the above thoughts ground the reason why disruptive media marketing has influenced the online behaviour of shoppers and successfully brought goods right into the comfort of buyers. He claimed that technology has indorsed cultures from other countries to penetrate Africa through web access, online shopping, social media and worldviews that pervade the digital age.

Although some works of literature poised certain demerits to technological mediations as contributing to displacing 'face-to-face' or 'natural state' of human interaction (Holmes, 2005 p.130), this paper opines that the evidence of its potency to convey stimulus that impact and drive behavioural changes through visual design cannot be undermined.

3.0 THEORETICAL ANCHORAGE

According to German psychologist, Max Wertheimer's theory of Visual Sensation and Visual Perception of 1910, opines that human's association with visual attributes like colour, depth, movement

and forms are only precursors to the study of how the human brain assigns meanings to visual objects. Lester (2003) states that the core criteria for ascribing meaning to an observed visual object do not rest mainly on seeing, he emphasised in his book Visual Communication: Images with messages that two fundamental theories namely the Sensual theories (Geslats and Constructivism theories) and the Perceptual theories (Semiotic and Cognitive theories) guide how we associate meaning to what we see and how visuals influence us. The knowledge of Sensual and Perceptual models empowers the visual designer to identify the basic elements of an image (forms, colour, depth and movement) and help them to combine these effectively into a meaningful whole, this paper anchors on these theories to find expression to how visual design impact humans in the digital age.

3.1 Sensual Theories (Geslats and Constructivism theories)

Lester (2003), states that according to Gestalt theory, the journey to the awareness that invokes the mind and evokes emotional changes in the human brain begins with sensual stimuli achieved externally through several sensory organs including the eyesight, Gestalt theorist asserts that these sensations on their own make no meaning except they are transmitted to the brain where they are cognitively defined as visual awareness and ascribed meaning, While Gestalt theory portrays the eyesight as a passive link between visual interactions and the brain which influence motives and responses around visual forms, it, however, agrees that its role as the conveyor of stimulus data to the brain is indispensable. Vision is, therefore, empirical to the assimilation of visual designs.

Constructivism theorists, on the other hand, believe in the 'power of the eyes' as fundamental to the construction of perception in the human brain. Julian Hochberg 's as cited in Sangeeta (2017), argues that Constructivism theory examines how the human eyes focus on motion as it scans an image, Hochberg 's eye-fixations theory states that viewers find the largest picture on a visual piece first before looking at the headline for the story, this theory explains why the interpretation of visual outcomes are academically uneasy to define (Rosen et al. 2013)

Huxley (1974 p.11) equally categorized the concept of Seeing into three namely sensing, selecting and perceiving, he opined that sensing is achieved when the eye scans visual items and sends stimulus responses to the central (nervous system). Huxley believes this is responsible for conceptualizing details of visual elements like shape colour, lines, balance, light, dark, texture and consequently, helps the viewer to focus on the ideal visual field by selecting what is meaningful to the brain, the conclusion is then drawn about the visual image based on past interactions, emotions, knowledge and experiences and 'Seeing' is achieved. The above postulation surmises that human emotion influences human choice, in addition, it underscores the role aesthetic of visual design plays in constructing human emotions.

3.2 Perceptual Theories (Semiotic and Cognitive theories)

Proponents of this theory believed that man is a complex animal who assigns complex meaning to the images he sees based on exposure, emotions and previous knowledge (Lester 2003); this underpins the study of signs called semiotics in Visual communication design which sustains that the use of semiotics is significant in achieving visual awareness. Lester defined semiology as the theory which supports the use of signs, symbols and their connotations. He attributed three types of semiotics:

- Icons: The exact representation of an object

- Index: An image that indicates something and
- Symbols: Images that do not look like their meaning but are understood as something because of convention or tradition.

Consequently, the above theories influenced this paper to sustain the important role the eyes and the brain play in conveying and interpreting visual semiotics and metaphors in contemporary society.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used by the researcher outlines the approaches for obtaining data and comparing two focus groups; it explains data collected, processed, and analysed using the observation method as primary data-gathering, the focus groups were systematically selected, interviewed and observed for physiognomies that reflect engagements with online visual media contents. A questionnaire that adopted some of the "Media and Technology Usage and Attitude Scale (MTUAS) parameters opined by Rosen et al. (2013), was used in the study. The research design adopted descriptive and comparative techniques to explain and conclude the research outcomes. Taxonomy of the focus group as shown by existing literature and online data was used for secondary data gathering and employed to validate the outcome.

Limited by time and location the researcher identified a purposive study population within 0.00405 square kilometres with a sample frame consisting of random Millennials aged 26 years to 41 years, a sample size of 30 people was then selected from which 10 focus group respondents were identified; the focus group was made up of campus students from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State and respondents from around 'Ifite municipal', an adjoin bypass to the university community, gender distribution was at the ratio of 6:4 (6 females and 4 males). The focus group of 10 participants were systematically clustered into two sets of respondents- those who had an internet-enabled mobile phone and a social media account and those who neither had a mobile phone or social media account.

4.1 Data investigation

Using observation, interview and questionnaire techniques, the respondents were systematically observed with attitudinal statements which evaluate their online engagements, the influence of online worldviews and the impact of visual enlightenment; the completed questionnaires were then evaluated using a descriptive-analytical tool (4 points Likert scale). Data aggregation and mining were shown in tables with a comparative distribution of frequencies and data outcomes.

4.2 Data aggregation and presentation

The data aggregation below shows a summary of data collected from two clusters within the focus group of 10 respondents

Respondent Profile	Response			
Variable	Male	Female	Students	Traders
Gender	4	6		
Occupation			7	3
Age	Millenials (26 - 41 years)			

Table 1: Respondent profile frequency

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' data by gender, occupation and age cluster. The choice of the number of the focused group sample was purposively made and the single-stage cluster technique was used to group them according to gender, occupation and age with the Mean age being 33.5 years.

Respondent Profile	Response	
Variable	No. of Yes	TOTAL
Access to internet	10	10
Own a social media account	5	10
Own a mobile phone	5	10
Spend 2-3 hours a day online	8	10
Do not own a social media account	5	10
Do not own a mobile phone	5	10
Do not Spend 2-3 hours a day online	2	10
Total	**40**	

Table 2: Variables of respondent online engagements

From the aggregated data above, Table 2 shows that among those who said 'Yes', 25% of the respondents had access to the internet with varying degrees of engagement; 12.5%, owned a mobile phone and another 12.5% owned a social media account, 20% of the respondents spent up to 2-3 hours a day online; 2 of the respondent who accounted for 5% were inactive online though had access to the internet. On average, the table shows that about 57% of the respondent's accessed online platforms while 43% of them did not. We could prescribe also that the percentage of those most active online (45%) is the sum of those with a mobile phone, or social media account and those who spend 2-3 hours online daily.

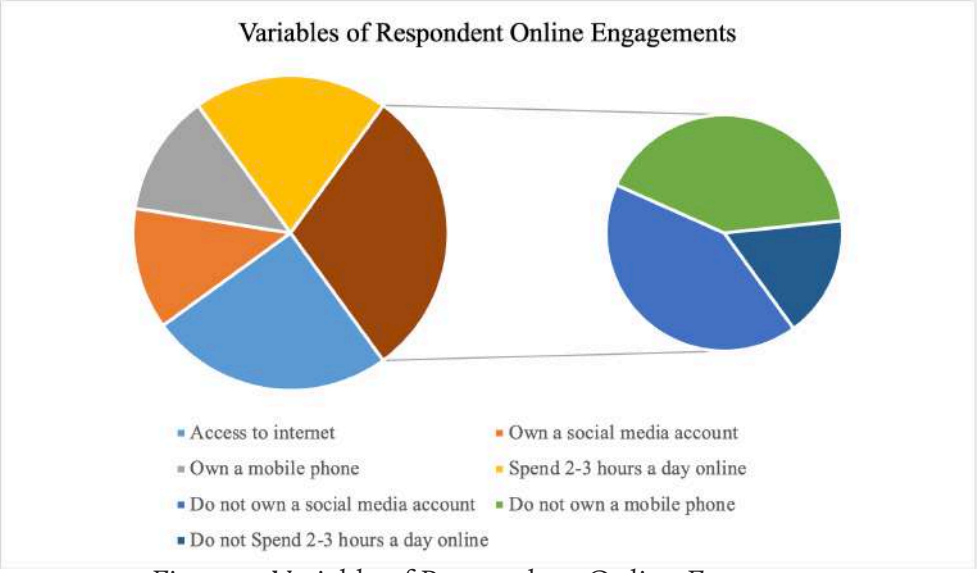

Figure 3: Variable of Respondent Online Engagements

Note. This chart was created by the author to illustrate and summarize the variable of respondents' online engagements, it was created using Microsoft chart.

Respondent engagement with technologically mediated visual design	**Responses**			
Variable	Never	Rarely	Often	Every time
Shop online	1	3	2	4
Search for information online		1	3	6
View social media first thing in the morning and the last thing at night?	2		3	5
Take and post pictures with your mobile phone			2	8
Check Fashion trends and more using a mobile phone	2	1	3	4
Watch Tv, movies and music videos online	1	2	2	5
Send and receive text messages using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or WhatsApp usage as messaging app	3		2	5
Use social media at work or school	1		2	7
Post status and update pictures on Facebook	1		1	8
Meet new people online	1	1	2	6

Table 3: Descriptive statistic of respondent's attitude towards online engagement

Respondent engagement with technologically mediated visual design	Responses			
Variable	Never	Rarely	Often	Every time
Shop online	1	3	2	4
Search for information online		1	3	6
View social media first thing in the morning and the last thing at night?	2		3	5
Take and post pictures with your mobile phone			2	8
Check Fashion trends and more using a mobile phone	2	1	3	4
Watch Tv, movies and music videos online	1	2	2	5
Send and receive text messages using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or WhatsApp usage as messaging app	3		2	5
Use social media at work or school	1		2	7
Post status and update pictures on Facebook	1		1	8
Meet new people online	1	1	2	6

Figure 4: Descriptive statistic of respondent's attitude towards online engagement

Note. This chart was created by the author to illustrate and summarize the Descriptive statistic of respondents' attitudes towards online engagement, it was created using a Microsoft chart.

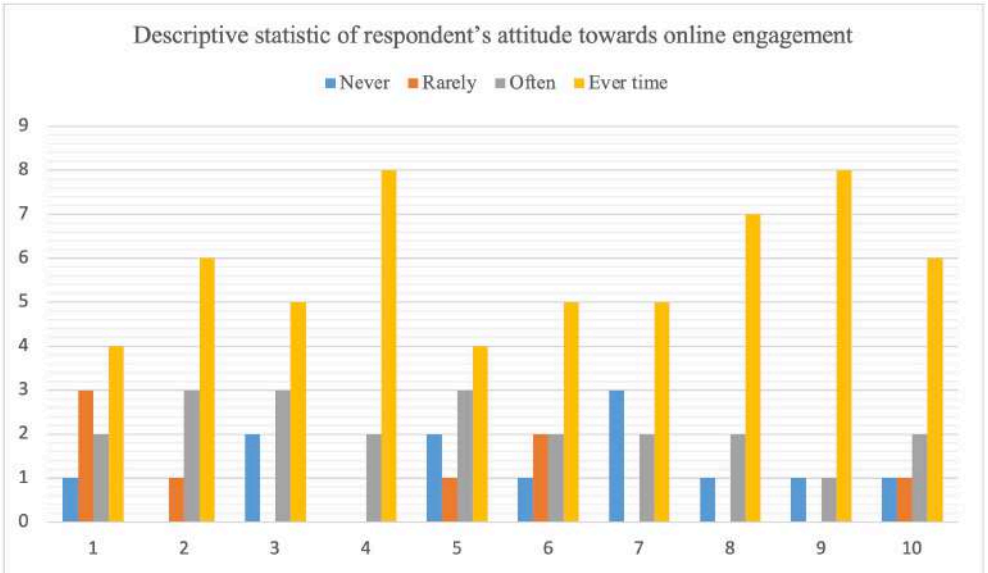

Figure 4: Descriptive statistic of respondent's attitude towards online engagement

Note. This chart was created by the author to illustrate and summarize the descriptive statistic of respondents' attitudes towards online engagements, it was created using Microsoft chart.

In Table 3, 10 attitudinal statement questions were asked and evaluated using a four-item Likert frequency response scale, the principle of association and clustering in data mining was used to associate the aggregates of both positive and negative frequency scales to arrive at the mode of the data table. The attitudinal statement used by the researcher sort to evaluate respondent's engagements online and the frequency at which their online presence influences them, Although current literature argues that the Mean, Average and the standard deviation are not the best for Likert scale mining (McLeod, 2019), the researcher used these measurements to call attention to other parameters needed in explaining the Likert scale outcomes.

Attitudanal Statements	Never	Rarely	Often	Everytime	Total Respondents	Average	Mode	Mean 1	Mean 2	Std Dev
1	1	3	2	4	10	2.5	4	2.9	9.5	2.6
2		1	3	6	10	3.3	6	3.5	12.7	3.0
3	2		3	5	10	3.3	5	3.1	10.9	2.8
4			2	8	10	5	8	3.8	14.6	3.3
5	2	1	3	4	10	2.5	4	2.9	9.7	2.6
6	1	2	2	5	10	2.5	5	3.1	10.7	2.8
7	3		2	5	10	3.3	5	2.9	10.1	2.7
8	1		2	7	10	3.3	7	3.5	13.1	3.1
9	1		1	8	10	3.3	8	3.6	13.8	3.2
10	1	1	2	6	10	2.5	6	3.3	11.9	2.9

Never-1, Rarely-2 Often-3, Every time-4

Table 3b: Descriptive data mining of respondent's attitude towards online engagements

In Table 3b, the Mode of the Likert scale shows that attitudinal statements '4' and '9' had the most number of occurrences in the data sets. The Average and the Mean measurement equally reveals that attitudinal statements '4' and '9' were the most engaged variable. The implication of this is that the respondents spent more time taking pictures, posting them, and uploading these pictures as updates on their Facebook social profiles. Respondents who had mobile phones and a social media account also used social media at the workplace and took delight in meeting new people online as revealed by the Mean 2 outcomes seen in items '8' and '10'.

5.0 DISCUSSION

Perception is at the base of any form of visual influence. As noted by Rosen et al. (2013), the evolution of technology through portable and mobile devices has remained a strong influence in human interactions with digital media. Available data also proves that once exposed to visual engagements, pictorial images (visual designs) play a fundamental role in influencing the behavioural pattern of humans. Taking pictures and posting them online, sending text messages and emails on mobile apps, meeting new friends online, watching movies and video musicals, creating video content with mobile phones, exchanging voice notes, shopping online, sourcing fashion trends, browsing web pages, video

chatting, virtual reality (VR) and augmented realities (AR) are all ways visual design has become rooted in today's digital age.

The implications of visual design and technology in contemporary society is huge, the variable outcomes in statement '1-3' and '5-10', revealed that respondents who did not have mobile phones, a social media account and a portable mobile device were digitally marginalised from current events around them. This provides evidence for the fusion between humans, products and digital spaces; technology has therefore created new forms of relationship that now shape human experiences and mediate human practices, (Verbeek, 2015).

The interview carried out as part of the observation technique also revealed that recipients who had continuous exposure to technology, the internet and visuals through social media, had a higher sagacity of worldview culture; language verbosity and word sense, high fashion sense and appearance than those who were naïve about technological trends and online social network.

Key elements from the data, however, indicate that technological addiction was evident, this could increase technological nervousness and expose users to danger. Digital media users must therefore remain cautious and comprehend that the parallel world of technology and its virtual platforms are not altogether contextual to human reality space, data equally shows that the use of social media during work hours could be abused, and excessive use of social media in the workplace could lead to work-violation ethics, undue exposure online and psychological tensions. The result of this paper, therefore, notes the following as key areas of visual design influences in today's digital age:

- Information and Communication
- Education and Learning
- Socialization and Worldview cultures
- Fashion and Lifestyle and,
- Entertainment and e-Commerce

For wants of time, the researcher opines that further research is carried out on this topic and milieu.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The power of visual design to influence contemporary society is evident, visual perceptions are aiding the interpretation of technological media not only from an endpoint of aesthetic functions and values but more so, from a standpoint of emotive stimuli and digital mediations. Therefore, the question of "what exactly is the power of images, to the viewer" and how the elements of visual designs (text, images, colours, photography and illustrations) combine to influence the audience must be answered appropriately by contemporary visual designers.

In light of the above findings, traditional graphic design and visual designs that have become part of contemporary mainstream media should be harnessed to drive concrete messages that could be passed through disruptive devices (mobile phones, advertisements, internet of things, e-commerce and visual learning) that employ vision as its engagement nexus.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Africa's visual artists and design institutions must realign with the realities of the future of contemporary visual design practice; the African design curriculums must be reinvented to synthesise the role technology plays as a strong mediator of visual practices in modern society. From traditional Africa to digital Africa, human interactions as we know them are about to change and visual designers must be at the forefront of securing a Pan-Africanist influence for digital content that would sail towards Africa.

While those who will become aware will open up to new digital engagements, horizons and the future of media digitization, those who will remain heedless will miss out on the possibilities that the fusion of digital media, humans and technology will birth.

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You should supply the electronic versions of your black and white figures/Illustrations. We prefer figures in TIFF, EPS, PS, PDF and Microsoft Office format. For vector graphics, EPS is the preferred format. For bitmapped graphics, TIFF is the preferred format. The following resolutions are optimal: line figures- 600- 1200 dpi; photographs - 300 dpi. Because of high cost of colour printing, colour figures are discouraged and if they have to appear in your manuscripts then you will meet their printing costs. (The figure legends should be included in the text file). Use standard fonts such as Times Roman, Courier,

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Book References:

Muthini, M. (1993), *Management of building project: Analysis of building procurement systems' features and conception of an appropriate project management system for Kenya.* Wuppertal: DVP-Verlag.

Journal Articles:

Olima, W.H.A. (2002). The conflicts, shortcomings, implication and the urban land management system in Kenya. *Habitat International*. *21*(3), 319-331.

Conference Paper from Conference Proceedings:

Rose, I. N. (2010). Informal construction workforce phenomena. Unpublished paper presented at a Conference on "Construction innovation and global competitiveness". Norfolk Hotel, Nakuru, 13th – 16th July, 2010.

Internet Journal:

Maina M. (2019). Looking at traditional use of leather as dress in Kenya: a case study of Keiyo traditional clothing. *Africa Habitat Review Journal.* Retrieved on January 25th, 2019, from: http://uonbi.ac.ke

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