Factors that Influence Nigerian Newspaper Journalists in Framing ASUU-FGN Industrial Crises

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Abstract

The unabated industrial actions in Nigeria particularly in tertiary education sector have been a source of concern to education stakeholders and researchers. Communication scholars have conducted researches on newspaper reportorial strategies on industrial actions but little studies have interrogated the Nigerian newspaper editors to find out what factors influence their resolve to frame ASUU-FGN industrial debacles. This study, therefore, intends to find out the perspectives of the key stakeholders on Nigerian universities industrial crises with reference to how did Nigerian newspaper editors' foreground and project the industrial crises, with a view to evaluating the factors shaping media coverage of Nigerian university industrial actions news. The media framing theory anchored the study; In-depth interview was adopted for data collection while five Nigerian newspapers editors (The Guardian, the Punch, the Nigerian Tribune, the Daily Trust and the Sun newspapers) were randomly selected using geographical delineation of the country. For the in-depth interview, four key participants were purposively selected from the past and present ASUU leadership and labour activists. Data were subjected to theme mapping for qualitative analysis. Finding revealed that newsroom factors, economic interests, propaganda factor, dearth of information other external factors influenced newspaper proprietors in the framing of ASUU-FGN industrial disputes news. The identified factors have become clog in the wheel to the credibility of mediated media messages in industrial crises reporting in Nigeria media. It is hereby recommended that industrial news reporting should not be subjected to newsroom politicking but strictly on journalism ethos.

Keywords: *industrial crisis, framing, newspapers journalists, ASUU, FGN*

Introduction

Unionism (organised labour movement) is rooted in Marxism, a social philosophy which advances that human society progresses through class struggles between the ownership class who controls production and a dispossessed workforce that provides the labour for production (Chandler, 1994). Unionism can be traced to Karl Marx's political resourcefulness, which, inadvertently, spurs the working class to carry out revolutionary action in order to dethrone capitalism. The goal is to bring about socio-economic sanity and equity in the society. Labour movement in Nigeria was established in 1952 as an affiliate of International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Strike action is a last resort and a potent fighting tool in any labour movement to press home workers' demands. Strike actions or trade disputes, from the past antecedent have generated a lot of arguments particularly when considering the loss of lives, the socio-economic setback and other untold hardships that accompany industrial strike actions.

Right from the time of Karl Marx, the media have been regarded as tools of manipulation in the hands of those who have access to material wealth and power. Berger (1998:43), citing Enzenberger (1974), observed that "all media manipulate; it is in the nature of media...there is no such thing as un-manipulated writing, filming, or broadcasting...the question is who manipulates them...." If media are perceived to be tools of manipulation (that is, media being exploited by the people who have access to control the media) to sway popular opinion, appealing to the psyche of the public by their news salience, selection and repeated emphasis on a given public discourse; then, it becomes needful to interrogate the perspectives of selected Nigerian editors and few labour advocates to find out factors that influence media stakeholders in the reportage of ASUU-FGN industrial fiascos. The thrust of the study, therefore, is to find out the salient factors that enable the Nigerian newspaper editors to emphasise and de-emphasised some issues in the conflict? And whose discourse perspectives or agitations are represented and why? The study hopes to discover both overt and covert agenda behind the media representation of the crises between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN).

In social context, Jones (2007) observes that industrial conflict is an expression of dissatisfaction by employees to their employers (management) over unsatisfactory working conditions, salaries and wages. Martins (2015), categorises industrial conflict into two: formal and informal. The formal industrial conflict is the type of conflict that is said to be planned, deliberate and calculated, while the industrial conflict that is unscheduled, spontaneous or the one taken by surprise is said to be informal. Nonetheless, the unsatisfactory condition of service or poor remuneration is often responsible for either of the two industrial fiascos. Similarly, industrial crises could be triggered by conflict of interest, personality clash, bad style of leadership, variations in ethical values, poor remunerations, non –implementation

of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and any other perceived obnoxious policies (Osabuohien and Ogunrinola, 2015).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was founded in 1978 as an off shoot of the collapsed Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) which was established in 1965.The university teachers formed the labour union in 1965 to cater for the welfare of the academic staff of the first five generation of Nigerian universities which include: The University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Ife (Now Obafemi Awolowo University) and University of Lagos (Ya'u, 2008 and Ojeifo, 2014). The first national president of ASUU was Dr. I. M. Dankani. ASUU, though an independent trade union, has affiliation with the Nigeria Labour Congress.

ASUU usually takes uncompromising stance with the nation's conservative leadership position perhaps, to sustain the old social rivalry or struggle between the capitalists and the working class. More importantly, Tade (2017), a columnist with the *Guardian* newspaper in his article titled 'ASUU: Towards a principled and ideological unionism' cited late Festus Iyayi on the five core principles of ASUU which include: integrity, transparency and accountability; professionalism, objectivity and hard work. Others are courage, sacrifice and total commitment; internal democracy, team work and group solidarity and patriotism, anti-imperialism and working class solidarity. Based on the above core principles on which ASUU is built, the union remains resilient and tenaciously opposing attempts by government at both federal and state levels to privatise public universities.

More importantly, ASUU's struggle is premised on three core issues: to champion a just cause for university autonomy, proper funding of the universities and academic freedom (Adewumi, 2008). Commenting on the above core tenets of ASUU's labour agitations, Adewumi (2008:353) unequivocally declares that "these are issues that have remained in the front burners of our Union's struggles to date". One of the foundation members of ASUU, Ya'u (2008:120) equally traces the trajectory of the union in his declaration that the union has changed "from its elitist conception of unionism to its apogee of political activism." He submits that the initial philosophy of the union is elitism prepared to fight for the welfare of academic staff but as time went by, the union grew to become weapons of university autonomy, to weapons for democratic struggles and then to weapons against military dictatorship. The initial philosophy (elitism) experientially

metamorphosed to the adoption of the latter philosophy (militancy) without ignoring the former, that is, the union grew from 'elitism to militancy' (Ya'u, 2008:121). From inception, therefore, ASUU has adopted the Marxist ideology of resistance; that is, to resist any perceived obnoxious or oppressive tendency against her members because unionism is all about class struggles and emancipation.

The infringement on academic freedom was first resisted by ASUU in 1980 under the leadership of its national president, Biodun Jeyifo, who spurred ASUU to declare a trade dispute with the federal government of Nigeria on the concerns of: funding, salaries, autonomy and academic freedom (Ya'u, 2008 and Ojeifo, 2014). Ever since, ASUU has embarked on a couple of industrial strike actions in 1983, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003/2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011/2012, 2013, 2017, 2018 and lately 2019 and 2020 (Fatunde, 2009, Ojeifo, 2014 and ASUU website). Most often, ASUU labour unrest is either orchestrated by the issue of funding or issue on policy as it affects university administration. For instance, the following fundamental issues have been identified as major reasons for the industrial altercations: Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS), demands for increased funding of public universities, government dictatorial/ anti people policies, suspension of accommodation policies in federal universities, terminations of some lecturers' appointment, upgrading of universities facilities and the non-implementations of agreements with the union. What is unique about ASUU-FGN labour disputes is that ASUU goes on strike to negotiate with the government to sign agreements and it also embarks on another round of strike actions to get the agreements implemented.

Finally, the foundation of ASUU labour struggles is premised on the need to reform the Nigerian universities to make them globally competitive and to foster academic excellence. The objectives of various negotiations with the federal government as summarised by Ya'u (2008) and Tade (2017) are, among others to arrest and reverse the decay in the university system in order to reposition it for greater responsibilities in national development by reversing the brain drain. The struggle also aims at enhancing the remuneration of academic staff and disengaging them from the web of a unified civil service wage structure and sustaining the culture of massive funding and ensuring university autonomy in order to relief it from

bureaucratic government intervention in its day–to–day administration. However, these laudable goals are still in limbo because of lack of political will from the government which has made the government to play politics with the issue of implementing the agreements it willingly signed with the union.

Objective of the study

The study intends to do an evaluation of the factors that influence Nigerian newspaper editors in the reportage of ASUU-FGN industrial crises.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research design while In-depth interview method was used for data collection and interview guide was used as data instrument. Five Nigerian newspapers editors (The Guardian, the Punch, the Nigerian Tribune, the Daily Trust and the Sun newspapers) were purposively selected using geographical delineation of the country. For the in-depth interview, four key participants were purposively selected from the past and present ASUU leadership and labour activists. The data were subjected to theme mapping for qualitative data interpretation.

Review of Relevant Literature

Theoretical Framework----Media Framing Theory

The study is anchored on the Media Framing Theory. Research on media framing is overwhelmed by theoretical and experiential ambiguity (Sheufele, 1999). Entman, (1993:3) also observes that media framing, as a theoretical construct, has "a scattered conceptualisation with numerous terminological inconsistencies". Nonetheless, media framing theory is categorised along with Agenda Setting and Priming as theories of media effects (Sheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Historically, Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano, (2009) note that Water Lippmann was the progenitor of framing theory in 1922. Since then, the theory has received some intellectual debates through the works of Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman. Media framing theory is built on the premise that how an issue is represented in the news always exerts some degree of influence on how it is understood and interpreted by the audience (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

The theory is relevant to the present study because it helps us to have clear perspectives on why journalists emphasise some issues while other issues are de-emphasised. More importantly, the theory showcases how journalistic norms,

philosophical foundation and other political-economy factors are imbued into news frames which often lead to different frame building. That implies that news items are products of the producers

Discussion of Findings

This section presents findings from the newspaper editors and the labour activists who were interviewed to investigate factors that influenced newspaper framing of the industrial crises between ASUU and FGN. The findings (factors) were subjected to theme mapping under the following headings: news values, internal factors (news room factors), dearth of information, propaganda factor and commercial factor.

News Values (news worthiness of ASUU-FGN stories)

The newspaper editors interviewed pointed out that what determines the coverage of stories on ASUU-FGN industrial crises is the news value of the industrial action. They admitted that, as part of watchdog and surveillance functions of the media, the media disseminate news as it breaks based on the news value of the event irrespective of the individual or organisation involved in the story setting. Also, there was a consensus among the interviewed news editors that journalists or news media ordinarily would not consider any event as newsworthy; rather, media professionals are guided by news values or newsworthiness of such event. News values such as timeliness and human interest are major determinants in the reportage of ASUU-FGN industrial crises. For instance, a senior editor with *the Punch* newspaper who was interviewed submitted that "ASUU-FGN story is always relevant, timely and newsworthy and more so, it is what people talk about..." To support *the Punch* editor's submission on the news value of ASUU-FGN stories, the daily editor, *the Daily Trust* newspaper posited that:

> You know that news have some qualities, timeliness, importance, relevance and all that. You don't just report things because you want to report but you report them because they are important and because they are necessary.

Again, the daily editor, *the Daily Sun* newspaper spoke on the interest of the public in ASUU-FGN industrial crises. He said "Public interest is a crucial factor. If it comes to public interest...education for instance, is a public interest for members of the public for it concerns our children".

This shows why news media are interested in ASUU-FGN stories because education, as a public sector, involves every member of the public. The value attached to a news event determines the level of attention and emphasis the media give to its coverage. It thus implies that the agenda the media set for a social problem determines the degree of emphasis and salience the media give to such a social problem. We can therefore conclude that news value is a factor that determines ASUU-FGN media representation.

Extant literature have supported journalists who attach news value to media representation, for instance, Campbell, (2004) and Stromback, et al (2012) have established that news value determines the way such news is framed or presented to the audience. Therefore, for any event to possess news values and qualify for selection, such a newsworthy event must possess the following criteria, according to Stromback, et al (2012:719): "frequency, absolute or intensity increase, meaningfulness, cultural proximity, unexpectedness, composition and reference to elite nations, elite people and something negative". Bell (1991:21-22) had earlier come up with a more comprehensive news values taxonomies. He itemised the following values news and events must possess:

> negativity, recency, proximity, consonance, unambiguity, unexpectedness, superlativeness, relevance, personalisation, eliteness, attribution and facility while continuity, competition, co-option, composition, predictability, and prefabrication constitute news values process (Bell 1991:21-22).

It thus implies that stories on ASUU-FGN industrial crises received much press coverage because of its news values to both the press and the public. The value of the news story therefore, is a factor that influenced news framing of the industrial crises.

Internal Factors (newsroom factors)

Internal factor or newsroom factor is another factor that influenced newspaper framing of the industrial crises between ASUU and FGN according to the editors

and the labour activists interviewed. Internal factor, in the context of frame building, is determined by ideological orientation, editorial policies and ownership structure. These internal factors are in-house core philosophy on which each media house is built. However, there are common ethical standards which all media organisations strictly adhere to such as objectivity, fairness and balanced reporting. There was a consensus among the editors that each individual media house has its internal regulatory mechanisms or philosophical foundations which regulate the activities of the media house. So, media disposition or perspective on any issue is determined by the internal or newsroom factors.

Meanwhile, there was no consensus among the editors and the labour activists with regard to ideological colouration of news. While some believed that news is inherently ideological others were of the views that ideological position is taken in editorial writing but not in straight news. For instance, an editor with *the Guardian* newspaper was of the opinion that news is ideological. He submitted that "...every news item is propagating somebody's idea or somebody is being used to propagate that idea...news are meant to serve some purpose or interests". In a similar view, a labour activist (interviewed) admitted that "every writing is ideological it depends on where you stand". Another labour activist, during the interview session, submitted that "you cannot rule ideological inclination of news out; there is no doubt about that." That implies that ideological orientation or philosophical foundation, as part of internal factor of every media house, has a strong influence on news framing of the industrial crises. The different orientation of individual media organisation accounts for differing opinions in media representations of similar news story setting.

One of the editors with *the Daily Trust newspaper* opined that in-house policy or editorial opinion influenced the reportage of the ASUU-FGN industrial conflict. He said: "based on in-house policy, we take a position which might be different from other newspaper position and we have no apology for that. Our position is our position." To corroborate this assertion, a senior editor with *the Punch newspaper* was of the view that ideological position of the media house does influence perspectives of news event's representation. She submitted that "news dissemination is passing across available information but, when it comes to

editorial writing, it is the point at which the newspaper takes a position on an issue. It is the newspaper position". Similarly, an editor with *the Sun newspaper* confirmed that editorial writing is tilted to a position that goes with the philosophical beliefs of the editorial board. He said "...but, if it comes to editorials, newspaper will take a position. It will not be the same. It will differ from newspaper to newspaper based on their philosophical foundations".

The various divergent positions from the editors and the labour activists interviewed have confirmed a common front that news is a representation of some perspectives. Also, editorial writing is a collective opinion of the media house on any public issue based on the ideological orientation of the media house. In a nut shell, individual media house solely determines what news is and which event deserves media coverage based on their in-house policy. It thus means that fairness in journalism is relative and so determined by the in-house policy of each media house. It equally tells or shows that the conscience of individual journalist is subsumed under the in-house policy which is so defined by media ownership.

The finding has revealed that editorial policy, as part of the internal factors, influenced newspaper journalists in the framing of the industrial crises between ASUU and FGN. The selected newspaper editors' perspectives on in-house policy as determinant for news coverage have further explained why opinionated headlines on the industrial crises were guided by the ideological beliefs of newspaper proprietors.

On the ownership control as part of internal factors that influenced the media framing of the industrial crises, an editor with *the Guardian newspaper* unreservedly admitted that "ownership influence is everywhere but when it is anti-progress or unethical, that is where media credibility and factual reportage is compromised". Similarly, an editor with *the Daily Trust* opined that "the ownership of the media also determines what is being reported...if the organised labour should have their newspaper; it is possible the paper will be reporting labour matters that will be favourable to labour". Consequently, the above observations on the influence of ownership structure on mediation of social phenomenon such as ASUU-FGN labour issue further confirm the insinuation about the old cliché (maxim) that 'who pays the piper calls the tune'. Also, the sub-editor and Head of News, *the Nigerian Tribune* newspaper admitted that "every paper is defined by media ownership structure". He, however, quickly added that "it is not all the

stories that ownership influence". The response presupposes that news is certainly influenced by the ownership. Attesting to the influence of ownership control in media representation, Okoduwa (2014:89) submits that "...to know that ownership has influence in editorial contents is the beginning of wisdom. No editor will direct his artillery at his proprietor and expect to keep his job". It therefore implies that ownership bias is a factor that determines both the editorial policy and the daily routines of any media house. Findings thus reveal that media houses' internal factors (ideological orientation, editorial policy and ownership structure) sufficiently influenced what and how the industrial crises between labour and government were reported by the selected Nigerian newspapers.

The findings have further confirmed the postulations of theories on media and society particularly media framing theory. For instance, Hallahan (1999) postulates that "media frame is integral of ideological submission" while Hall, (2005) later observed that 'news is a constructed reality'. Also, de-Vreese (2005), a media framing theorist, proposed a model for news framing. The model identified two processes that enhance journalistic media framing which are frame building and frame setting. The frame building process accounts for activities that take place in the newsroom along with the factors or the constraints that limit a journalist in the discharge of his ethical calling. Among the newsroom factors listed by de-Vreese include internal factors, editorial policies, news values and other external factors. It therefore implies that the sociological paradigm of news production particularly the newsroom politicking, partisanship, ownership structure are social variables that influenced the media framing of ASU-FGN industrial crises.

Dearth of Information

Dearth of information is a serious challenge newspaper journalists faced with reference to ASUU-FGN news reporting. Virtually all the editors interviewed lamented on the dearth of information as a factor that influenced media reportage of the crises. For instance, the news editor with *the Nigerian Tribune newspaper* complained about the problem of getting information during ASUU-FGN industrial disputes, especially from the government while getting information from the ASUU side is relatively much easier. The editor posited that "if it is on ASUU 'no wahala', you can get it from ASUU. But, for government side, the ministry will tell you: we

will issue press release. It is pretty difficult to get information". The response painted the frustration the Nigerian print media professionals encounter in getting relevant information from government agency with a view to giving fair and balanced report as updates on the industrial crises.

Similarly, the news editor with *the Sun newspaper* admitted that dearth of information on ASUU-FGN industrial crises negatively impacted the framing of the industrial disputes. He said "... journalists have challenges in getting information because people don't willingly volunteer to give information...so the challenge of getting information is always there". In a reaction to the challenges confronting journalists in reporting ASUU-FGN industrial crises, *the Punch* newspaper editor regretted that Nigerians and some stakeholders hoard useful information that will enhance fair reportage. She said "...because we live in a society that hoards information. Even information that ordinarily should be in the public domain, we delight in hoarding them...secrecy runs through our activities, government and individuals". Also, *the Daily Trust newspaper* news editor berated the information dearth challenge when compiling facts on ASUU-FGN industrial crises. He observed that:

> reporting industrial crises is quite challenging. Some of them even hoard information from journalists. So, journalists have problem from getting the truth...any time you are trying to do a story relating to labour matters ...you tend to hit the brick wall because the needed information is not readily available.

The above instances of frustrations faced by print journalists reveal how dearth of information from parties to the industrial crises might compel the press to publish unfair reports about labour matters. Adisa (2014) lamented that journalists do insult the naivety of the masses by their war journalism due to non-cooperation of parties to conflict to supply useful information to the press. Kaun (2016) in her submission however regretted the dilemma and the precarious state media professionals do find themselves when doing crisis-related stories coupled with scarcity of information, thereby threatening objectivity and fairness in reporting crisis events. The interactions with the media professionals on the challenges militating against fair and balanced reportage of industrial crises have explained or captured the frustrations and the subsequent such frustrations have in labour disputes reporting in Nigeria. The difficulty facing the media professionals in gathering facts on

ASUU-FGN labour matters will not in any way suffice to absolve the press from the obligation of fair and balanced reporting in crisis period.

Propaganda Factor

Propaganda is another factor that influenced media reportage of ASUU-FGN industrial crises. In labour news reporting, a party is favourably reported while the other party is negatively projected before the public. This is possible because propaganda is a manipulative instrument deployed to promote some point of views at the expense of others. Propaganda, in this context, is a set of designed media messages aimed at swindling or manipulating others to curry public favour. As a persuasive strategy, it is employed by media or media manipulators either positively or negatively to appeal to the psyche of the target audience. It is therefore employed to influence, revolutionise or reinforce some beliefs in the audience. Nearly all the editors interviewed admitted that parties to the industrial crises often aim at manipulating the media to do stories in their favour. It was agreed that the media are propaganda tools in the hands of politicians and the elites. Nonetheless, the editors did not condescend to the blackmail that the media are agents of propaganda but believed that media manipulation arises from the syndicated articles, sponsored articles and advertorials, including news releases sent to media house which are often loaded with prejudiced opinions. In the submission of the editor of *Saturday Punch* newspaper, she observed that:

> it is possible for a reporter to report something that could favour ASUU for instance or favour other party depending on the information source....Yes, it is possible for the media to be propaganda tools based on whatsoever is made available to the reporters. It is very easy for them to propagate whatever idea or ideology they want to disseminate to the public.

This submission summarised the dilemma and constraint of the media in reporting ASUU-FGN industrial crises. The media as the marketplace of ideas are patronised by parties to conflict not only for the projection of their grievances but also to manipulate the media so that their point of views can be projected to the public favourably. The reason for media patronage by parties to industrial crises is well

captured by Jones (2017:33) when he wrote: "today, the industrial wars have moved away from the negotiating table to the propaganda war in newspapers". From the submissions of the *Punch* editor and Jones, the study can draw an inference that the essence of the paradigm shift from the usual negotiation table to the pages of newspaper is purely for propaganda purpose.

The labour activists interviewed did not agree that parties to conflict especially ASUU patronise the media for the sake of propaganda. Rather, media are patronised because of the need to carry members of the public along. For instance, an ex-chair of ASUU local branch submitted "...there is no doubt, the labour patronising the media for obvious reason. I think what is responsible is the understanding by the labour unions that there is power in mass media...there is a need to carry the media along". According to the labour activists, media are channels of reaching both the government and members of the public about their grouse against the government for well-meaning Nigerians to intervene and prevail on government.

The study, therefore, revealed that propaganda exigency (demand) in media reportage of ASUU-FGN industrial crises paved way for parties to the industrial conflicts to manipulate the media and consequently turn media professionals to propaganda tools. Bennett (2005:43) critically reflected on the possibility of the media being propaganda tools in the hands of the media manipulators. He stated thus:

> certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers.., to the producers and, through the latter to the whole (social system). The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune [sic] against its falsehood.... Thus, emerges a pattern of one dimensional thought and behaviour (Bennett, 2005:43).

From Bennett's submissions, the media, most of the times, promote false consciousness (imagined utopian) in order to push elite agenda to the public domain. The submissions of Fuch and Bennett have placed a moral burden on journalism practice especially the surveillance and the watchdog roles of the press in our society

For media to be effective in the performance of its watchdog roles beyond propaganda, Bell (1991) and Coronel (2016) highlighted some conditions which include but not limited to press freedom, access to information, laws that facilitate rather than impede the ability of journalists to conduct investigation along with good remuneration and good welfare package for media professionals. Other factors for effective 'watch dogging' are removing structural limitations (newsroom conditions), prevailing socio-political atmosphere and non-partisanship of journalists. It is therefore evident from this study that those structural factors, together with newsroom factors, invariably manipulate and thus affect credible newspaper reportage of ASUU-FGN industrial crises.

Commercial Factor

Commercial factor also influenced the Nigerian newspaper journalists in framing the industrial crises between ASUU and FGN. The economic variable, as determinant of media representation of the labour tussle, was presented in two phases by the interviewees. First, the economic recession in the country inhibited media organisations from funding independent investigative reporting on ASUU-FGN industrial crises. Meanwhile, all the editors interviewed admitted that they do routine stories on ASUU-FGN labour matters to reduce speculation. For financial constraint, the editors admitted that they hardly conducted investigative reports on ASUU-FGN labour disputes but only relied on the episodic or spontaneous reports from the labour beat reporters. For instance, the editor, *the Nigerian Tribune* newspaper admitted that "we don't investigate ASUU-FGN issues when there are no strike actions". Similarly, *the Punch newspaper* editor made her submission "what I have observed is that we only report ASUU-FGN stories during the industrial strike action and when strike is gone everybody goes back to do something else". I t is crystal clear that Nigerian print journalists rarely conduct investigative reporting on ASUU-FGN industrial action.

The implication of financial constraint facing the Nigerian press is that media houses will have to rely on piece-meal news releases from parties to the industrial conflicts. As explained earlier, news releases or syndicated articles from the warring parties are, most of the time ideologically framed in such a way to curry

the favour of the public. In reality, investigative reporting is the heart of journalism because fair and balanced reporting endears journalists to the elite.

Also, economic factor is revealed to be an incentive to media framing of ASUU-FGN industrial crises in terms of commercial (advertisement) interests. It was gathered from ASUU leadership that most of the times, "ASUU stories especially the union news releases and other syndicated articles are often placed inside newspaper page. However, when such news releases are sponsored advertorials, then, newspapers accord obvious prominence in the newspaper page because ASUU paid for such space". ASUU national president further bemoaned the role of newspaper journalists when he said that "...journalism is gradually becoming platform for pecuniary gains...we have also resorted to releasing our texts through paid adverts." Also, another labour activist corroborated ASUU leadership on the pecuniary gains of the media in event coverage when he said that "they prefer to honour the organisation where they get adverts from rather than reporting against the organisation that put food on their table". It is obvious that survival of newspaper outfits largely depends on their market drive for advertorials. This explains why media professionals have soft spot for parties to conflict that patronise them for advertisement slots. The daily editor, *the Nigerian Tribune* declared the disposition of his media organisation on commercial interests and news coverage when he said that:

> well, that does not mean we don't have sympathy. If for example, if we get advert from a chairman of an organisation and he later calls to say help use a particular story in our front page.... I will oblige.

The above revelations from the senior editor of a national newspaper berated journalism practice in Nigeria because it clearly shows that market value or economic factor is a driving force in determining news coverage, news values and news selection including the prominence or placement given to such news item on the pages of newspaper. Sociology of news researchers such as Schudson (1991), Berger (1998), Hall (2005) and a host of others have confirmed that 'news is a constructed reality rather than reality itself'.

The implication of attaching pecuniary gains to media coverage of topical issues is not only detrimental to journalism profession, but it equally reduces the credibility of the media because unethical media contents that are harmful and libellous can

be released to the public thereby disrupting the society's social order. The press should know that the quality of news coverage, news credibility and factual reportage will endear the public to place advertisements in a particular newspaper.

In conclusion, the in-depth interviews with the selected newspaper editors and the labour activists have revealed that newsroom factors, economic interests, propaganda agenda campaigns and other external factors influenced newspaper proprietors in the news framing of ASUU-FGN industrial disputes. These determining factors have become anathema to the credibility of mediated media messages in industrial crises reporting in Nigeria media space.

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