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## **Nigerian Journalists' Awareness of, and Adherence to, Social Responsibility and Pro-Development Principles**

**RIDWAN ABIOLA KOLAWOLE<sup>1</sup> & BABATUNDE RAPHAEL OJEBUYI<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Journalism is a sacred profession that has been accorded significant recognition as an institution that services the modern democratic system. Therefore, journalists are expected to be well-grounded in both the practical aspects and those fundamental doctrines that explain how the mass media should perform to serve the social system, especially in African nations with emerging democracy and development deficiencies. Existing Nigerian studies on media performance have examined media coverage of development issues, press freedom, media ownership and objectivity in the context of democracy. However, journalists' awareness of the media roles as specified by Social Responsibility and Developmental tenets, and factors that influence adherence to such tenets have not received enough scholarly attention. This study was, therefore, designed to examine Nigerian journalists' level of awareness of the tenets of the social responsibility and developmental frameworks to establish the journalists' adherence to such frameworks and the factors influencing the adherence. Through a mixed-methods design, data were generated from journalists and manifest contents of selected Nigerian newspapers. The majority (80.5%) of Nigerian journalists sampled were not aware of the media roles as stipulated by the tenets of Social Responsibility and Development Media theories. Overall, the journalists confirmed low adherence to the principles of the two theories and identified profit-making (35.0%) and ownership (25.0%) as factors militating against adherence to the tenets of these theories by some journalists. Low adherence to social responsibility and developmental principles by journalists has negative consequences for democratic success in Nigeria as a country with developmental deficits.

**Keywords:** Nigerian journalists, Nigerian newspapers, social responsibility, media ownership, profit-making

### **Introduction**

There exists a strong relationship between mass media and society.

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<sup>1</sup>Ridwan Abiola Kolawole is of the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.  
E-mail: [ridwan.kolawole@gmail.com](mailto:ridwan.kolawole@gmail.com), Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8689-4126>

<sup>2</sup>Babatunde Raphael Ojebuyi is of the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.  
E-mail: [ojebabson@gmail.com](mailto:ojebabson@gmail.com), Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7630>

The media are expected to embrace this relationship, which is tied to the normative principles that abound in the society where the media operate. The roles of the media as society's watchdog, educating the masses and providing entertainment are spelt out in these normative principles of social responsibility while development media theory dictates the developmental role of the media in developing economies. The crucial roles of the media, concerning the normative role of social responsibility and development frameworks, are referenced by Ravi (2012, p.2) quoting McQuail who states that "the media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply." Supporting this claim, Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) assert that normative and cognitive orientations are fundamental to journalism before practice. In essence, if journalism as a profession is supposed to be guided by this orientation, the media professionals cannot claim ignorance of what constitutes their orientation.

Media Theory stipulates that the mass media should always uphold the principles of balance and objectivity by maintaining neutrality and pluralism in their construction of social reality. These prescriptions support the professionalism which journalists are not only expected to be aware of but which they are equally supposed to embrace and deploy in their professional activities. When journalists are aware of their professional responsibilities especially the pro-development ones such as social responsibility and development media and play according to the golden rules, the nation would experience democratic success, social order and development. Nigeria, like many other African and Asian nations, is a developing country which needs a media system that is anchored on pro-development principles. Although, it may be argued that development theory is a contingent theory because it derived its source from McQuail's postulation that the theory would give plausible explanations for the journalistic performance of developing countries, it is sufficient to state that the concept of development media theory provides a driving force for developmental journalism. Communication and media researchers have focused on the manifest components of communication, while they paid less attention to testing and examining the theories in terms of how these theories are applied and they should work. Many scholars (e.g. Ukonu, 2005; Ifenkwe, 2008; Middleton, 2009; Ravi, 2012; Tshabangu, 2013; Odozi & Nyam, 2014; Vyas & Sachdeva, 2014; Ojebuyi & Kolawole, 2016; Barkemeyer, Figge, Hoepner, Holt, Kraak, & Yu, 2017; Mordi & Ogbu, 2017; Dewan, 2019) have carried out studies on the influence and control of mass media ownership as factors determining the media contents, reportage of development issues, and hindering freedom of the journalists and media objectivity. However, despite the empirical evidence that there is a strong connection between role orientations (normative and cognitive processes) and role performance

(practical and narrative processes) as the fundamental values that define journalism (Watson, 2003; Baran & Davis, 2012; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017), the existing studies, as much as we could ascertain, did not give much attention to the relationship between Nigerian journalists' awareness of the tenets of social responsibility and pro-development theories and how such awareness manifests in the media contents created by the journalists. This current study was, therefore, designed to examine Nigerian journalists' awareness of social responsibility and developmental principles, to establish the level of adherence of the journalists to the tenets of the theories and the factors that influenced the application of the theoretical principles.

To achieve these objectives, three research questions are answered in the study: 1) What is the level of the Nigerian journalists' awareness of the tenets of Social Responsibility and Development Media theories? 2) What is the extent to which the journalists adhere to the tenets of social responsibility and development media theories in their reportage? 3) What are the factors affecting the journalists' adherence to the principles of Social Responsibility and Development media theories? Social Responsibility and the Development Media theories form the framework for this study, while we adopted the mixed-methods design.

### **Media Role in the Context of Extant Theories**

Describing the mass media as the “inescapable of modern life”, Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez and Fryberg (2015, P. 40) state that mass media teach people how to conduct themselves in the society, help them to make sense of others having understood the diversity that exists in the overall social networks. As a commonplace channel, mass media serve as the potential channel by which “social representations are created and maintained in mainstream society” (Leavitt et al., 2015, P. 42). Because of this relationship that exists between the mass media and the people, it is expected of the mass media to be fair to all kinds of people irrespective of their social status or location. Besides, it is instructive and ethically correct for the mass media to bring people of different classes together through their mass-mediated channel. All these are spelt out in the normative framework (Tilahun, 2017). This is also supported by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) who expatiate on this normative framework by classifying the stages of the journalistic process into four: *normative*, which is the theory; *cognitive*, value; *practical* (practice); and *narrative*, which characterises the media reportage. Aufderheide, Jaszi, Bieze and Boyles (2012, p.2) explain that journalists “believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy” and as such, the journalists must advance those ends by being in quest of truth. This will no doubt justify the socially responsible roles of the media as they present the truth, minding fairness and justice. Describing the mass media as a social system, Tseguy and Ogoshi (2015, P.51) see the imperative



of the mass media to anchor their practice on the development (media) principles as a way to help Nigerian State to achieve sustainable development goals. This argument further reinforces the extent to which the media should function as agents of development, especially in a developing country like Nigeria. Although Tsegny contends that “factors like corruption, poor communication channels, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, poor implementation framework and political instability” impede such effective role of the media, even these factors are all development issues which development media theory urges the media to address.

### **Conceptual Explication of Development Journalism**

By integrating development into journalism, its goal aims at improving the lives of the people in general, using mass communication media. Tshabangu (2013) opines that development journalism should be practised in a way that suits a specific setting. Citing instances from the Zimbabwean model of development journalism, Tshabangu posits that development journalism is expected to advance the goals for national development as commonly defined by the citizens. To achieve this, Tshabangu suggests that such a development journalism model should be taught at the country's journalism schools, while those journalists already practising should be asked to attend short courses. This proposition would not only boost the journalists' awareness and understanding of the normative principles of the press, but it would also allow journalists to have the roadmap that would foster unity and growth of the country.

The media constitute a force that supports the government's development drives. Lemke (2018), for instance, has underscored the significance of development journalism as supporting the government in making the best use of resources at its disposal even though journalists in some developing countries have been blamed for poor attention accorded developmental journalism (Tshabangu, 2013) owing to what Alhassan, Odartey-Wellington and Faisal (2018) describe as commoditisation of development programmes in the media. Similarly, James and Olasupo (2015, p.64) note that despite the powerful influence of the media to ensure development, the realities of characteristic poverty, poor infrastructure and low level of illiteracy in Africa “have failed and weakened the potential of mass media as resources for development”. Arguing in the same direction, Salawu and Owolabi (2017) point out that the media owe the society its transformation and spur them [citizens] into engagement on issues that affect them. This is as the authors (p.1) contend that “Exploring Journalism Practice and Perception in Developing Countries is a crucial reference source...on the impacts of development journalism on contemporary nations and the media's responsibility to inform citizens of government and non-government activities.” This position supports the tenets of development media theory

just as it embraces social responsibility principles. Linking development media theory to its social responsibility counterparts, Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) maintain that development journalism as a normative concept sets a goal of collaboration for the journalists just as it places greater emphasis on their socially-responsible roles.

### **Development-Centred Issues, Social Responsibility and Media Reportage**

The media perform developmental role as they inform and educate the masses. Put differently, the development role of the media is a product of education and information they render to society (Locksley, 2009). In other words, the mass media play critical roles in delivering the information people need for participating in development-related matters and decisions that would shape their present lives without jeopardizing their future growth (Folarin, 2002; Locksley, 2009). Soola (2003, p.25) maintains that the newspaper is to be used for development purposes and educate policy makers to implement 'development-friendly' initiatives. Undoubtedly, development journalism derives its power from the theoretical basis of development theory. While relating to this, Ahva (2017) holds that development journalism should not be seen or learnt only from the professional perspective but from the very basis of the theory which enacts how journalism should be practised.

Social Responsibility theory proposes that the media are free but must be responsible. Their freedom allows them to serve as watchdogs over the government (Folarin, 2002). This function allows them to charge the government to be accountable to the citizens. Stories on government failings (bad state of the roads, poor health facilities, unpaid salaries and disasters, among others, attract the attention of the journalists (Iqbal, Ali, Saleem and Khursheed, 2014) which they aim to help the government know and address. Scanlon (2015) expatiates further that reporters are interested in collecting data and information about damage, destruction and casualties to inform so that relevant authorities will take heed.

For the relevant authorities to take decisive actions on disaster, crimes and conflict, the mass media should have constructed compelling key elements and disseminated same. Also, Carli (2008) and Puddephatt (2013) have hinted that the socially-responsible role of the media enhances them to bring the issues of conflict to the level of public discussion (for resolution).

### **Ownership and Profit-making as Factors against Theory-Driven Media Practice**

The relationship between ownership of the media and their contents being reported has continued to attract the attention of scholars (e.g. Pritchard, Terry & Brewer, 2008; Ojebuyi & Ekennia, 2013; Ojebuyi & Kolawole, 2016) who

revisit the impasse that characterises the media ownership across the world. These researchers, among others, have debated the issue of media ownership as a factor responsible for direction and slanting of news reportage, especially as the media ownership warrants pitching the news and opinions or features to suit the owners' interest rather than the public interest. Shoemaker and Reese, cited in Wang (2003), attempt to refine and extend Altschull's work by stating that the theory of media ownership and construction of news content suggest that the media proprietors have the final say in what goes into the public. This "final say" is already known by the journalists. Another factor is linked to ownership which is capable of hindering effective media performance, particularly concerning adhering to the media theories, is the profit-making motive upon which many media houses rely for turnover through advertisements to sustain their existence and to pay salaries of their staff (Owolabi, 2013). If the capitalist nations could use the media to promote capitalist goals and objectives, according to Kwame Nkrumah, cited in Akinfeleye (2003), there is nothing that forbids Nigerian and African media from pursuing development goals to ensure development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social Responsibility and Development Media theories are adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. The two theories, as relevant to this study, are explained as follows:

#### **The Social Responsibility Theory (SRT)**

The Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) emerged as a response to the inadequacies of the Libertarian Theory, which gave excessive freedom to the media. The SRT is one of the four earlier normative theories of the press (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956). The outcome of 1987 USA's Hutchins Commission of 1987 gave birth to this press-system which allows the press to combine freedom with responsibility (Folarin, 2002; Akinfeleye, 2003). The core tenets of the theory are that the primary responsibility of the press is to service, promote and preserve democracy by providing information to the citizens and by promptly responding to the need of the society as well as raising conflict and issue of public interest to the level of discussion (Olayiwola, 1991; Severin & Tankard, 2001 and Folarin, 2002). This suggests that the media should be so free that it could be used by citizens who have ideas or concerns to express. This theory suggests that the media inform the public to enable it to take self-determined action and protect the rights of the individual by acting as a watchdog over the government. Justifiably, Leavitt et al. (2015) state that the mass media are the teachers who instil societal conduct in the people and make them appreciative of their diversity as a society. Alhassan Odartey-Wellington and Faisal (2018), however, contend that the media responsibility has been monetised by some stakeholders who use it to promote their agenda.

### **The Development Media Theory (DMT)**

Development journalism (also called development communication) has been a veritable system employed by the media to foster development in an environment where they operate as a result of vital roles they play in the society (Kalyango, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, Skjerdal, Hasim, Muchtar, Ullah, Manda & Kamara, 2017). Development media theory is a concept proposed to address the issue of development, especially in the developing countries (Folarin, 2002 and Ate & Ikerodah, 2012). The theory also emphasises the need for a body responsible to regulate the operations of the media to ensure that development is practised without overstepping the bounds of becoming partisanship (Tshabangu, 2013). Thus, development media theory was propounded to help the developing countries to use communication to spur social change and development (Folarin, 2002; Watson, 2013). Watson (2003, p.103) explains further that development theory nurtures the autonomy of developing nations and gives special emphasis to indigenous cultures; “it is both a theory of state support and one of resistance to the norms of competing nations and competing theories of the media”. Some of the principles of this theory tested in this study are: (a) Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy (or in line with national ideology), without prejudice to their basic functions of information, education and entertainment; (b) Media should also accept and help in carrying out the special development tasks of national integration, socio-economic modernization, promotion of literacy and cultural creativity (Folarin, 2002, p.35).

### **Methodology**

The mixed-methods design was employed to carry out the study. Quantitative methods of survey and content analysis were used to collect data from the reporters and the selected newspapers respectively, while qualitative approach (interview) was adopted to elicit data from the editors. The sources of data for this study were in two categories: journalists (editors and reporters); and three newspapers—*Nigerian Tribune*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*—which were randomly selected from among the top 10 national newspapers. Two editors each from *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Nation*, and one senior reporter from *The Punch* were purposively selected for the in-depth interviews, while, for questionnaire administration, 15 reporters each from *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Nation*, and 11 from *The Punch* were selected through convenience sampling. From the three newspapers, social responsibility (764) and development (928) issues were content-analysed with the aid of analytical content categories contained in the coding sheet as a research instrument. The categorisation was guided by the three variables drawn from each of the Development Media and Social Responsibility theories as follows:

### **A. Development Media Theory Variables**

*Development-centred news:* These comprise news items on the economy, infrastructure, agriculture, employment and other similar issues that can empower the people and improve their wellbeing.

*Peace and Unity:* These are stories that focus on promoting peace and unity among different kinds of ethnic groups in Nigeria.

*Literacy and Education:* These are stories on education and literacy.

### **B. Social Responsibility Theory Variables**

*Disaster:* News items on tragic occurrences such as fire outbreak, flood and accidents, and other forms of disaster to get relevant stakeholders informed to make decisions.

*Crimes:* These are News items relating to armed robbery, theft, murder, kidnapping, terrorism and rape.

*Conflicts:* These are news stories on protests, industrial actions and communal clashes of any kind.

### **Reliability and Validity**

An inter-coder reliability test was conducted using Holsti's inter-coder reliability (Wang, 2011) method for the coding sheet. The two coders employed for test agreed on **23** items (**M**) out of a sub-sample of **27** units (**N**). This produced **0.851** which was considered high enough to make the coding sheet reliable. For the questionnaire, Alpha Cronbach Reliability test was used to test the 38-item questionnaire on **17** respondents with the result of **0.718** which was high enough to make the instrument reliable.

Data for the study were collected sequentially in three phases. Coding sheet was used to collect relevant contents from the selected newspapers, with the support of trained coders in the library of the African Newspapers Plc., Publisher of *The Tribune* titles, Imalefalaafia, Ibadan, Nigeria. The outcome of the coding pattern helped in the structure of both the questionnaire and the in-depth interview guide for the reporters and editors, respectively. Lastly, data collection for the survey through questionnaire was done at the respective journalists' offices in Ibadan and Lagos.

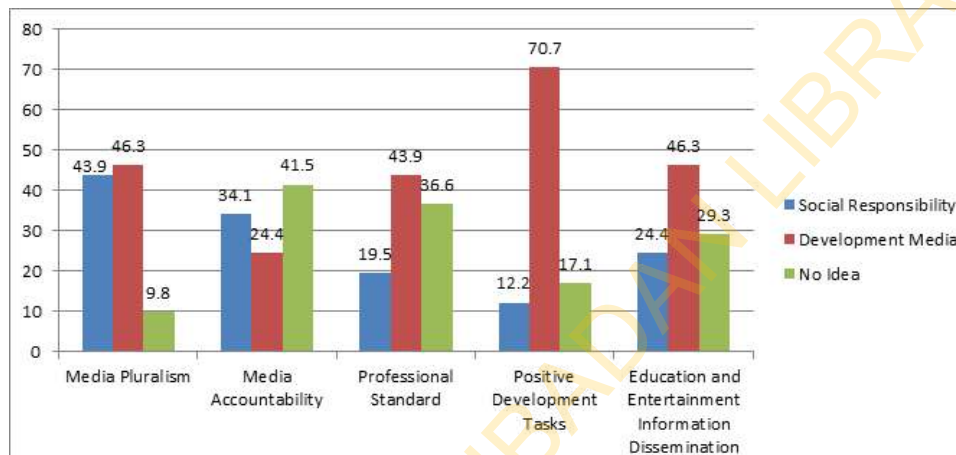
### **Results**

While the quantitative data are presented in tables and charts, the qualitative data are presented through discursive analysis, paraphrase and representative quotes from the interviewees.

**Research Question One:** What is the level of the Nigerian journalists' awareness of the tenets of Social Responsibility and Development Media theories?

This research question sought to investigate the journalists' understanding of the tenets of Social Responsibility and the Development Media theories. This was done with the use of a questionnaire. Before answering this question, the respondents were asked to indicate their course of study. This educational demographic showed that 70.7% of the reporters studied journalism or mass communication.

**Figure 1: Journalists' Awareness of SRT and DMT**



In Figure 1, five statements were constructed to test the journalists' awareness of the two theories. These five statements were carved out from the principles of the two theories. The first sought to know whether social responsibility is about media pluralism in the coverage of the society: 43.9% of the respondents got this right by affirming the statement to be social responsibility, 46.3% thought they knew it but got it wrong while 9.8% of the respondents had no idea. Therefore, **56.1%** of the respondents had no awareness of the theories. Also, responses showed that **65.9%** (41.5% plus 24.5%) respondents were not aware of these tenets while only 34.1% understood this principle to be that of social responsibility theory. Furthermore, 80.5% of the respondents did not understand the concept of professional standard as established by the two theories being tested. Finally, 75.6% of the respondents did not know which theory is responsible for education and entertainment.

Majority of the editors interviewed said they knew that media theories exist but they did not know the tenets of the theory even though they claimed they upheld these tenets. An editor with the *Nigerian Tribune* (rightly) said that concerning the Social Responsibility Theory of the media “the journalists are not just there to write, they must hold government accountable and make the governed comfortable. It is a theory that says press are free but must be responsible to the society”. This view was shared by



another editor with the newspaper who also recommended that developmental journalism should be learnt by whoever intends to practise journalism. A senior correspondent (reporter) with *The Punch* who though, was not assertive, claimed that his media organisation was pro-development by tasking the government to be accountable to the citizens. Notwithstanding all these assertions by the journalists, none of them could point out the principles of the Social Responsibility Theory but they got some of the tenets of the Development Media Theory.

An editor of *The Nation* newspaper declared his “no regard” for media theories. He disclosed that he did not understand what the media theories meant. He remarked, “I am not a graduate of Mass Communication but I know I am a newsman; I don't know all these theories you are talking about. Journalism is what I like to do and I'm doing it.” This declaration aligns with the reporters' poor understanding of the principles of normative theories of their profession. In summary, we found that, overall, journalists have low awareness of tenets of both the social responsibility and development media theories while some do not want to associate with whatever is called a theory. The majority of the journalists did not also understand what the tenets of the theories entailed.

**Research Question Two:** What is the extent to which the journalists adhere to the tenets of social responsibility and development media theories in their reportage?

Question two was set to determine the extent to which the selected newspapers paid attention to the tenets of the selected theories (development and social responsibilities) in their coverage. To answer this question, three themes were created for each of the Development Media and Social Responsibility theories. Therefore, the results in the following section were generated from data gathered through content analysis and in-depth interviews.

**Table 2: Comparability of Development Media Theory issues across the selected newspapers**

| Newspapers              | Themes                     |                     |                        | Grand Total (%)    |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
|                         | Development-centred Issues | Peace Building      | Literacy and Education |                    |
| <i>The Nation</i>       | 149 (27.5%)                | 59 (25.5%)          | 44 (28.2%)             | 252 (27.1)         |
| <i>The Punch</i>        | <b>205 (37.9%)</b>         | 85 (36.8%)          | <b>66 (42.3%)</b>      | <b>356 (38.4)</b>  |
| <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> | <b>187 (35.6%)</b>         | 87 (37.7%)          | 46 (29.5%)             | <b>320 (34.5)</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>541 (100.0%)</b>        | <b>231 (100.0%)</b> | <b>156 (100.0%)</b>    | <b>928 (100.0)</b> |

Table 1 above shows that the three selected newspapers reported a total number of 928 stories relating to the themes of development: *The Punch* reported 356 (38.4%); *Nigerian Tribune* reported the 320 (34.5%) stories while *The Nation* reported the least number of stories (252; 27.1%).

**Table 3: Comparability of Social Responsibility issues reportage across the selected newspapers**

| Newspapers              | Themes             |                     |                     |                            |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
|                         | Disaster           | Crimes              | Conflict            | Grand Total and Percentage |
| <i>The Nation</i>       | <b>32 (38.1%)</b>  | 126 (23.9%)         | 45 (29.4%)          | 203 (26.6%)                |
| <i>The Punch</i>        | 23 (27.4%)         | <b>180 (34.2%)</b>  | 51 (33.3%)          | 254 (33.2%)                |
| <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> | 29 (34.5%)         | <b>221 (41.9%)</b>  | <b>57 (37.3)</b>    | <b>307 (40.2%)</b>         |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>84 (100.0%)</b> | <b>527 (100.0%)</b> | <b>153 (100.0%)</b> | <b>764 (100.0%)</b>        |

The total number of stories reported by the selected newspapers on Social Responsibility themes is 764 with *Nigerian Tribune* having the highest (307; 40.2%) followed by *The Punch* which reported 254 (33.2%). Again, *The Nation* reported the least number of the stories, 203 (26.6%). These findings were corroborated by the in-depth interviews as some of the editors claimed that they were aware of the theories but adhered to them whenever they favoured their proprietors' interests. For instance, two editors from *Nigerian Tribune* claimed understanding of the theories and their principles. One of them stated: "When we talk of development media principles, we see it as developmental journalism which must be embraced by professional journalists." Whereas, another editor shared the same view but added that, "theories are academic exercise and not easily amenable to journalism practice in the real sense of it, owing to factors such as profit and ownership influence". A senior reporter with *The Punch* newspaper affirmed this same position. He asserted that *The Punch* had a standard focusing on developmental issues in addition to being responsible. Interestingly, the interview conducted with the editors of *The Nation* newspaper revealed that the reportage of the least stories reported by *The Nation* on both the social responsibility and developmental issues were not by accident, they were rather deliberate as the gatekeepers (the editors) attached no importance to the theories. One of the editors said, "I don't understand all this theory thing you are talking about. I don't believe in it". Therefore, the fact that some of the

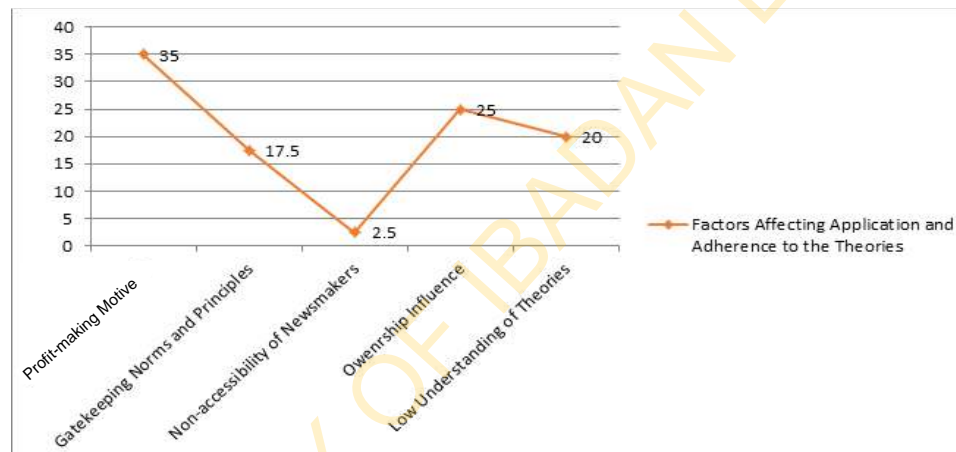


editors and the reporters failed to understand the essence of principles of what they practise further proves that the much-aspired professionalism of journalism may have been defeated.

**Research Question Three:** What are the factors affecting the journalists' adherence to the principles of Social Responsibility and Development Media theories?

This question was set to identify factors that influenced the journalists' application of the tenets of media theories.

**Figure 2: Factors affecting the Application of Journalists' adherence to the two theories in the coverage of events**



As shown in Figure 2, the leading factors influencing journalists' adherence to the theories in the coverage of events are *profit-making motive* (35.0%) and *ownership interest* (25.0%) which put less emphasis on public interest and good. It can, therefore, be inferred that profit-making and ownership interest are close factors in this circumstance. Whatever factor that might constitute ownership, it is largely to keep the media business growing and it cannot grow if there is no profit. So, it is right to say that the ownership factor is 60%. Also ranked was the *low understanding* of the tenets of the tested theories which is also 25.0%. The profit-making motive was strongly supported by the editors interviewed. An editor disclosed that “The profit-making motive of the media houses may not allow journalists to observe tenets of these theories.”

Further, a *Nigerian Tribune* editor and one *The Punch* correspondent described *ownership influence* as another powerful factor that would lead to journalists setting aside the tenets of media theories. They said: “Sometimes, the stories are ready, the owner will just call the editor, and say that, 'so and so are his friends and that the story should be killed.' The editor will have no

choice except to kill the story; the editor does not need to be told before knowing that the stories should not be published.” *The Punch* correspondent added, “But I must also add that, theory or no theory, ownership is an important factor in allowing a story to go for publication.” An editor with *The Nation* newspaper who was interviewed corroborated the findings on the poor understanding of the theories. He submitted that:

I don't know anything about theory. All I know is that the reporter should get me newsworthy stories. I did not study journalism but I am a newsman. Therefore, this theory thing, I don't understand.

Another editor from *Nigerian Tribune* added that the Nigerian media have not attained the level at which they will deliberately apply development media theory. This is, however, not necessarily the case considering the focus of the theory which is to foster development in developing nations (Folarin, 2002; Salawu & Owolabi, 2017). In summary, the profit-making motive of the media houses and ownership are the most important factors that determine what would be reported.

### Discussion

Apart from the evidence of low knowledge of developmental and socially responsible role enunciated by the two theories, this study also reveals that the profit-making motive of the media houses and ownership influence were identified by the journalists as the leading factors that determined what would be reported by the Nigerian journalists. Even if the journalists have a good understanding of and are willing to imbibe the tenets of the theories, their passion must not be placed over profit-making and ownership interests. This finding affirms the position already established by Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013) that ownership plays a significant role in media coverage of political stories and this trend is in dissonance with the principle of theory-practice driven professionalism.

The findings also reveal that low awareness of the tenets of the theories prevented journalists from applying the theories. This poor awareness was rated after the factors of profit-making and ownership interest. In essence, journalists in Nigeria do not give preference to awareness of the theories which, according to Folarin (2002), should be the guiding principles, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. The journalists adhered to the principle of theories (although not deliberately), especially when it brings financial gains to the media organisation. This can come in a negative form as negativity sells newspapers.

Some of the journalists had little awareness of the theories while some displayed a fair knowledge of the theories. The majority of the stories reported by the selected newspapers did not suggest a high level of alignment

with Development Media theory which is believed to be developing countries-centred (Folarin, 2002). Throughout the study period, the three newspapers could only report 1,692 stories relating to development and social responsibility theories. Development Media theory-related issues were 54.8% while the Social Responsibility theory-related themes constituted 45.2%, giving a difference of 9.6%. It is also important to note that only 9.2% of this was on literacy and education, which is a development genre. It is justifiable that this is connected to the fact that literacy and education genres do not sell stories as alluded to by one of the editors from *Nigerian Tribune*. The finding is, however, a reflection of the socio-political and economic atmosphere in Nigeria which has shaped the media practice towards being profit-oriented or politically-inclined. This profit-making motive is a struggle for economic survival among the media proprietors (Kolawole, 2012). Since privately-owned mass media organisations are neoliberal-driven, the owners naturally prioritise profit-making. This takes a toll on media performance on development media issues.

Findings from the survey show that the journalists did not have the right understanding of the tenets of the theories under study. This was made obvious by their responses to the questions raised to this effect. Some said they had no idea while some gave the attributes of the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) to Development Media Theory (DMT) and vice-versa

It is, therefore, safe to conclude that Nigerian journalists, to a large extent, are not knowledgeable in the social responsibility and development media theoretical frameworks. The media operated based on the profit-making motive of their proprietors. This is in addition to their poor awareness of the theories and ownership influence. This argument is further supported by a *Nigerian Tribune* editor, who asserted that theories are jettisoned because of the profit motive, ownership influence and poor (non-journalism) educational background of the professionals. Another editor from *Nigerian Tribune* explained that “the theories are mere academic affairs.” This assertion is the reality in Nigeria but it opposes the exposition of scholars (Folarin, 2002; Watson, 2003; McQuail, 2005) who posit that theories should serve as a guide in their professional activities, especially as professionals in the developing nations.

As contended by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), if the journalists are deficient in role orientations (normative and cognitive processes), they cannot excel in-role performance (practical and narrative processes). This is the trend established in this current study. The grave implication of this trend for the practice of development journalism in Nigeria is that the status quo of low cognition among journalists will continue where the reporters with little or no knowledge of the theoretical foundations of their profession will subsequently be promoted to the status of the editors who will serve as the gatekeepers to decide what is selected and included as the news contents of

the day. Paying little or no attention to this critical aspect of the profession will no doubt make journalism in Nigeria less of a profession but a craft as some have argued. This is supported by Ahva (2017) who opines that journalism should not be seen outside of its enactment (i.e. theory) to provide theory-practice professionalism.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has established that Nigerian journalists are not aware of the tenets of the theories guiding their professional practice. Also, profit orientation and ownership factor contributed to the dearth of adherence to the socially responsible role and development functions of the Nigerian journalists. Unfortunately, the journalists did not attach much importance to the understanding of the tenets of press theories, although knowledge of the theories is one of the core values in professional journalism. On the contrary, they believed that ownership influence and profit motive were more important than knowledge of theories. The trend established in this study portends a dysfunctional system where the Nigerian journalists are incapacitated by various socio-economic factors as well as ownership interference. Therefore, professionals and government should collaborate to have friendly environments for the media to operate according to the principles of normative theories of the press. Besides, to have a media industry where journalism is treated as a profession and journalists display a high level of role orientations (normative and cognitive processes), the basic minimum qualification must be the possession of a Higher Diploma or a Bachelor's Degree in communication-related disciplines. Apart from this, journalists should be encouraged and supported by both government and media owners to be well-grounded in the tenets of the basic press theories that guide the profession.

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