

# Marginalising the Majority: Nigerian Newspapers' Coverage of the Rural Sections in a Profit- Driven Economy

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## Abstract

The study examined the performance of Nigerian print media, in the context of neoliberalism, regarding their coverage of the less-urban sections as compared to the attention given to the urban centres. The social responsibility, developmental media, and social exclusion theories provided the theoretical framework for the study. *The Guardian*, *The Nigerian Tribune* and *The Vanguard*—out of the national quality newspapers in Nigeria—were randomly selected for content analysis, while six reporters and two editors from the newspapers were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. Performances of the selected newspapers showed that they did not fare well in their social responsibilities and development roles. The newspapers gave more attention to the urban centres to the neglect of the rural sections while they placed monetary value on the scanty events they reported from the rural sections. The only occasions when the rural sections received appreciable media attention was when negatives stories broke. This trend negates the tenets of social responsibility and national development. All regulating agencies in the Nigerian media industry must be alive to their statutory responsibilities in order to ensure balance and fairness in the media coverage of different sections and groups in the country.

**Key Words:** Media performance, Neoliberalism, Nigerian newspapers, Nigerian rural sections, Social responsibility

## Background and Rationale

Social responsibility concept suggests that the press, apart from being independent and free, should also see itself as an agent of public service. It should, as a matter of fact, be responsible to people across boundaries—the urban and the rural—rather than the few people and or particular stratum of the society (Raufu, 2003 and McQuail, 2007). The proponents of the Social Responsibility theory contend that the media contents should reflect the social relevance,

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conscience and reality of the society in general. However, there are factors that may prevent the press from upholding and sustaining this social responsibility concept. Some of these factors are ownership influence (Doyle, 2002, Omenugha, Uzuegbunam & Omenugha, 2013), competition and the need to make profit (Tambini, 2013). These variables are inherent in a neo-liberal economy—an economic policy characterised with market deregulation where the private individuals are given the freedom to own, manage and control sections of the economy of the state (Bauder, 2008). Like any other business section, mass media ownership by private individuals is not left out in this regard.

Neoliberalism in media ownership can be regarded as a libertarian press in the modern world. This assertion is supported by the explanation of Ojobode (2009:59) as he describes it as “a précis of global transmutation from government headship of business and the economy to predominant control of both by the private section”. In neoliberalism, government has, to a large extent, abdicated what should be part of its responsibilities to the governed. Neoliberalism with regards to media ownership is a situation in which struggle for economic survival among the media proprietors is the norm; the press operate in a profit-driven economy (Fenton, 2011; Tambini, 2013). Even the few government-owned media organisations in Nigeria that hitherto enjoyed adequate funding from government have been fully commercialised and mandated to be self-sustaining. The implication of this is that these public media stations would have to compete with numerous private media organisations in the country and may sacrifice their public services for profit making in order to survive. In other words, this phenomenon of survival in a profit-driven atmosphere is likely to affect the functions and social responsibilities of the Nigerian press to the extent that those events that have commercial values, rather than events that really concern the public, may attract attention of the press.

Many scholars (e.g. Ozoh, 1998; Soola, 2003; Fenton, 2011; Garland and Harper, 2012; Pickard, 2013; Tambini, 2013) have worked on the media coverage of different sections and strata of the society, and the press performances in the aspects of public service and profit making in a free economy (neo-liberalism), the media coverage of the Nigerian rural and its constituents (people and events) compared to the degree of attention given to the urban sections of the country in the context of profit-driven economy has not received adequate scholarly attention. In fact, an earlier study by Ojobode (2009) has shown that there has been a fierce struggle between social responsibility and profit-making in Nigerian media space where the latter is really winning the battle, but the study focused only on the broadcast media. Therefore, this paper moves a step further to examine the performances of the Nigerian print media in terms of their social responsibilities to the public, especially their coverage of the less-urban sections compared to the attention given to the urban parts in a country that has entrenched neoliberalism. In essence, the current study is a comparative examination of how the Nigerian newspapers operating in a profit-driven environment report events and people in the rural and the urban components of the country. Two research questions guided this study: (1) How did the selected newspapers report events in the rural and the urban sections of Nigeria? (2) How

did the profit-making perspectives of the journalists influence fulfilment of their social responsibilities and their newspapers' coverage of the rural sections of Nigeria?

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Media Performance in a Profit-Driven Economy***

Profit-driven operation is the characteristic of a neo-liberal policy where the economy of a nation is deregulated or liberalised giving more economic freedom to the private sections while government becomes a passive actor. Ojebode (2009:59) describes neoliberalism as “a précis of global transmutation from government headship of business and the economy to predominant control of both by the private section”. Neoliberalism as an economic policy was developed in the 1970's (Obadan cited in Ojebode 2009) but became fully operational in the 1990's. In neoliberalism, government gives liberty to the interested private individuals to own, control and operate business activities, including the mass media, with little or no government intervention. Government in neoliberal economy only provides an enabling environment and policies for the private sections to operate and flourish. In the opinions of Larner (2000) and Snyder (2001) in Kawam (2012), neoclassical economic theory, of which neoliberalism is a result, provides that hard work leads to success while placing values on individual wants over community needs. They also argue that neoliberalism theorizes that both the economy and the state function best with the least amount of intervention from governments, regulatory bodies, and financial markets.

Mass media are accorded high significance in any democratic society because they perform roles which are regarded as veritable instruments upon which success of the governance and the economy of such society rest. These traditional roles are education, information and enlightenment. According to the libertarian theorists the core roles expected of the media are information, servicing the economic system, servicing the political system, public enlightenment, and entertainment (Daramola 2005). Dimitrova, Sheheta, Stromback, and Nord (2014: 98) explain that “one of the primary functions of news media in a democratic society is to inform its citizens.” This suggests that the mass media serves the democratic system by constructing social reality and letting the public know the truth so that the citizens are empowered to make informed decisions and actively participate in the political system.

Before deregulation of the broadcast industry by the military regime in 1992 (Berger, 2007; Akinfeleye, 2008) and introduction of the neo-liberal policy by the Obasanjo-led administration in 1999, (Olorunnisola, 2009), most media establishments—especially the broadcast media—in Nigeria were owned by either the Federal or regional government, and were well funded to perform their roles as agents of truth and public services. However with the emergence of neoliberalism or free market economy in Nigeria, the atmosphere of such public services in the media industry changed as the stations were alleged to have sacrificed the public service for profit-making reason. But the opponents of this agenda criticise the new order when they argue that neoliberal reform benefits the rich and spells doom for public service programmes. Because the policy is

extensively profit-driven where the industry was liberalised and the ownership focused more on making money rather than the public service, the media establishments changed. Even the government-owned media houses became mouthpiece of the capitalist owners and government (Ojebode 2009) at the expense of development issues that affect the people at the rural areas.

De Uriarte (1996) while commenting on the performance of the press in a neoliberal context compares neoliberalism to authoritarianism emphasizing that the press lacks ideological freedom in both systems. The author contends that “in both cases, content and participation are narrowly constructed, albeit more by thought-manipulation than by daily brutality”. And in both systems the press “serve the ends of those who control” (p.21). De Uriarte’s submission suggests that in an authoritarian regime the role of a press is constricted by the dictatorial tendencies of the rulers while in a neoliberal economy press freedom is constrained by a profit-driven corporation.

In the name of privatisation, Nigerian economic sector has been liberalised as the government insists that the economy must be private-driven. President Olusegun Obasanjo’s civilian administration, in 2006, reinforced this when the President said “We insist the economy must be private sector-led, private-sector driven” (Ojebode 2009:59). The government insistence on private-sector driven (profit-driven) has had its own share on the operation of the mass media—print and electronic—in Nigeria especially with relation to the media performance.

The policy of neoliberalism and eventual deregulation of the media industry in Nigeria may have compromised the social responsibility of the press in the discharge of its statutory duties as the fourth estate of the realm. Referring to Treanor, Ojebode (2009:60) says, “to neoliberals, the market is supreme in all things and all things can be explained in market terms”. Therefore, in a fully deregulated media industry as it obtains in Nigeria, the mass media may be compelled to neglect the rural and sub-urban areas especially when there are no financial gains from those areas except when there are odd happenings or when there are events that involve prominent individuals who naturally make news. Social responsibilities imply that the freedom of the press (which libertarian press had earlier advocated) must be accompanied by a certain degree of responsibilities to the society and even to the profession. Corroborating this, Day (2006:83) posits that “the term *social responsibility* has entered the lexicon of media practitioners alongside the word *freedom*, a concept that is also reflected in the codes of the various media professions”. Notwithstanding the foregoing argument, the neoliberal press, to a large extent, checks the excess of the government and provide the other side of the story, which the government-owned media are most likely to tell from the government perspective alone. Supporting this view, Daramola (2005) and Sambe (2005) posit that libertarian press espouses that the press must have unfettered freedom to assist men in search of truth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The social responsibility theory, developmental media theory and social exclusion theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. These

theories are considered appropriate for the study because the first two theories—social responsibility, and developmental media theories—are essentially mass media theories that fall in the category of normative theories of the press which explain how the cultural, economic and socio-political contexts in a given society shape media performance in that setting and assign specific roles to the media (Daramola, 2003; Watson, 2003, McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2009).

The excessive freedom and the abuse of that freedom by the press under Libertarian Press regime gave birth to the Social Responsibility Theory. The theory owes its origin to the Hutchins Commission set up in 1947 in the United States of America (McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2009). The justification for setting up of the Commission was to restructure the Libertarian Press regime, as prescribed by the Free Press (Libertarian) Theory, in respect of the excessive freedom it gave to the press without justifiable contributions to the development of the society. Folarin (1998:27) says the Commission was put in place to “re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the Libertarian or Free Press Theory...because the so-called free market of ideas had failed to guarantee press freedom and to yield the expected benefits to society”. Instead of having a press that was socially responsible, the commercial orientation of the press system and rapid developments in media technology created an imbalance in the access to the media, and concentrated the control of media power in the hands of a few influential businessmen and media professionals.

Social Responsibility as a theoretical orientation, therefore, advocates a press system that de-emphasises uncontrolled freedom, excessive profit making, and control of the media by social elite. Bates (2001), as cited by Davis and Baran (2009:114), says social responsibility theory prescribes that “the press is not free if those who operate it behave as though their position conferred on them the privilege of being deaf to ideas which the process of free speech have brought to the public attention.” What Bates means here is that instead of being blindly subservient by printing or transmitting what their proprietors want, journalists have the moral burden to be socially responsible to the people by telling them the truth, and in doing this, media practitioners must be accurate, objective and balanced. Media should be self-regulating and pluralist by avoiding violence, respecting rights of minority groups, allowing divergent views from the masses, and being accountable, not only to their employers and the market, but also to society (McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2009).

The Developmental Media Theory was propounded with a view to using media as instrument for development especially in the developing nations (McQuail, 2007). In the submission of Baran and Davis (2009: 122), developmental media theory “advocates media support for an existing political regime and its efforts to bring about national economic development.” The media must not oppose but support the government to achieve its development objectives. According to Folarin (2002), the interruptions and socialist alterations of the press theory formulated from the west gave birth to Development Media Theory which relates specifically to media structure and performance in the developing nations. Instead of isolating social, political and economic needs of the third world countries, the theory is all inclusive, encompassing a great variety

of socio-cultural, economic and political conditions which allow the media to be primarily used for development purposes. Watson (2003: 103) summarises the tenets of developmental media theory as he says that the theory “requires that bad news stories are treated with caution, for such stories can be economically damaging to a nation in the throes of growth and change”. In essence, developmental media theory and the Soviet Theory share some similarities because, in both contexts, media are regarded as a tool for achieving or fulfilling the political, cultural, social and economic goals set by the state to attain holistic development.

The social exclusion theory is essentially about the deprivation meted to the less-privileged people especially because of their location. Social exclusion theory explains there are always situations or conditions which distance, people, groups, communities and territories from the centre of power while people from such communities and territories suffer from unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, and bad health programmes, and without corresponding attention from the government and other stakeholders including the press (Estivill, 2003).

The three theories are relevant to this study as they espouse the core variables that form the thematic focus of this study. The variables are media social responsibilities, democracy, development and tendency for marginalisation of the rural sections by the news media in a profit-driven context.

### **Method of Study**

The primary focus of this study was to analyse the manifest contents of Nigerian newspapers in respect of their reportage of the rural sectors in the context of profit-driven economy of the country. Three newspapers—*The Guardian*, *The Nigerian Tribune* and *The Vanguard*—out of the national newspapers in Nigeria, were randomly selected for the study. The three newspapers were so selected because they are privately-owned media outfits that survive on their own without any subvention from the government—a situation that could encourage them to maximise profit at the expense of their social responsibilities. Content analysis and In-depth interviews were adopted as the research methods because the researchers intended to analyse the manifest contents of the selected newspapers in order to establish their coverage of the rural and urban centres within the neo-liberal economic context of the country. We also aimed at finding out the views of the reporters and editors of the selected newspapers regarding the reportage of the rural sections by their media organisations and the factors that influenced the coverage patterns by these media houses.

Therefore, 54 editions (covering five months; March to August 2011) of each of the selected newspapers were selected through systematic sampling technique. This made a total of 162 editions. For the interviews, two reporters and one editor each were purposively selected from the three newspapers except *The Guardian* from which only one editor was accessible at the time of the study. This could be regarded as a major limitation to this paper. Our selection was based on the fact the reporters are directly responsible for the coverage and reporting of the events both at the urban centres and the rural sections while the editors on the other

hand serve as the final gatekeepers, who determine what eventually goes into the publication for each day.

An 18-item coding sheet and an 11-item interview guide were used as instruments for data collection. The coding sheet contained the content categories which were used to sort the news contents of the selected newspapers. The first main category is *Prominence* of the stories (in terms of their placements i.e. *Front Page*, *Back Page*, *Editorial Page*, and *Inside Page* stories). *Front Page* is the first page or the front cover page of a newspaper. *Back Page* is the last page or the back cover page of a newspaper while other pages apart from both the front page and the back page are *Inside Pages*. The *Editorial Page* is the inside page that contains the editorial position of the newspaper (i.e. the newspaper's Editorial Board's ideological perspective or critical comments on a certain public issue or policy). The second main category is *General News Themes*: Here, we have the following sub-categories: *Politics*, *society*, *disaster*, *conflicts*, *Crimes*, *education*, and *development-oriented reports*.

### **Findings**

Quantitative data are presented in tables and figures, while the qualitative data are presented in the form of paraphrase and representative quotes from the interviewees. The presentation, interpretation and discussion of findings are done in line with the two research questions that were constructed to guide the study.

*RQ 1: How did the selected newspapers report events in the rural and the urban sections of Nigeria?*

This research question was formulated to reveal the dominant aspects of the rural and urban sections reported by the selected newspapers. Specifically, this question addressed the two main categories: general news themes, and development-oriented programmes of both the rural and urban sections in Nigeria. Six themes—*politics*, *society*, *education*, *disaster*, *conflict* and *crimes*—were drafted to generate relevant data for the question. Table 1 presents the dominant aspects of the rural and urban sections as reported by the selected newspapers.

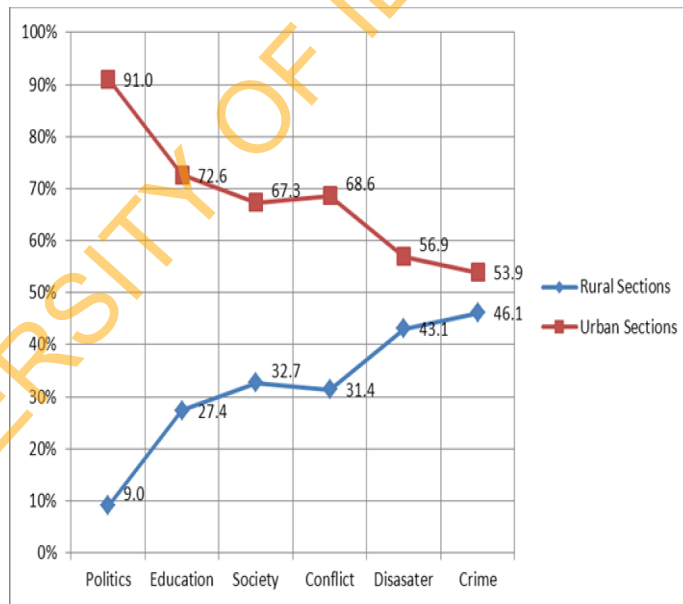
**Table 1: Dominant Aspects of the Rural and Urban Centres Covered by the Newspapers**

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Data as presented in Table 1 show that on political news (such as political campaigns, political participation, political mobilization, project commissioning by the political office holders, and political officers’ visits to communities), *The Guardian* newspaper reported only five (10.6%) events from the rural sections whereas the newspaper reported 112 (23.9%) of political matters from the cities; *The Guardian* reported seven (14.5%) of political news from the rural sections, and 167 (34.3%) from the urban centres. *The Nigerian Tribune* got the highest proportions of the total political news reported by the three newspapers with 36 (75.0%) from the rural sections and 207 (42.0%) from the cities. In reporting society news (i.e. news about social functions such as birthday celebrations, obituaries, funeral, religious festivals, and wedding ceremonies), *The Vanguard* reported 13 (13.5%) events from the rural sections and 54 (27.2%) from the urban centres; *The Guardian* had 23 news items from the rural sections and 31 from the cities while *The Vanguard* had 13 from the rural communities, and 54 news items from the cities. Crime news (such as murder, kidnapping, arson, armed robbery and theft) and disaster stories (i.e. natural and man-induced occurrences such as droughts, fire, earthquake, flood, accidents of any kind including building collapse, and loss in agricultural produce) from the rural areas got a fair deal of attention from the newspapers compared to other categories of news. There is a narrow gap between the proportion of crime news reported from the cities and those reported from the rural sections. For example, as shown in Table 1, *The Guardian* newspaper reported 15 crime stories from the rural areas and 16 from the cities; *The Vanguard* reported 30 crime stories from the rural sections and 27 from the cities. Fig 1 shows the clear picture of these patterns of coverage by the newspapers.



**Fig.1:** Newspapers’ Patterns of Covering Dominant Aspects of the Rural and Urban Sections of Nigeria

The patterns of coverage presented in Fig 1 show two extremes: the first extreme presents a wide gap between the degrees of attention the newspapers gave to the rural and urban strata of Nigeria, and the second extreme shows a marginal gap. On the first extreme, the overall amount of news the newspapers reported about politics from the cities is 91.0% against 9.0% of the same category of news from the rural sections. On the other extreme, the proportion of crime news from the cities is 53.9% while the proportion from the rural sections is 46.1% as reported by the newspapers.

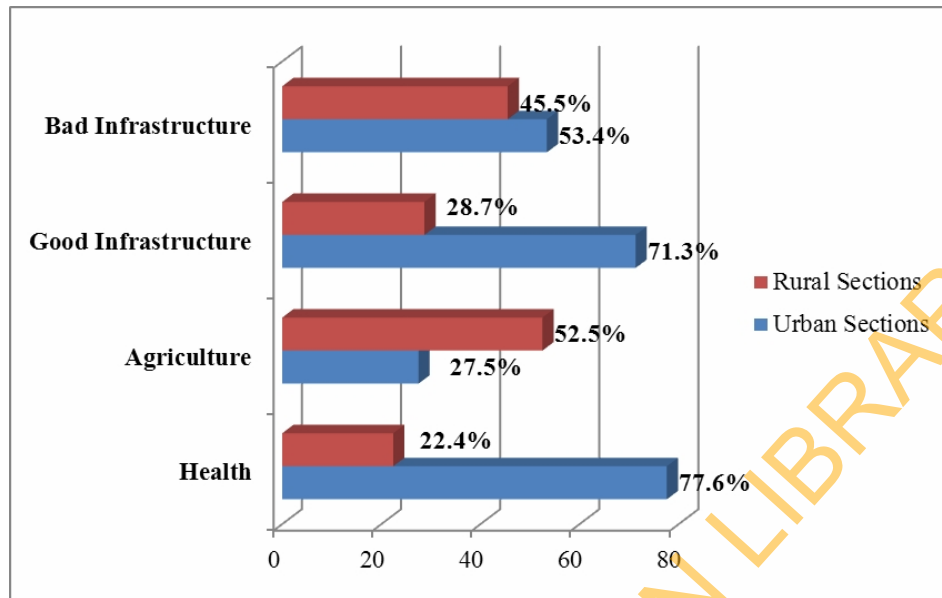
Table 2 presents three categories of development-oriented news for both the rural and urban sections as covered by the newspapers selected for the study. About health-related news from the rural sections, *The Guardian* reported seven (20.6%) items, *The Vanguard* reported the same number of news (n=7; 20%) while *The Nigerian Tribune* has the highest number (n=20; 58.8%). Comparatively, each of the newspapers gave more attention to health issues at the urban sections of the country: *The Guardian* reported 29 (24.6%) cases, *The Vanguard* reported 33 (27.9%) while *The Nigerian Tribune* reported 56 (47.5%) health issues. The same pattern is reflected in how the newspapers reported state of infrastructures as they gave more attention to the urban sections than they did to the rural sections. For instance, as presented in Table 2, *The Guardian* reported 12 (22.2%) cases of bad infrastructure in the rural sections as against 28 (45.1%) cases on the same issue from the urban sections. Similarly, *The Nigerian Tribune* reported 10 (30.3%) cases on good infrastructure from the rural sections compared with 34 (41.4%) cases it reported on the same issue from the urban centres. *The Guardian* also reported more stories (n=38; 46.3%) on good infrastructure from the urban centres than it reported the same issue from the rural sections (n=12; 36.3%). Only *Nigerian Tribune* has a different pattern of coverage in this regard as the newspaper reported more news on bad infrastructure from the rural sections (n=36; 66.6%) than similar news from the urban centres (n=23; 37.0%). *The Nigerian Tribune's* higher percentage of coverage of rural sections could be understood from its location and its founding philosophy: The newspaper is located in the city of Ibadan but with preference for the issues that affect the masses and the thrust of its editorial policy, which is to be the voice of the common man. These form part of the motives for the establishment of this newspaper in 1949 by late Obafemi Awolowo. (*FocusNigeria.com*, 2008).

However, the three newspapers reported more news on agriculture-related activities from the rural communities but less from the urban centres. This is understandable as agricultural businesses are naturally more concentrated at the rural settlements than in the cities. Figure 2 further clearly shows the contrasting patterns of attention given to the urban and the rural sections by the selected newspapers in their coverage of events from the two sections.

**Table 2: Development-Oriented Themes Reported by the Newspapers**

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**Fig.2:** Newspapers’ Patterns of Covering Development-Related News in Rural and Urban Sections of Nigeria

As shown in Fig 2, the three newspapers selected for the study gave more attention to development issues in the urban centres while the rural sections received lesser attention. The aggregate percentages of coverage of development issues show that on health, 77.6% of the total coverage was given to the urban centres while lesser attention (22.4%) was given to the rural sections. On good infrastructure, stories from urban sections got more media attention (71.3%) than stories from the rural sections (28.7%); bad infrastructure stories from the cities appeared more (53.4%) than similar stories from the rural sections (46.6%).

*RQ 2: How did the profit-making perspectives of the journalists influence fulfilment of their social responsibilities and their newspapers’ coverage of the rural sections of Nigeria?*

This research question was set to examine the dialectic of profit-making motive and public service in terms of coverage of the rural and the urban sections of Nigeria by the selected newspapers. We examined this in relation to the social responsibility role of the selected newspapers in the context of neoliberal framework in Nigeria. Qualitative responses from reporters and editors of the selected newspapers were used to answer the research question.

Findings show that profit-making is a key factor that determines how and what the journalists report and the amount of attention their newspapers give to events in the urban and the rural sections. It was established that all the selected newspapers—like other media houses in Nigeria—were set up primarily to make profit while the social responsibility or public service becomes secondary. All the interviewees (reporters and editors of the selected newspapers) affirmed that

profit is an important factor in reporting or not reporting the happenings from the rural sections.

The perspectives of the journalists concerning “negative” nature of stories as one of the major incentives for covering the rural areas complement the patterns of reportage by the selected newspapers as presented in Fig 1. The patterns show that “negative stories” such as crimes, conflicts and disasters from the rural sections of Nigeria received more media attention compared to how other categories of news such as politics, society, and education from the rural communities got lesser media attention. Ultimately, the journalists asserted that since the negative stories make newspapers to sell more, they give attention to the events that are negative (from the rural areas) to attract readership and increase profits.

### **Discussion**

From the data presented in tables 1 and 2, and Figs 1 and 2, it is established that the three newspapers published events on *health, agriculture* and *infrastructure* from the urban and rural sections at varied degrees. Interestingly, the dominant pattern perceivable from the foregoing findings is that the selected newspapers focused more on events (apart from news on agriculture) that affected the urban centres of the country while they gave a relatively low attention to those from the rural sections. The percentage of coverage given to the rural areas by the selected newspapers is low compared to the coverage given to the urban centres. This low media attention given the rural sections would naturally lead to further exclusion of the grassroots people from other social, political, and economic benefits as articulated by social exclusion theory (Estivill, 2003).

The social responsibility theory prescribes that instead of dancing to the whims of their proprietors, journalists should be conscious of the moral burden placed on them to be socially responsible to the people by telling them the truth in accurate, objective and balanced manners. Journalists should be self-regulating and pluralist (McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2009). Similarly, developmental media theory requires that media in developing nations must treat negative news stories with caution, because such stories can be economically damaging to the countries that desperately need development (Watson, 2003). However, findings of this study reveal that the tenets of social responsibility and developmental media theories, in the Nigerian context, have been de-emphasised by the newspapers as their coverage of events were tilted more towards the urban centres at the expense of the rural sections. Also, the newspapers gave little attention to the development-related issues at the rural sections while they concentrated more on the urban centres that are already relatively developed. Ironically, the newspapers gave relatively more attention to the rural sections especially when the stories concerned negativities such as crimes, disasters and conflicts as shown in Fig. 1, or when such news from the rural section have monetary values for the newspapers. This phenomenon where media organisations report events with the sole motive of making money is what Fenton (2011:65) describes as “marketisation of news”.

However, out of the three newspapers studied, *The Nigerian Tribune* demonstrated a different pattern of reporting the state of deteriorating infrastructure at the rural and urban sections. The newspaper reported more cases of decaying social amenities at the rural areas but less at the cities. This might be connected with the fact that the newspaper intended to set agenda for the governments at all levels; calling their attention to the bad aspects of the rural sections. With this, *The Nigerian Tribune* seemed to respect, at least relatively, the tenets of developmental media theory. One of the interviewees, Olumide Gbenga, explained this further by explaining that his newspaper, *The Nigerian Tribune*, “reports events from the rural areas so as to call the attention of the government to the plight of the people” at that stratum he referred to as “the neglected section of the society”. This position correlates with the view of Egbon in Daramola (2005:161) who stated that the media could be used to maintain social equilibrium of the rural people with their counterparts in the urban centres, facilitate change or to seek radical alternative; and that no radical alternative and social equilibrium can be achieved if the people at the rural levels are not carried along in the process. But, painfully, the overall findings in this study still show that the urban centres receive more media attention in this regard than the rural sections of the Nigerian society.

The trend, as confirmed by the interviewees, where the drive for monetary gains dictates what issues the media would report at the expense of other events, is in consonance with Ojebode’s (2009) finding that in Nigeria, profit-making is winning the battle against social responsibilities (public service). The trend also gives credence to the postulation of Pearson, et al as cited in Ojebuyi (2012) that public relations have used a range of strategies and mechanisms for getting access to journalists. These have included approaches such as the mailing of press releases to target publications and journalists, the purchasing of advertorial space, the offering of “freebies” in return for editorial coverage, and the staging of press conferences. It can be inferred from the above explanation that the cash for comments or adverts can deny the less privileged from being heard. Opubor as cited in Aliagan (2006) attempts an explanation for this concentration of media reportage when he observes that Nigerian media are urban-centred with a large percentage of their contents originating from Lagos and the seats of government.

Significantly, the profit-making motive of the newspapers has affected the social responsibility roles of the media. It is instructive to emphasise that profit cannot be combined with the social responsibility; one will affect the other. Therefore, in an environment like Nigeria where deregulation of the media space has put control of the media system largely in the hands of private individuals with government only playing passive roles, it is obvious that the social responsibilities of the press will suffer as this study has revealed. This is because the media houses in Nigeria would have to compete in the stiff market, and must make profit in order to survive.

Given the perceptions of the professionals in the Nigerian newspapers, as confirmed by the interviewees, there is a relationship between the low coverage of the rural areas and profit-making motive of the newspapers. At the expense of their social responsibilities, especially to rural areas that constitute about 70% of

the Nigerian population (Moemeka, 2009), the Nigerian journalists would prefer to report stories that have the propensity of generating money for their media organisations. The current study further confirms the position of Fenton (2011), who has posited that news media are in crisis as a result of the stiff competition occasioned by the free market and the emergence of new media; and this crisis reflects in how newspapers are being closed down, how media organisations are shedding staff, and how media proprietors are aggressively intensifying strategies to increase their profit margin. Overall, Fenton argues, these variables are having a negative impact on the quality of the news generally, and the quantity of local news available to media consumers.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this study, we set out to examine the performance of Nigerian print media in terms of their social responsibilities to the public and contribution to the nation's development. These objectives were contextualised in the newspapers' coverage of the less-urban sections as compared to the attention given to the urban parts in a country that has entrenched neoliberalism. Performances of the selected newspapers showed that they did not fare well in their social responsibilities and development roles. This trend reflects the tenet of social exclusion theory, which states that the less-privileged people in the rural sections are always subjected to marginalisation. This is evident in the patterns of the reported stories from the rural sections as compared to the amount and nature of stories reported from the urban centres. The study has also established that the newspapers selected for the study placed monetary value on the scanty events they reported from the rural sections of the country. This phenomenon could be attributed to the neoliberal framework in the country whereby the newspapers operate in a context where profit must be maximised in order for the media to survive the stiff competitions occasioned by a free market system. Even development is achievable in an atmosphere where there is no discrimination in the media coverage of all strata of the society. It is, therefore, imperative for all stakeholders, particularly, the press, in the development programme to champion the principles of equity, balance and fairness by accommodating all sections of the society and upholding the tenets of Social Responsibility and Developmental Media Theories. To promote balance in how the Nigerian media cover different sections and groups in the country, Nigerian government needs to ensure that all regulating agencies in the media industry are alive to their statutory responsibilities in such ways that ensure balance and fairness in the media coverage of different sections and groups in the country. When these happen, the reporters and their editors would be conscious of the burden on them to be socially responsible, and serve as true agents of development for the country.

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