(5) neutral stories while the lowest level of neutrality was observed in Guardian with 4.35 percent (3). Generally, out of 513 stories, 70.57 percent (362) were positive, 9.16 percent (47) were negative while 20.27 percent (104) were neutral. This finding is in agreement with the work of Okon & Ekpe (2018), where anticorruption stories with favourable direction (strong positive impression on the anti-corruption campaign) had the highest magnitude in The Sun and Nigerian Chronicles newspapers. This indicated that the print media supported anti-corruption campaign of Government.

Likewise, findings from the current study suggest that all the newspapers (The Punch, Vanguard, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune) played positive roles in exposing corrupt practices in the oil and gas industry of Nigeria. This, therefore, indicates that the Newspapers are fulfilling their social responsibilities in line with the social responsibility theory by opening the eyes of the public to corruption in the most economically-significant sector of the country. This further gives an insight on the role of the newspapers in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Based on the level of neutrality observed in this paper, Nigerian Tribune is the most objective compared to other newspapers. Apart from neutral presentation of news, other determinants of objectivity include truth, relevance and balance/non-partisanship (Westerstahl, 1983). However, Andren et al. (1979) asserted that "a program is objective to the extent the following conditions are fulfilled: (I) it contains true assertions. (II) it is not misleading. (III) it contains essential assertions. (IV) it is thorough" (p. 43). Based on the aforementioned, it can be stated that all the newspapers examined in this paper are objective. For instance, they all reported relevant stories on corruption in the oil and gas sector, which were supported by facts such as figures.
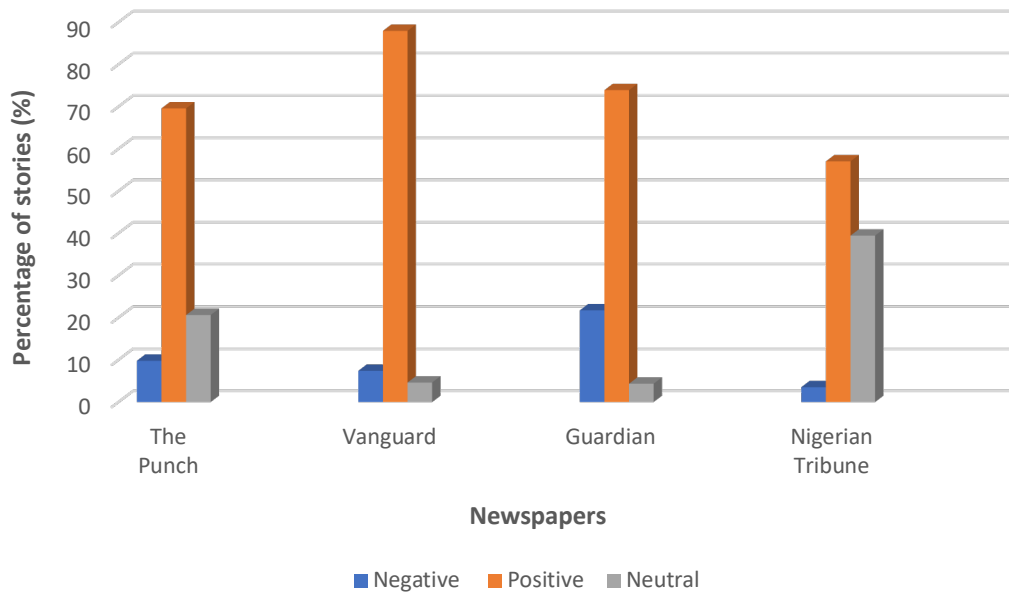
Figure 4. Tone of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry reported in the selected newspapers.

Conclusion

Based on our findings, it can be concluded that the coverage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry was accorded prominence by all the newspapers (The Punch, Vanguard, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune). The Punch had the highest magnitude of stories on corruption in the sector and Nigerian Tribune had the highest number of stories reported on its front and back pages. While Guardian had the highest number of full-paged stories, the Punch and Nigerian Tribune adopted the widest range of publication formats with news being the most dominant format employed by all the dailies. It is worthy of note that publication formats that could facilitate in-depth reportage of corruption in the sector such as features, editorials, opinions and interviews were poorly adopted by the newspapers.

Despite this shortcoming, the level of prominence given to corruption in this paper implies that the selected newspapers are fulfilling the agenda-setting role and social responsibility of informing the public because the number of occurrences of a story and the degree of prominence attributed to an issue are some of the major elements that can lead to discussion or opinion in the agenda setting theory (Folarin, 1998; Ayodeji-Falade & Osunkunle, 2019). It is clear from the findings that the observed frequency of the stories is high enough to set the agenda for public discussion on corruption in the oil sector as about 534 corruption stories were published in the study period.

On the other hand, Nigerian Tribune displayed the highest level of objectivity in terms of neutrality of the tone used in the reportage of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and

gas sector. However, we discovered that the objectivity of the newspapers cannot be adjudged solely by the neutrality of the tone as the stories on corruption reported by all the newspapers are largely true, relevant and balanced. If objectivity means fairness, as an agent of change, the print media will only be fair to the society if they continue to expose corrupt practices. The commitment of the newspapers as agents of change is reflected in the way they condemned corruption and emphasized the consequences, which connotes positive direction for media and the society. It is therefore sufficed to conclude that all the newspapers are objective.

Recommendation

The authors recommend that the press should prioritize reportage of important issues as corruption by increasing the number of full pages dedicated to such issues as against reserving full pages of newspapers for advertorials. Furthermore, the print media should consider the use of publication formats that could facilitate in-depth reportage of corruption such as features, editorials, opinions and interviews. In other words, investigative journalism should be more embraced.

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