

Coverage of Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry: A Comparative Content Analysis of Four National Dailies

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Abstract

This paper investigated the coverage of corruption in the oil and gas industry through a content analysis of four Nigerian newspapers (The Punch, Vanguard, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune). The paper adopted quantitative approach, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed through content analysis of the selected newspapers. This paper revealed that 534 stories were published on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas sector by all the newspapers within the study period (July 2018-June 2019), with the Punch having the highest magnitude of stories (n = 196, 36.70%) while Nigerian Tribune had the highest number of stories reported on its front and back pages (n = 143, 92.25%). However, Guardian had the highest number of full-paged stories (n = 15, 20%) whereas the Punch and Nigerian Tribune adopted the widest range of publication formats with news being the most dominant format employed by all the dailies (n = 462, 86.52%). In terms of tone of stories, Nigerian Tribune was the most neutral (n = 56, 39.44%). These suggest that the newspapers gave prominence to reportage of corruption, which implies that the selected newspapers are fulfilling their agenda-setting role and social responsibility to the public. It is anticipated that our findings will play a significant role in enhancing the function of Nigerian newspapers as agent of change.

Keywords: Change agent, Content analysis, Corruption, Nigerian newspapers, Press, Print media.

Nijerya Petrol ve Gaz Endüstrisinde Yolsuzluğun Kapsamı: Dört Ulusal Günlük Filmin Karşılaştırmalı Bir İçerik Analizi

Özet

Bu makale, dört Nijeryalı gazetenin (The Punch, Vanguard, Guardian ve Nigerian Tribune) içerik analizi yoluyla, petrol ve gaz endüstrisindeki yolsuzluk haberini incelemiştir. Makale, nicel verilerin toplandığı ve seçilen gazetelerin içerik analizi yoluyla analiz edildiği nicel yaklaşımı benimsemiştir. Bu makale, çalışma döneminde (Temmuz 2018-Haziran 2019) Nijerya petrol ve gaz sektöründeki yolsuzlukla ilgili 534 haberin yayımlandığını ve Punch'ın en yüksek haber sayısına (n = 196,% 36.70) sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Nigerian Tribune

ön ve arka sayfalarında en fazla haber bildirilen haberlere sahiptir (n = 143,% 92.25). Bununla birlikte, Guardian en yüksek sayıda tam sayfalı hikayeye sahipken (n = 15,% 20), Punch ve Nigerian Tribune en geniş yayın formatlarını benimsemiştir ve haberler tüm günlük gazetelerde en baskın formattır (n = 462, % 86.52). Hikayelerin tonu açısından, Nigerian Tribune en tarafsız olandır (n = 56,% 39.44). Bunlar, gazetelerin yolsuzluk haberlerini ön plana çıkardığını göstermekte, bu da seçilen gazetelerin gündem belirleyici rollerini ve halka karşı sosyal sorumluluklarını yerine getirdiklerini göstermektedir. Bulgularımızın, Nijerya gazetelerinin, değişimin temsilcisi olarak işlevini geliştirmede, önemli bir rol oynayacağı tahmin edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Değişim ajanı, İçerik analizi, Yolsuzluk, Nijeryalı gazeteler, Basın, Yazılı basın

Introduction

Corruption is “the misuse of entrusted power or a dishonest use of one’s office or position for personal gain” (Ijewereme, 2015, p. 1). Manifestation of corruption in Nigeria is in diverse forms such as “misappropriation of funds; over-invoicing; bribery; embezzlement; money laundering; and outright looting of the treasury” (Ijewereme, 2015, p. 1). Nigeria has the largest population in Africa with an estimate of about 200 million people. The country solely depends on crude oil as the main thrust of its economy. However, the overdependence on oil has encouraged and sustained corruption in the sector (Ijewereme, 2015). Consequently, eradication of corruption in the oil and gas industry of Nigeria is a long-lasting political goal, which seems not to have yielded meaningful results over the years.

According to a report from the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in 2014, the amount of proceeds realized from the oil and gas sector in Nigeria is about 70 to 90 percent of the total foreign earning. Therefore, the oil and gas industry constitutes the major pillar of Nigeria economy thus, shaping the tone and dictating the political and economy future of the nation (Donwa, Mgbame & Ogbeide, 2015). Although, crude oil was discovered at Oloibiri in 1970’s, it was first sighted in 1956 and oil exportation began in 1958 (Obioma, 2012). Since crude oil discovery in Nigeria, oil has become a key influence on Nigeria economy (Obioma, 2012).

Consequently, agriculture was neglected and this, obviously, led to the extinction of some agricultural produce such as groundnut, cotton, cocoa, palm oil, timber, hides and skin among others, which were the major sources of foreign earnings in Nigeria. Agricultural export during the pre-independent era created additional prospects for employment and government revenue. Now, oil is responsible for about 90 percent of entire exports and almost four-fifths of entire government incomes (Douglass, Clader, Christy, Michaels & Belsley, 2003; Budina & Wijnbergen, 2008). The emphasis on oil and the high level of devotion to the oil sector have

increased conflicts generation in the Niger Delta region. In fact, some Nigerians believe that “oil is more valuable than blood” (Usman, 2011, p. 294).

Nigeria, the “Giant of Africa” as generally called, is categorized as the highest crude oil manufacturer in Africa and the 7th largest exporter of same in the world. Nigeria is also the 10th major holder of process gas reserve globally (Punch Newspaper, 2008). Nevertheless, Nigeria is categorized as one of the chief indebted countries in the world (Omotola, 2008). Despite the country’s enormous profit from oil, approximately 70% of its population still languishes in abject poverty with an individual living on less than US \$2 per day. With all the proceeds from oil, Nigeria still remains poor in terms of ‘socio-economic welfare of the citizens’. In my opinion, Nigeria situation can be likened to being “hungry amidst surplus”. This scenario is, perhaps, consequent upon the high level of corruption that exists in the nation generally and in the oil and gas sector particularly. The country has constantly been ranked high in corruption perception index reports (Adomako, 2008; Transparency International, 2019).

In fact, there exists a synergetic relationship between oil and corruption as majority of the oil earnings are diverted into the purse of the few wealthy Nigerian leaders (Adomako, 2008). The under or over-invoicing of the import and export materials by the NNPC was cited by the 1993 US Senate Kerry Report (Obuah, 2010). The synergy between oil and corruption in Nigeria has become so intense that it has been passed down from hand to hand in the bureaucracy. The high rate of corruption in the oil and gas sector is detrimental to the overall well-being of the country because of the direct impact on the nation’s economy (Usman, 2011). It is remarkably worrisome that despite the substantial oil boom in Nigeria economy, the physical expansion of the country has not been visible; rather, things have deteriorated, owing to the level of corruption and oil policy operation in the country.

However, one of the major goals of the current administration under the leadership of Muhammadu Buhari is to tackle corruption in Nigeria as this is evident in its anti-corruption campaign, the platform on which he was elected. According to the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI), Waziri Adio, corruption in the oil and gas sector accounted for 90% of corrupt practices in Nigeria (Onwueanyi, 2016). The impact of this on the country’s economy cannot be overemphasized as about 20% of Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is lost to corruption (Transparency International, 2005). Given the direct impact of corrupt practices in the oil and gas industry on the economy, corruption in this sector is a major national issue that requires adequate and objective coverage by the press.

Indeed, the press remains the most powerful channel of communication in the country that cut across all publics; its impact is made through the columns of newspapers (Gupta, 2006). There are several independent newspapers in Nigeria with track record of professionalism in the coverage of issues of public interest including politics, corruption and terrorism. Some of the prominent Nigerian newspapers are the Punch, Vanguard, Guardian, and Nigerian Tribune and so on. Nevertheless, the poor level of press freedom in Nigeria as manifested in denied access to information, molestation and threat to lives of journalists (Olawoyin, 2017) may hamper the effective discharge of the duties of the press in the country.

In the last few years, most studies on coverage of corruption by the print media in Nigeria have focused on general corruption with dearth of information on the coverage of corruption in the major sectors of the Nation's economy. Fadaïro, Fadaïro & Aminu (2014) documented the coverage of corruption news by major Nigerian newspapers in the following sectors: politics/governance, agriculture, transport, energy, service oriented, education, oil/gas and entertainment/sport. Odionye & Yare (2018) reported the coverage of corruption cases by selected newspapers and magazines in Nigeria. They also studied the perception of the newspapers' editors on the anticorruption fight in the country. Recently, some studies have also examined the coverage of anti-corruption efforts of the Buhari-led administration by the print media (Ekanem & Sobowale, 2017; Edmond & Wilson, 2018; Okon, 2018). However, there is dearth of information on the coverage of corruption in the oil and gas industry in Nigeria. Hence, this paper sought to contribute to knowledge in this field and thus cover this gap by assessing the coverage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry through a comparative content analysis of four major Nigerian newspapers.

Role of the Press in Exposing Corruption in Nigeria

In line with its social responsibility, the press is expected to expose corruption in the society through adequate coverage of corrupt practices in every sector of the Nation's economy and as such fulfilling its watchdog role. It is also possible to use qualitative independent media reporting to emphasize and pressurize the stakeholders to act appropriately (Edmond & Wilson, 2018). Onabajo (2007) highlights the heterogenous nature of the mass media to supply useful information to their audience scattered all over. This can either be through broadcast or the use of newspaper to constantly inform, educate and entertain or to correct certain wrongs in the society. Press also enlightens people through campaigns, programming, news, editorial contents among others, to elucidate the benefits of moral astuteness as important to national development.

The key role played by the media in combating corruption cannot be over emphasized especially in investigating claims of corruption that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria, with the most endemic found in the robe of public officers and some stakeholders in governance. Furthermore, there is need for the media to drum hard the beat against corruption (Coronel, 2009).

It is speculated that “corruption can never be prevented and can never be fought without institutions, as rulers, administrators and bureaucrats come and go but institutions and systems remain” (Akanle & Adesina, 2015, p. 433-434). This is also corroborated by the former President of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo during his inaugural speech in 1999 who said

“Instead of progress and development, which we are entitled to expect from those who govern us, we experience persistent deterioration in the quality of our governance, leading to instability and the weakening of all public institutions. No society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become the full-blown cancer it has become in Nigeria”.

The press is a strong institution that needs to be strengthened so as to fight corruption in Nigeria. The immediate past American President, Barrack Obama advised the African countries on the need to build solid institutions rather than building strong men. Failure to ensure this will result in corrupt environment that the failed institution will not be able to rescue. This is indeed the exact situation in Nigeria, currently.

As the watchdog of government, the press is responsible for relaying cogent information about government activities and divulging its excesses. This openness and publicity on the part of the press has been a way of checking the excesses of government activities. Edmond & Wilson (2018, p. 6) affirm that “the idea of the press as the fourth estate; an institution that exists primarily as a check on those in public office, was based on the premise that powerful states had to be prevented from overstepping their bounds”. The press working independent of government, even as its freedoms were guaranteed by the state, was supposed to ensure this”. It is devastating and unfortunate when the press, who is supposed to surveil the activities of the bureaucrat, is corrupt. This was clearly highlighted by Mwangi (2010) who believes Nigerian press has made several efforts to foster democracy, it is unfortunate it participated in the menace that saturates the land.

In addition, the press often fails to dig deep through investigative journalism the corruption stories they report. However, this may be because of several factors such as gratification, ownership, censorship or other control. In the actual sense, the press, who is

entrusted with the role of checking the excesses of government, is not immune against corruption (Edmond & Wilson, 2018, p. 2). In some cases, the press has made gratification and brown envelop (bribe) its priority in giving media content the required prominence and access.

More so, some people believe that journalists often use the media to build good image for themselves and their organizations. The concept of 'PR-news' has increasingly become popular in the Nigerian media landscape. Journalists prefer to attend press briefings with juicy packages at the end, which may influence the tune of reporting. On the other hand, journalists are advised to avoid corrupt practices and always dig out the truth that the public needs to know (Edmond & Wilson, 2018). It is also important to note that journalists should be neutral in order to war against corruption. Yusha'u (2009) notes that press coverage of political corruption by most newspapers in Nigeria is bias as a result gratification. Stapenhurst (2000) opines as follows:

“How well media can perform its watchdog function against corruption, fundamentally, depends on a number of factors defined by the political, economic and legal environment in which the media operate: however, media freedom, freedom of expression, access to information, ownership, competition, credibility and outreach have been identified as the major factors that determine the quality and effectiveness of media performance on corruption” (p. 19-23).

In the view of Stapenhurst (2000, p. 19-23), the press reporting on corruption can either have tangible or intangible impact. It is tangible when media reporting on corruption has a positive result on the listeners thus, resulting in call to end the menace in the society. Media role in fighting corruption can be intangible when media reporting lacks openness and fairness that will result in the required positive change and growth in the society. Eigen (2001) adds that the media is very central to ensuring accountability by monitoring and investigating those entrusted with the position of authority, especially those who may try to abuse their office for personal gain.

Therefore, emphasizing the role of the media in fighting corruption over the years has successfully been used to change people's opinion/ belief regarding issues like corruption. The role of the press in moulding perception, norms and behaviour is essential in war against corruption. However, Rajak (2014) asserts that the press may not be the rudimentary tools in fighting corruption, but they are crucial in accomplishing the cultural transformation that must follow legislative change to make laws and institutional changes workable.

According to Rajak (2014), press can intensify the consequence of anti-corruption regulation by 'reaching and mobilizing a broader audience'; 'motivating political leaders to

act’; ‘facilitating a cultural change that will improve the sustainability of change’. Moreover, the media promote generally accepted behaviour and condemn corrupt and unacceptable ones (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Therefore, the press can actually be instrumental to curbing corruption and generate public pressure against corruption.

The press can be instrument of democratization and empowerment for the citizenry by allowing them air and debate issues and participate in decision making (Chiumbu, Minnie & Bussiek, 2009). In doing this, journalists should ensure that the core values of their profession are upheld. Dower (2003) highlighted the following as some of the acceptable values: objectivity, truth, impartiality, balance and integrity. For journalistic work to be credible, it has to be first, reliable and accurate. Chari (2009) opines that “news contents should not only be accurate and truthful but should also be of quality, uncontaminated information, which has the potential to democratically change the culture of a nation” (p. 49). We believe that objectivity is the key to truth as acknowledged by Streckfuss (1990) who posits that “...writing a balance story without the reporters’ hyperbole may be equated to neutralism”. In our opinion, objectivity means finding and reporting the truth through ethical procedures.

We believe that through accountable news-gathering and dissemination process, credible media channels can set agenda for free press that is proficient to fight corruption in its environment. Therefore, the authors through this study have evaluated the coverage of corruption in the most significant sector of Nigeria economy: oil and gas industry by selected Nigerian newspapers so as to ascertain if the press is indeed fulfilling its social responsibility by uncovering corruption in the country.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the agenda setting theory, which forms the basis for determining the level of prominence given to the coverage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by the selected newspapers. Moreover, this theory will help to predict if the selected newspapers are fulfilling their social obligations by setting the agenda for the public on issue of corruption in the country’s oil and gas sector while reporting accurately and objectively too.

The name “agenda setting” came to limelight in the study of McComb & Shaw (1972). They conducted their study on the 1968 United States presidential election, where they found out that the press had a major control of voters’ judgment on what the major issues were. They also found out that there was a strong connection between emphasis given by the press on issues and the importance attached to such issues by voters. The proponents of this theory believe that the press either consciously or unconsciously creates a certain image of reality for the public.

The press brings to our notice events and occurrences on a daily basis ranging from news, sport, crime, documentary, drama among others. It overemphasizes some stories while neglecting the others, this makes some media user to perceive such stories as more important (Fourie, 2007). Take for instance, the period when stories about crime, corruption and AIDS filled the columns of many South African newspapers, many believe that the nation is already crumbling. The attention devoted to a particular news stories influences the public perception of the importance of such issue (McQuail, 2000).

The press is, therefore, significantly more important than a transmitter of information because it often time succeeds in affecting audiences' choices on issues built on saliency of such reports. In this paper, we appraised the agenda setting role of the press in the reportage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by determining the level of prominence given to the issue of corruption by the selected newspapers through analysis of story frequency; front/back page placement; story size/length; and the use of different editorial formats.

Methodology

This paper adopted a quantitative research approach, in which a quantitative content analysis was used to assess the coverage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by four Nigerian Newspapers (The Punch, Vanguard, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune), which were purposively selected based on their wide circulation and readership in the country. In fact, they are listed among the newspapers with the widest circulation in Nigeria. Besides, they are all daily newspapers. All the editions of the four selected newspapers from July 2018 to June 2019 numbering 1460 editions constituted the study population. The newspaper editions were sourced from the library of the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.

This paper employed a non-probability sampling technique, in which we selected articles on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry from the study population, which is the focus of the research. Purposive or judgmental sampling was adopted in this paper as we needed to select only newspaper articles/data that are related to the research focus, which is corruption stories in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria within the period of the research. More so, purposive sampling was used to access targeted and specific samples (Patton, 2002). In agreement with the opinion of Wimmer & Dominick (2003), samples were selected based on the aim of the study, other articles from the population that were not on corruption in the oil and gas sector were therefore, jettisoned. Hence, we thoroughly searched all the editions of the four newspapers for 12 months (July 2018 to June 2019) and ensured that only the editions that contained stories on corruption in the oil and gas industry in Nigeria were selected.

Results and Discussion

Frequency of Stories on Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry by the Selected Newspapers

Figure 1 shows the frequency of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by the selected newspapers. A total of 534 stories were reported on corruption in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria by the four newspapers in one-year (1st July, 2018 and 30th June, 2019) with the Punch having the highest frequency of 196 stories (36.70%) followed by the Nigerian Tribune with 155 stories (29.03%) whereas Vanguard and Guardian reported 108 (20.22%) and 75 (14.04%) stories, respectively.

The high frequency observed in the Punch and Nigerian Tribune indicates that they may have more access to information or more sources than the other two newspapers (Vanguard and Guardian). More so, the Punch had increased awareness on corruption in the oil and gas sector compared to other newspapers and increased public awareness on an issue has been ascribed to the concept of the agenda setting of the press (Severin & Tankard, 2001). This is in agreement with the work of Shoemaker (1989) who reported that “high frequency of stories of illegal use of drug on the newspapers in the United States between 1986 and 1989 increased public’s awareness on the issue of drugs, which the people perceived as the nation’s most important problem at that time” (Ayodeji-Falade & Osunkunle, 2019, p. 113). This is also corroborated by Daramola (2003) who stated there is a link between frequency of news coverage and the importance attached to such news by the public. Furthermore, Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui (2009) reported that significant increase in newspaper coverage of global warming is connected to increased public concern for the matter.

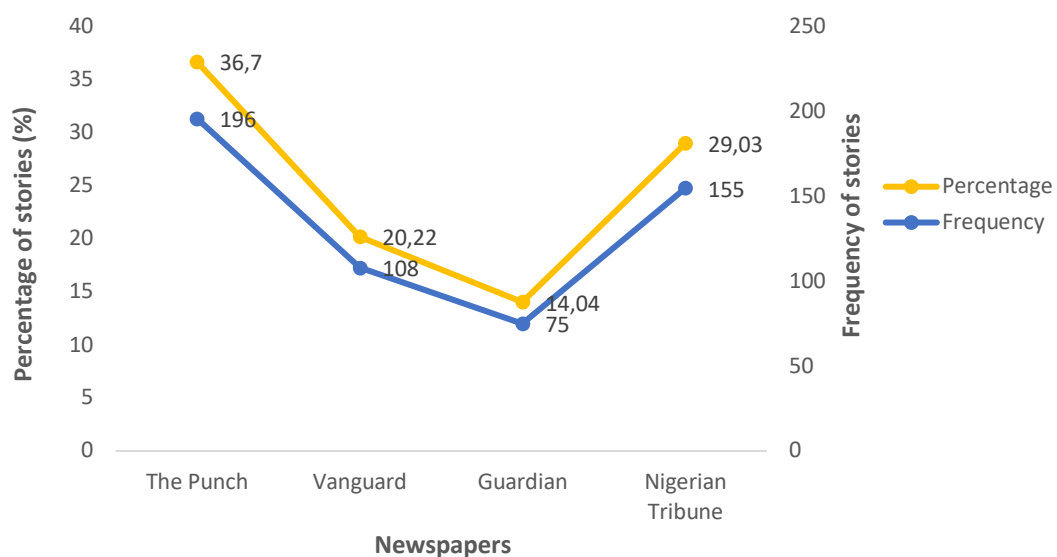


Figure 1. Frequency of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by the selected newspapers.

Publication Formats of Stories on Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry by the Selected Newspapers

Table 1 shows the different publication formats used in the reportage of corruption in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria by the selected newspapers. Out of the 534 stories reported by all the newspapers, 462 (86.52%) were news reports, 22 (4.12%) were features, 15 (2.81%) were editorials while 10 stories (1.87%) were opinions whereas interviews, cartoons, vox pop and letter to the editor were 10 (1.87%), 7 (1.31%), 5 (0.94%) and 3 (0.56%), respectively. Our findings showed that the Punch and Nigerian Tribune adopted eight different publication formats: news, letter to the editors, features, cartoons, editorials, opinion, vox pop and interview while Guardian and Vanguard employed six (news, features, editorials, opinion, vox pop and interview) and five (news, features, opinion, vox pop and interview) publication formats, respectively.

However, news had the highest frequency of usage by all the newspapers. This suggests that the newspapers did not provide sufficient details on the issue of corruption in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria as news stories do not allow adequate information unlike some other publication formats such as features, editorials, opinions and interviews (Amenaghawon, 2016). This finding agrees with the work of Ayodeji-Falade & Osunkunle (2019), where majority of the stories on FeesMustFall reported by Daily Dispatch were news, however, the newspaper employed only two publication formats: news and opinion as opposed to what was observed in this paper, where the selected newspapers employed between five and eight publication formats. This finding is also corroborated by Okon (2018), who reported that majority of the anti-corruption stories covered by The News/TELL and Sun/Nigerian Chronicle during Obasanjo and Buhari administrations were news stories.

Nevertheless, the newspapers (The News/TELL and Sun/Nigerian Chronicle) did not adopt vox pop and interview, which are part of the formats employed by all the dailies in this paper. The low usage of other publication formats (features, editorials, and interview) aside from news in this paper is noteworthy and suggests that the newspapers did not do in-depth report on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry. It is expected that the newspapers would do more of investigative reporting on issues of corruption in the country than what was observed in this paper as this type of reporting is “perhaps watchdog journalism’s most celebrated form” (Coronel, 2009, p. 3). The low usage of investigative style of reporting by the newspapers may probably be attributed to poor of access to adequate information on corruption in the oil and gas sector and also logistics such as additional funds required for research, transportation and accommodation in the process of getting reports. Furthermore, readers are

not very familiar with other publication formats such as features, editorials etc as they do with news (Amenaghawon, 2016).

Table 1. Publication formats of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by the selected newspapers

Editorial format	The Punch Count & %	Vanguard Count & %	Guardian Count & %	Nigerian Tribune Count & %	Total Count & %
News	173 (88.26)	96 (88.88)	58 (77.33)	135 (87.09)	462 (86.52)
Letter to the Editor	1 (0.51)	-	-	2 (1.29)	3 (0.56)
Features	3 (1.53)	7 (6.48)	11 (14.67)	1 (0.65)	22 (4.12)
Cartoons	2 (1.02)	-	-	5 (3.23)	7 (1.31)
Editorials	10 (5.10)	-	1 (1.33)	4 (2.58)	15 (2.81)
Opinion	3 (1.54)	1 (0.93)	1 (1.33)	5 (3.23)	10 (1.87)
Vox pop	1 (0.51)	1 (0.93)	2 (2.67)	1 (0.65)	5 (0.94)
Interview	3 (1.53)	3 (2.78)	2 (2.67)	2 (1.29)	10 (1.87)
Total	196 (100)	108 (100)	75 (100)	155 (100)	534 (100)

Positioning of Stories on Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry in the Selected Newspapers

Figure 2 presents findings on the positioning of stories on corruption in the oil and gas industry in the selected newspapers. The findings show that Guardian had the highest percentage of stories, 68 percent (51) on the front page followed by Vanguard with about 57 percent (62) while Nigerian tribune and the Punch presented approximately 55 percent (86) and 26 percent (52) of their stories on the front pages, respectively. Meanwhile, the Punch had the highest magnitude of stories on the back page (96), which amounts to 48.97 percent followed by Nigerian tribune with 36.77 percent stories (57) on the back page while Vanguard and Guardian positioned 21.30 percent (23) and 10.66 percent (8) stories on their respective back pages.

Likewise, the Punch placed the highest quantity of stories in the inside pages (48), amounting to 24.50 percent while the Nigerian tribune positioned the lowest number (12) of stories (7.74%) in the inside pages. On the other hand, Vanguard and Guardian had 21.30 percent (23) and 21.33 percent (16) stories in their inside pages, respectively. Generally, out of the 534 stories reported on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by all the selected newspapers, 251 (47%) were placed on the front pages, 184 (34.46%) on the back pages while 99 (18.54%) were positioned in the inside pages. The high magnitude of stories on both the front and back pages of all the newspapers indicates the level of prominence attributed to the

issue (Okon, 2018), with Nigerian tribune having 92.25 percent of its stories on the front and back pages while Vanguard had 78.70 percent on the front and back pages.

However, Guardian and the Punch had 78.66 and 75.30 percent stories on the front and back pages, respectively. The findings indicate that all the newspapers gave prominence to the stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry with the highest level of prominence observed in the Nigerian tribune. With the level of prominence observed based on front- and back-page placement in this paper, it is sufficed to state that the newspapers are setting the agenda of what people think or talk about in the society, therefore, fulfilling their social responsibilities and the agenda setting role.

This finding concurs with previous related studies, where prominence was determined using front- and back-page placement or either. Ayodeji-Falade & Osunkunle (2019) reported that FeesMustFall stories were given prominence by Daily Dispatch because majority of the stories, approximately 93 percent, were positioned on the front page of the newspaper. Meanwhile, Okon (2018) attributed high prominence given to stories on anti-corruption by The News/TELL and Sun/Nigerian Chronicle to the presence of such stories on the front/cover and back/sectional pages of the respective newspapers. However, Ugwuanyi (2018) adduced the low prominence accorded rape cases in Nigeria by Daily Sun and Vanguard to the placement of most stories on rape on the inside page (56.7%) of the newspapers whereas only about 13 percent of the stories were reported on the front page. This is corroborated by Ekwueme (2017), who reported that the coverage of economic recession was not given due prominence by Guardian and Vanguard as majority of the articles were present on the inside page of the newspapers with 83 and 86 percent, respectively while the front-page presence of the stories was very low.

More so, Fadairo, Fadairo & Aminu (2014) observed that majority of the corruption articles presented by the selected newspapers (The Nation, Tribune and Guardian) appeared on the inside page. The high prominence accorded corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by the four newspapers (The Punch, Vanguard, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune) indicates the level of importance attached to the issue of corruption by the selected newspapers, thus fulfilling their agenda setting responsibility to the society.

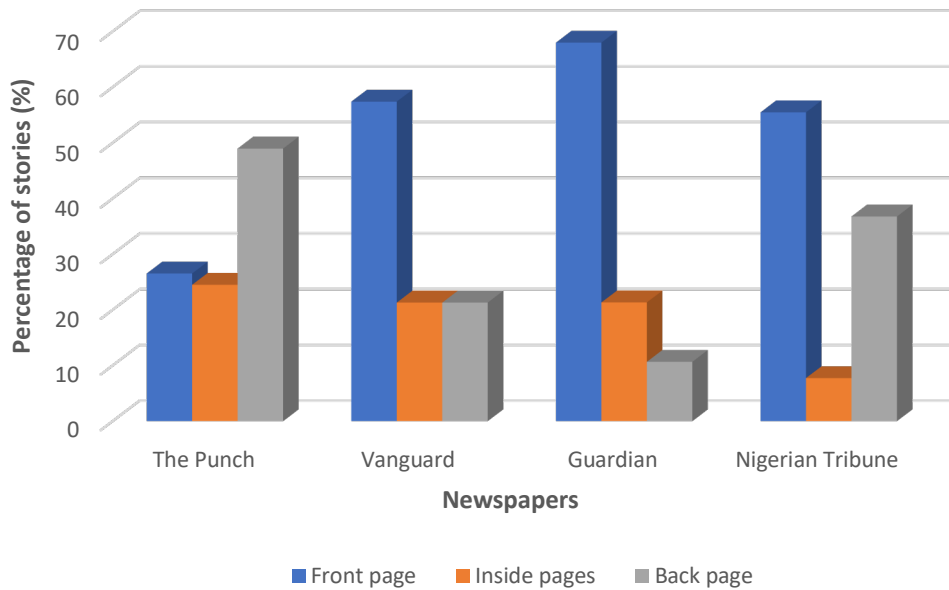


Figure 2. Position of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry in the selected newspapers.

Story Size/Length used in the Reportage of Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry by the Selected Newspapers

Figure 3 shows the findings on the size/length of stories on corruption in the oil and gas industry as presented by the four studied newspapers. The results show that Guardian had the highest percentage of full paged stories (20%) followed by Nigerian Tribune with 14.19 percent (22) while Vanguard and the Punch reported 9.26 percent (10) and 8.67 percent (17), respectively. Meanwhile, the highest percentage of half-paged stories was reported by the Punch with 66 stories (37.67%) followed by the Nigerian Tribune with 28 stories (18.06%) while Guardian and Vanguard reported 11 (14.67%) and 13 (12.04%) half-paged stories, respectively.

Nevertheless, the highest percentage (65.74%) of quarter-paged stories was recorded by Vanguard with 71 stories followed by Guardian with 53.33 percent (40) while 45.16 percent (70) and 36.22 percent (71) of corruption stories reported by Nigerian Tribune and the Punch occupied quarter page, respectively. In other cases, the newspapers dedicated a small portion of a page to corruption stories. For the small portion stories, Nigerian Tribune had the highest percentage (22.58%) with 35 stories followed by the Punch with 21.43 percent (42). Meanwhile, Vanguard reported 12.96 percent (14) of their stories on small portion page whereas Guardian had the lowest percentage of stories (12%) occupying small portion of a page. In the overall, out of the 534 stories reported on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas

sector by all the selected newspapers, 252 stories (47.19%) appeared on a quarter page while 118 stories (22.09%) were reported using a half page. However, only 64 stories (11.99%) occupied a full page as 100 stories, which account for about 19 percent, were reported on a small portion page.

The same trend was observed by Amenaghawon (2016), who reported that most of the Niger Delta conflict articles (45.3%) were placed on quarter page in the selected newspapers (Guardian, Nigerian Tribune, Vanguard and Daily Champion). This is further corroborated by the work of Fadaïro, Fadaïro & Aminu (2014), where the highest percentage of total corruption articles (56.8%) covered by the selected newspapers (The Nation, Tribune and Guardian) were allotted quarter page. However, this paper showed that Guardian had the highest percentage of full-paged stories (20%) and the lowest percentage of stories occupying a small portion page compared to other newspapers.

Relatively, Guardian allotted more space to stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. This indicates that Guardian gave more prominence to the issue of corruption in the oil and gas sector than the others as it had the highest percentage of total stories on full, half and quarter pages. However, other newspapers (The Punch, Vanguard and Nigerian Tribune) accorded the stories due prominence as a significant percentage were allotted full, half and quarter pages compared to the stories on a small portion of a page. This is corroborated by Okon & Ekpe (2018) who considered anti-corruption articles on full, half and quarter pages as being prominent. It is clear from the findings that stories on corruption in the oil and gas industry were accorded adequate space with all the newspapers having majority of their stories occupying full, half and quarter pages of the selected newspapers. Just like the view of Fadaïro, Fadaïro & Aminu (2014), the space allotted to corruption stories in the oil and gas industry by the newspapers also reflects the level of prominence accorded the issue.

In the overall, it is sufficed to suggest that the selected newspapers gave prominence to the reportage of corruption in the oil and gas sector of the country. This is actually expected as the industry has a major stake in the gross domestic product of Nigeria. Moreover, “the oil and gas industry remain the economic nerve centre of Nigeria, which is evident in the mono-product economy that the country runs” (Amenaghawon, 2016, p. 152). Nevertheless, the low degree of allotment of full page observed in this paper further confirms the brevity of news stories, which is more in this paper. More so, it may be an indication that the newspapers did not invest enough in investigative coverage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry.

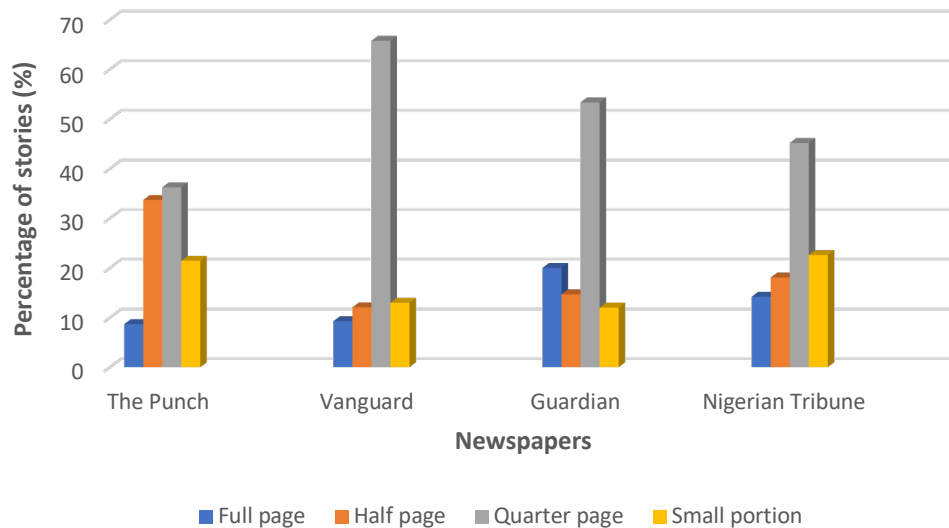


Figure 3. Story size/length used in the reportage of corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by the selected newspapers.

Tone of Stories on Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Reported in the Selected Newspapers

Figure 4 presents the findings on the tonality of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas sector as reported by the four selected newspapers. This is used to determine the objectivity of the newspapers in their reportage of corruption in the oil and gas industry. The tones used by the newspapers are categorized into positive, negative and neutral. Negative stories are those that support a corrupt practice in the oil and gas sector or give justification for an act of corruption in the sector; positive stories suggest that the writer condemn corruption in the oil and gas sector or emphasize the consequences of corruption; while neutral stories are those that neither support nor condemn corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry.

The findings show that Guardian had the highest percentage of stories written with negative tone with 21.74 percent (15) followed by the Punch with 9.79 percent (19) whereas Vanguard and Nigerian Tribune had 8 and 5 negative stories, respectively, which account for 7.41 and 3.52 percent of their respective stories on corruption. On the other hand, Vanguard recorded the highest positive stories with 87.96 percent (95) followed by Guardian with 73.91 percent (51). About 69 percent (135) of the Punch stories were positive while Nigerian Tribune reported 57.04 percent (81) positive stories.

Nevertheless, Nigerian Tribune recorded the highest level of neutrality with 39.44 percent (56) followed by the Punch with 20.62 percent (40). Vanguard had only 4.63 percent

(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.

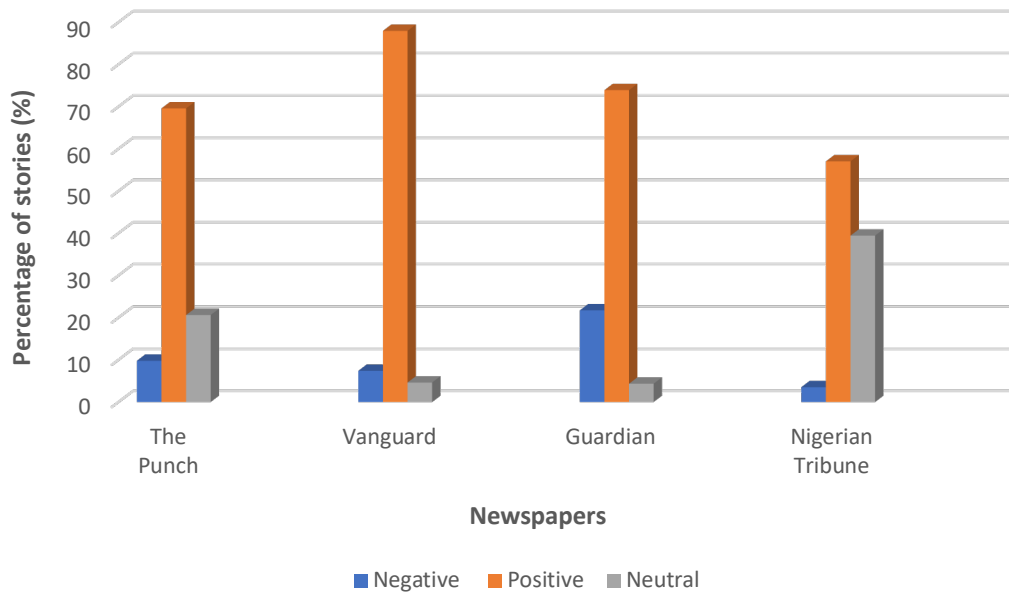


Figure 4. Tone of stories on corruption in the Nigerian oil and gas industry reported in the selected newspapers.

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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