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Review article

Research on brown envelope journalism in the African media

By Terje S. Skjerdal

Abstract

This article gives an overview of past and contemporary research on the “brown envelope” phenomenon in African journalism and documents local terminology and appropriation. The research literature on the phenomenon is growing, coinciding with the alleged increase of informal incentives in African journalism practice. The article discusses how the research tradition has invariably interpreted brown envelope journalism in light of the professional and societal atmosphere. It is argued that the research body has clustered around four main topics: documentation of brown envelope journalism; consideration of the impact of poor economic conditions; analysis of the political and social influence; and discussion of ethical and professional concerns. Three directions for further research are suggested, encouraging further empirical, anthropological and philosophical studies on brown envelope practices with the view to interrogate the phenomenon as an exemplar of wider professional and ethical issues.

Key words: Brown envelope journalism, freebies, corruption, bribery, professional ethics, research perspectives

Introduction:

Judging by the response to the call for articles for the present theme issue of *African Communication Research*, there is a tremendous interest in the phenomenon of brown envelope journalism among communication and media researchers in Africa. The editors received close to 40 article proposals for the issue, representing 10 countries from all parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the widespread research interest may not necessarily mean that brown envelope journalism is rife in African media practice, our contention is exactly that. On the basis of informal accounts and an increasing number of media commentaries addressing the dilemma of brown envelopes, there is legitimate reason to believe that this phenomenon and other types of informal incentives and bribes are common in African media

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practice.

The primary aim of this review article is to provide an overview of research conducted on brown envelope journalism within an African context. The review takes as its starting point brown envelopes in the strict sense – i.e. cash secretly given to a journalist on a reporting mission – but the review also includes other types of journalistic incentives such as meals and free tickets (freebies), and, to some extent, institutional corruption. Some insight into international research on the topic is provided too, as well as a note on methodological challenges for researchers who intend to do studies in the area – regardless of cultural context. The main focus in this article, however, remains on Africa.

Specific studies on brown envelopes in African journalism are few. However, a range of scholarly articles mentions the phenomenon when discussing professionalism, journalism ethics and newsroom practices of the African media. It also seems that the number of articles acknowledging the phenomenon is on the increase despite the assumed professionalization of journalism practice. It does make sense to analyze brown envelope practices within a wider examination of journalism culture instead of treating them in isolation; however, given the broad recognition of the practice, more focused studies are also called for. Nevertheless, there are at least four researchers who have done special efforts to understand brown envelopes within African journalism practice, and they deserve to be mentioned at the outset of this review. Jennifer Hasty's (1999; 2001; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2006) anthropological research of journalism culture in Ghana dwells at length with *solli* (brown envelopes) and its kinship with local reporting practice.

Conducting a comparative PhD study between Ghana and Zambia, Twange Kasoma (2007; 2009) goes on to apply both surveys and in-depth interviews to discuss the extent of brown envelope journalism in each of these countries, and specifically how it threatens development reporting. Lilian N. Ndangam (2006; 2009) focuses on *gombo* (brown envelopes, freebies) in Cameroon, and interrogates the tensions between severe economic crisis/corruption and media liberalization/professionalism. Also focusing on French-speaking Africa, Marie-Soleil Frère's (2000; 2001; 2005; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010) studies of media in for example DR Congo, Rwanda and Chad duly acknowledge the many complications of brown envelope journalism in these countries. These four researchers will be duly revisited; however, this review

article also refers to more than 70 other studies which consider the phenomenon of brown envelopes in African journalism in greater or lesser detail. The anecdotal references to brown envelopes in the research literature are many, though focused in-depth studies are far fewer.

Before entering into a discussion of the research literature, however, it is necessary to consider some basic attributes of brown envelopes as they are generally understood by researchers and media workers.

What is brown envelope journalism?

The term “brown envelope journalism” is applied to denote journalistic activity which involves transfer of various types of rewards from sources to the reporter. Although the usage of the term varies somewhat from context to context, it is safe to say that the following three characteristics are usually involved if we speak about the original “little” brown envelope: the practice occurs on the *personal level*, it has some degree of *confidentiality*, and it denotes an *informal contract* between the source and the reporter whereby both parties have certain obligations. These three characteristics are visualized through the image of a brown envelope containing cash physically handed over from a source to a reporter.

That the reward is personal means that it is primarily intended to be used by the receiver (the media worker) on a personal and individual level. Even though brown envelopes are habitually concealed as, for example, per diem or funds for transportation, the understanding is that they include a surplus rate which the reporter can use personally. Brown envelopes are similarly individual in the sense that they are usually not transferred on an institutional level as in various types of organizational corruption, but are handed over to single journalists with the view to appeal to the local decision-making level rather than to higher management or organizational level. That the allowance is personal and individual does not mean that it is not shared with others. There are examples of more or less organized brown envelope activity within organizations where reporters are expected to systematically share the allowance with other persons in the newsroom, for example, with editors who are exempt from going out and receiving such gifts. Nonetheless, the transmission of the gift usually takes place on reporter’s level and is therefore essentially personal.

Secondly, brown envelopes are characterized by confidentiality. The allowance is normally given in confidence and does not appear on

paper and reports unless it can be described as transportation costs or other formally approved expenses. Even so, there are many examples of brown envelopes being openly and systematically handed over to all reporters at an event. In Tanzania, for example, it is customary for reporters to have to queue up and sign a form to receive a “sitting fee” from the event organizer. However, in research terms the allowance would still be regarded as informal and concealed because it is given privately to the individual journalist and is habitually hidden from official reports and public taxation, and it is usually treated with some degree of discretion in the newsroom. Also, most importantly, the audience will not be informed when informal inducements have taken place during the news-gathering process.

Thirdly, implied from the above, there is an informal contract being entered into between the source and the reporter when brown envelopes are involved. The source will have certain expectations that may vary from occasion to occasion. At the most basic level, the source expects coverage of an event or issue; but more importantly, the issue is expected to be covered in positive and uncritical manner. Reportedly, there are also cases where reporters are offered brown envelopes to kill a story, i.e. to take it out of publicity altogether. The latter is an example of indisputable bribery where the source attempts to manipulate the journalistic independence of the media outlet. The amount in such incidents sometimes reaches high levels. Usually, however, the amounts are far more modest, but still significant enough to jeopardize journalistic independence. Reports also expose that journalists have refused covering certain issues if they were not offered informal payment, thereby putting increased pressure on sources to engage in the practice. The phenomenon can therefore be said to represent an informal contract where both parties are expected to fulfil certain obligations.

In journalistic activity, brown envelopes are related to other types of incentives that may pose a challenge to editorial independence. Freebie is one such incentive, probably known to any practicing journalist across the world. Freebies are small material benefits given to the journalist, for example a free meal or a book. Addressed by many writers in media ethics, the freebie, although usually small, is seen as being in conflict with journalistic interest because at the end of the day “it boils down to bribery” (Retief, 2002, p. 135). The basic difference between brown envelope and freebie is thus that the former denotes a cash gift, while the latter is a material gift. However, as observed in

research, “brown envelopes” are sometimes used to denote material gifts too (e.g. Birhanu, 2010), and “freebies” are used to denote immaterial gifts, such as the comfortable weekend holiday that South African journalists habitually get from the manufacturer when testing out a new car model (Krüger, 2004, p. 102; Froneman & De Beer, 1997, p. 265). The dividing line between brown envelopes and freebies is therefore not clear-cut, although “freebies” are usually used to denote gifts for immediate consumption (e.g. meals, beverage) and items interlinked with the subject of the story (e.g. a CD for review), while “brown envelopes” refer to incentives that have cash value and that can be put aside by the journalist for future use.

The suggestion in this article is that the wider term “brown envelope journalism” denotes a range of incentives involving cash (brown envelopes) and other gifts (freebies) that may put the journalist’s independence into question. The term “brown envelope syndrome” is accordingly used by commentators – particularly in Nigeria – to imply that this wider set of journalism is a complex and interwoven medical-like condition that is in need of treatment both on the part of the individual journalist and on the media industry as a whole (Akabogu, 2005; Maier, 2000; Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2006; Olukotun, 2002; Omenugha & Oji, 2008; Onadipe & Lord, 1999). The range of practices are commonly viewed as ethically problematic by journalism theorists and media commentators alike.

Brown envelope journalism is sometimes equated with “checkbook journalism” (e.g. Chari, 2007, p. 57; Khan, 1998, p. 594; Ross, 2010, p. 10), but actually, the source of the monetary incentive is reversed. Brown envelopes are provided by informants and sources, while checkbook journalism denotes the opposite undertaking whereby media institutions pay sources for information. The latter is judged by some as an increasing challenge for Western journalism (Goldstein, 2007; Schlesinger, 2006), whereas brown envelope journalism on its part is much less addressed in journalism theory in that part of the world. The reverse goes for Africa, where occurrences of chequebook journalism appear to be few (Stos, 2009), in contrast to accounts of brown envelopes.

While checkbook journalism is associated with the institutional level, brown envelope journalism belongs to reporter’s level – even though institutional brown envelopes are also reported as a phenomenon (Kasoma, 2007). Similarly, the two practices differ in their ethical challenges and should therefore be treated as distinct

entities in research. The focus in this article is on source-initiated incentives, in other words on practices of brown envelope journalism, rather than checkbook journalism.

Obviously, there are many other ways to introduce media corruption than the brown envelope in the strict sense. Two such ways are publication in exchange for paid advertizing, and shared employment by journalists with PR agencies (Tsetsura, 2005, p. 15). "Cash for coverage" denotes a wider area which also includes various institutional incentives (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Ristow, 2010). However, the present article assumes as its main focus a more precise approach to brown envelope journalism, defined as having both a primarily personal dimension, a confidential character, and a contractual basis which is unofficial in nature.

Table 1: Relationship between different incentives in journalism practice

Practice	Explanation
Freebie	Gift offered from a source to a journalist, e.g. free lunch or free ticket.
Brown envelope	In the strict sense, a monetary contribution handed over from a source to a journalist. In wider sense may also denote material goods and services.
Brown envelope journalism	A wider set of journalism practices involving material or immaterial incentives delivered from sources to journalists.
Checkbook journalism	Journalism practice where sources are paid for stories or information.

Does brown envelope constitute bribery or corruption?

There are different views as to whether brown envelopes qualify as corruption. If corruption is restricted to acts which constitute legal transgression, then brown envelopes would rarely be defined as corruption. A brown envelope is usually confined to a small amount of money, say the equivalent to a few US dollars, and in some cases the contribution appears as customary as a polite greeting or an expected

subsidy towards transportation costs. Adding to the innocence, there are reports of publics who believe they are obliged to pay when forwarding news to the media; it is part of the unwritten contract between the media and the public, so to speak (Bardi, 2008; Birhanu, 2010). The pettiness of the contribution and the ordinariness of the practice make it untenable to speak about corruption in such cases.

However, then there are incidents which are much more grave in nature. For example, in November 2010, two Ugandan journalists were arrested for allegedly extorting a water company boss to clear him and his company from accusations of unclean water. If the extortion had been successful, it would surely qualify as journalistic corruption. However, the incident sparked off a debate within the Ugandan journalism fraternity which demonstrated that there is a range of subsidizing practices that may or may not be seen as bribery per se. One journalist, for example, reports that the pay that Ugandan freelance journalists receive for an article sometimes does not even cover the expenses involved in collecting the story (e-thread in Journalists & ICT4D in Uganda discussion forum; cf. Vuchiri, 2010). There are also countries which have endorsed rules of journalistic conduct in legislation, exemplified by Kenya's Media Act (2007) which incorporates a "Code of conduct for the practice of journalism". Article 3 of the code stipulates that journalists must not "accept gifts, favours or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage" or "engage in activities that may compromise their integrity or independence".

In distinguishing between bribes and brown envelopes, Venatus Agbanu (2009) argues that bribery implies a sense of voluntariness and habitually involves negotiation between the source and the journalist, while brown envelopes are not bargained and are given with seemingly no strings attached. Similarly, some of Hasty's (2005b, p. 135) informants in the Ghanaian private press emphasize that *solì* does not represent an act of bribery but is an appreciative gift or compensation for risk. Other researchers warn against using the term bribery to denote brown envelope practices because it would represent an unfruitful judgment from Western media ethics on African journalism practice.

Herman Wasserman (2008, p. 82), for example, argues that "instead of labeling this practice as 'bribery' and simply condemning it", one should apply a "hybrid ethical framework" in the analysis of the brown envelopes. This framework, as described by Wasserman, upholds

global ethical notions of fairness, credibility and truth-telling while at the same time acknowledging the socio-economic conditions under which African journalists work. His countryman Johan Retief (2002, p. 135), however, is more direct in his denunciation of gifts in journalism and maintains that it “boils down to bribery”. His advice is clear: “Never use your poor salary as an excuse for accepting free meals” (Retief, 2002, p. 135). Generally, scholars in journalism ethics describe brown envelope journalism as problematic and unethical, likely to have an impact on journalistic coverage, but they differ on the question as to whether it constitutes bribery or corruption.

Origins of “brown envelope” practices

The exact origin of the term “brown envelope” is somewhat uncertain, but it may very well stem from West Africa. Theories on this issue differ, however. According to Derek Forbes (2005), the term supposedly originated in the UK in the 1990s. Brown envelopes were a key ingredient in the so-called “cash-for-questions affair”, in which lobbyists allegedly paid two members of the British parliament on behalf of the influential businessman Mohamed Al-Fayed to post specific questions on the agenda for the House of Commons (Bartlett, 1999). *The Guardian*, which exposed the affair in October 1994, reported that the cash was handed over in brown envelopes, hence the rationale for the term¹. “Brown envelopes” later came to be adopted as a term designating the equivalent handover of cash from sources to journalists, according to Forbes (2005, p. 82). However, Edmund O. Bamiro (1994; 1997) documents that the term was known in Ghanaian and Nigerian English earlier than that. “Brown envelope” was an euphemism which “originated from the practice among Ghanaians to discreetly enclose bribe money in envelopes, not necessarily brown ones, rather than exposing it” (Bamiro, 1997, p. 110). The term was used by Canadian author Dave Godfrey in his award-winning 1970 novel *The New Ancestors* in which he borrowed words and phrases from West Africa to illustrate the impact of foreign culture on a country (Godfrey, 1970, p. 8; cf. Bamiro, 1994, p. 14). It makes sense that the term stems from West Africa; among media commentators today it is especially commonly used to describe journalism practices in Nigeria.

It is difficult to tell exactly when “brown envelope” became a term to designate journalism practices, but Ndaeyo Uko (2004) reports that this type of bribery was rife in the Nigerian press during the Second Republic (1979–83). Ministers had to bribe journalists to ensure that

stories were published, especially in the government press where salaries were low. Uko testifies that by 1983, reporters had begun to demand a "brown envelope" as a condition for conducting an interview. Brown envelopes became so common that officials reverted to white envelopes, according to Uko (2004, p. 55; cf. Edeani, 1990; Ekwelie, 1986, pp. 100–01; Faringer, 1991, p. 56).

Nomenclature

Throughout Africa, brown envelopes are referred to with a wide range of terms. To continue with Nigeria, the local term "*keske*" is used to describe informal contributions handed over from sources to journalists (Adio, 2001, p. 141). Other local phrases are "*kola*", "*goro*", "*gbalamu/gbalamun*", "*chope*", "*communiqua*", "*jewu*", "*kua/kwa/qua*", "*awufu*" and "*egunje*", in addition to English euphemisms like "family support", "better life", "the-journalists-are-going", "energizer" and "handshake" (Adebanwi, 2008, p. 55; Adio, 2001, p. 141; Agbanu, 2009; Nwabueze, 2010; Ojo, 1996, p. 130; Onyisi, 1996; Yusha'u, 2009, p. 170). Nigerian journalists also talk about "Ghana-must-go", which points to the red and blue woven plastic bag, in this case supposedly stuffed with cash (Ojo, 2003, p. 832). In neighbouring Cameroon, and in Chad, "*gombo*" is a well established phrase to designate journalistic enticements (Ndangam, 2006, 2009; Frère, 2009, p. 98; Tagne, 1996; Tabuwe & Tanjong, 2010). According to Francis Nyamnjoh (1999), Cameroonian "*le journalisme de Gombo*" is a "sort of 'bread and butter journalism' that does not exclude 'prostitution'" (p. 50) – though "prostitution" should be understood in the allegorical sense. In Ghana, "*solì*" is the preferred term (Diedong, 2006). It is derived from "solidarity", denoting that the source has some sort of sympathy with the despairing situation of the journalist and therefore wants to extend a helping hand which can also strengthen the ties between the two parties (Hasty, 2005c, p. 346). "Payola" is also commonly used, especially in the context where payments are forwarded to journalists and media operations for airplay of popular music (Gokah, Dzokoto & Ndiweni, 2009; cf. Katunich, 2002). Moreover, Ghana has introduced an exclusive phrase to describe refreshments and other freebies offered at the end of an official event, namely "item 13" (Hasty, 2005c, p. 346). Item 13 is understood as the last (and rewarding) issue on the agenda of the meeting.

In Liberia, “*gatu*” is the term to use. It supposedly comes from “gratuity” (Berger, 2002, p. 26; 2006, p. 20), i.e. money given in recognition of services. French-speaking countries use for example “*final communiqué*”, “*communiqué finale*”, and “*consultation*”, which are found in Benin (Adjovi, 2002; Frère, 2000; Moumouni, 2003, p. 162); “*frais de participation*”, which is one of several expressions in Cameroon (Ndangam, 2006, p. 187); and “*coupe/coupage*”, which is common in the Democratic Republic of Congo (AMDI, 2006, p. 43; Frère, 2007, p. 64, 2008, p. 72). Congo Brazzaville prefers “*camora*” (Frère, 2005, p. 14). A humorous touch is attached to the Zambian equivalent – “*ndalama yamatako*” – which literally means “money of the buttocks”.

The implication is apparently that the contribution constitutes a “sitting allowance” to ease the pain of sitting through a lot of press briefings (Kasoma, 2009; Ristow, 2010, p. 12). Similarly, Tanzanian journalists, besides using the Swahili term “*mshiko*” (Mfumbusa, 2006), speak of “sitting fee” or “sitting allowance” to denote the small amount of money they get from the organizer for showing up and enduring the “suffering” of a seminar or a press conference. The same term is used in Kenya. Ethiopians, however, prefer “blessing fee” to “sitting fee”, especially in stories where the Orthodox church is involved (Berhanu & Skjerdal, 2009, p. 135). Brown envelopes in Ethiopia are however more commonly referred to as “*buche*”, which is derived from Amharic “*bucheka*” and means “snatching something” (Berhanu, 2009; Berhanu & Skjerdal, 2009).

The Ethiopian case also illustrates how the nomenclature around brown envelopes has developed to fathom the manifold nature of the practice. For example, reporting places where brown envelopes do not exist are known in Ethiopia as “*derek tabiya*”, literally meaning “dry location”, so as to imply that going there does not bring any substance for the journalist. The Oromo language, spoken by the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, matches Amharic on this point by referring to journalistic bribery as “*jetu*”, meaning “something wet” (Birhanu, 2010). In Ethiopian Radio, journalists not taking brown envelopes are described as “*wogami*”, meaning “deviant: or “conservative”. The implication is that morally upright journalists constitute a minority in the newsroom (Berhanu & Skjerdal, 2009, p. 141–42).

As seen above, the euphemisms describing brown envelope practices are many, most being sarcastic and cynical expressions. Journalists living on conferences and receptions are invariably known as “cocktail journalists” (Akinfeleye, 1987, 1988, 2007, 2008), “Hilton

journalists" (Ndangam, 2009, p. 820) and "cash-and-carry journalists" (Ojebode, 2010). "Naira" (Nigerian currency) or "cedi" (Ghanaian currency) journalists are those reporting for money (Akinfeleye, 2005). "Oiling hands" (Kasoma, 2000, p. 96) should probably be regarded a "bonus journalism" (Frère, 2001, p. 62). These and related terms are found elsewhere in the world too, linking African reporting practices to global journalism behaviour. "Cocktail journalists", for example, are observed in India (Aggarwal, 1989, p. 5) and in Washington DC, USA (Campbell & Cochrane, 2003, p. 18) as well, although it must be added that in the latter example, the term is used to describe reporters who are convinced they must frequently attend dinner parties in order to get the right connections in the nation's administrative seat, in contrast to the African meaning of the term, where it points to journalists who have very small resources and see receptions as a creative way to reduce their living expenses. This illustrates the extent to which underground practices habitually acquire local meaning and terminology in order to draw boundaries between the initiated and the outside world.

Methodological challenges

There are certain methodological challenges attached to the study of corruptive media practices that need to be reflected upon before delving into the actual research. The first and foremost challenge relates to research reliability. The problem is obvious: When studying clandestine activity, researchers face the fact that empirical data are sparse, and informants may have something to hide. Lack of empirical data on corruption (Andvig & Fjeldstad, 2001) may lead researchers to rely too heavily on a small amount of already existing data, even if the concerned material may be beset with uncertainty and stems from a different social and cultural context. Researchers thus easily end up making shortcuts in their analysis, typically based on common sense and general public perceptions. To this end, Ayo Olukotun (2004b) suggests that there is a tendency to over-generalize the extent of media corruption in the literature.

Certainly, attempts at deciding exact corruption levels is a daunting task at best. Corruption is by nature an underground activity, and it is improbable that academic research in the area is able to expose more than what public investigation is able to do. This is further restricted by limitations in academic research methods. The personal interview is deficient because informants habitually want to be perceived as more

morally upright than they really are. The interview situation is therefore likely to make the informants appear ethically correct, as illustrated in Mireya Márquez Ramírez' (2005) research of journalistic bribery in Mexico. She had to turn the tape recorder off to get journalists to talk openly about bribery and admit their own involvement in it. Likewise, Danya Lynne Pysh (2009) found no traces of media bribery through research interviews when studying unethical practices among Russian PR practitioners despite the fact that many commentators claim it is a huge problem. Thus, she appropriately makes the suggestion that the practice has gone underground and that research techniques are deficient when it comes to unearthing the organism of bribery (p. 58). Similar problems of respondents' dishonesty go for surveys too; even if responses are given anonymously, respondents tend to express what they perceive as being the most "correct" answer. Consequently, Kasoma's (2007) in-depth study of brown envelopes among Zambian and Ghanaian journalists found considerably wider reach of the practice when applying observation and in-depth interviews than when using surveys.

All in all, this means that mapping the extent of corruption and fraud among journalists is a challenging undertaking. Certain techniques could be utilized to increase research reliability, such as asking for colleagues' immoral practices instead of the respondent's own; combining qualitative and quantitative analysis; and employing control groups. The way questions are phrased to the respondents is also an important consideration. This is illustrated in a survey from Cambodia which sought to find out how many journalists were involved in petty corruption. Only 13% of the journalists admitted that they took bribes; however, when asked if they had ever accepted money or gifts for attending press conferences, 33% confessed they had done so (LICADHO, 2008, p. 70). Concrete questions therefore encourage respondents to reveal facts more than do general questions. Irrespective of the approach, research data should always be treated with care if the aim is to determine the amount of corruption in a given community. Comparing research results across different eras and societies must be done with equal caution.

Brown envelope journalism around the world

Illicit payments in journalism practices are known worldwide (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2011), but the research on the phenomenon is not evenly distributed. The main geographical areas in research appear

to be South East Asia/China and Eastern Europe, in addition to a growing body of research concerning countries in Latin America and Africa. It is hard to determine whether the uneven level and development of research theory reflects the actual extent of brown envelope practices, although comparative research points in that direction.

A bold study by Dean Kruckeberg and Katerina Tsetsura (2003) attempted to map out the likelihood for "cash for news coverage" in 66 countries across the world. Obviously, the researchers could not go in depth for each country, but chose a set of eight indicators which supposedly pointed to the probability of corrupt journalistic behavior in newspapers in the concerned countries. The eight indicators were: tradition of self-determination by citizens; perception of corruption laws; accountability of government; adult literacy; professional journalism education; codes of ethics; freedom of the press; and media competition. Unsurprisingly given the slant of the indicators, Western countries occupied all the top positions of societies least likely to cater for journalistic corruption. On the other end of the scale were Eastern and Southern countries, with China being judged as the most probable society to have newspapers which would publish news for cash, followed by Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Due to lack of data, only five African countries were included in the study. Their positions on the list were (with 66 being the worst): Mauritius 40; South Africa 50; Kenya 55; Nigeria 58; and Egypt 61. Based on plain numerical values, the approach had palpable weaknesses, though the study must be said to echo a number of other studies which conclude that the grand contrast between free and repressive media societies is a key indicator of media corruption (Brunetti & Weder, 2003).

The mentioned study is analogous to a survey by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) from 2002 which sought to give an idea of the extent of "cash for editorial content" in various parts of the world. The study surveyed 242 PR and communication professionals from 54 countries (in other words less than five respondents for each country, which means that the results must be treated with much caution). Overall, the results suggest that unethical influence on editorial content is perceived to be more of a problem in Eastern Europe and Latin America than in North-Western Europe and North America. Most unfavorable in this particular survey came Eastern Europe, where 63% of the respondents believed that the acceptance of bribes by journalists in exchange for editorial material was common.

Asked whether they believed the media sometimes were bribed to kill a story, the percentages of respondents saying this would “never” or “very rarely” happen were 97.5% for the USA, 87.5% for North-Western Europe, and 66% for Africa and the Middle East (the participating countries in Africa were Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria and South Africa). The study also marked the first phase of IPRA’s global Campaign for Media Transparency, which was later joined by the International Federation of Journalists and the International Press Institute (survey quoted in Peters, 2003, p. 53).

Although brown envelopes may largely have disappeared in today’s Western journalism practice, they existed in earlier eras, according to researchers in journalism ethics. Karen Sanders (2003, p. 122) reports that bribes were commonplace in British journalism in the 17th and 18th century, while attempts at influencing media coverage today have mostly materialized in other forms such as freebies and junkets (i.e. events where all expenses are paid). In 19th century North America, it was common for publicists to offer journalists cash for coverage. By the early 1900s, it had become popular to offer gifts to reporters, such as liquor, theatre tickets and Christmas presents. However, practitioners also raised ethical concerns with the various incentives, and according to Denise DeLorme and Fred Fedler (2003), “most journalists agreed that they should not accept money, especially not large sums, from people they wrote about” (p. 105).

The questionable practice continued to some extent in American journalism until the 1920s and 1930s (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Vanderbilt, 1974), after which professionalization processes led to a more antagonistic relationship between journalists and the public relations industry. About the same time, European journalism fraternities began to formulate national ethical codes which served to define journalists as a community worthy of public confidence. Ethical rules notwithstanding, various types of source influence are believed to be an enduring problem in European and North American journalism. In a recent study of attitudes among Spanish journalists, Susana Herrera Damas and Carlos Maciá Barber (2009) found that while most media professionals were very reluctant to receive gifts of high monetary value (more than EUR 200), they had less objections to accepting gifts of smaller value such as promotional products, free tickets to shows and exhibitions, and paid meals and trips. Asked about material gifts between the value of EUR 30 and 200, among the 410 journalists who participated in the survey 50.9% said it was admissible

to accept such gifts while 49.1% said no. This suggests that freebies of fairly significant value are accepted among Spanish journalists. Attitudes towards freebies, however, vary somewhat between news organizations and national journalism traditions. According to Chris Frost (2007), trivial freebies are accepted by many Western journalists, but some American and Scandinavian media houses strictly reject anything that is offered for free, no matter how small. Frost (2007) imparts that taking monetary incentives to suppress a story is “extremely rare” among Western journalists today, although “a hundred years ago it was standard practice for some of the more unsavoury press” (p. 124).

In Russia, journalistic corruption is known as “*zakazukha*” (or “*jinsa*”), which could translate as “pay for publicity” (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003, p. 13). The magnitude of the practice was tested in an experiment by a PR agency in Moscow in 2001. A fake news release was sent out to a number of newspapers concerning the opening of a fictitious store. As many as 16 publications negotiated with the PR agency to publish the story for payment of between USD 50 and 500, and no less than 13 newspapers ended up printing a story about the non-existent shop (Klyueva, 2008, p. 410; McGraw, 2003). This despite Russian law which stipulates that paid advertisements must be clearly separated from editorial content. Supposedly having its own anatomy in Russian media communication (Pankin, 1999), *zakazukha* is noted to have erupted with the new liberal media climate in the 1990s. Greg Simons (2010) explains this as a result of sudden liberalization, whereby censorship was denounced and the media had to begin researching their own stories. Since this proved a costly way to do journalism, many media outlets and journalists therefore reverted into *zakazukha* practices (cf. Azhgikhina, 2001, p. 42). Interestingly enough, however, it is suggested that because of Russia’s and the Soviet Union’s long history of propaganda, local audiences are able to see through *zakazukha* (Mickiewicz, 2006, p. 191). This underscores that brown envelopes and related journalism practices must perpetually be analyzed from the perspective of the local context.

Proceeding to China, cash for coverage is fittingly described as “red envelope journalism”. The red envelope, or *hongbao*, is customarily given with a cash amount to workers, family and friends on occasions like new year, birthdays and so forth (Wu, 2010). Using the red envelope for journalistic enticements became commonplace in the 1990s, after which, according to Yuezhi Zhao (1998), the practice

developed from being an individual act to becoming collective; from being unorganized to becoming organized. Besides, amounts involved in Chinese journalism bribery have grown. Many media outlets supposedly operate with fixed amounts for different kinds of stories. Journalists with higher reputation receive higher sums (Huang, 2008), like in Russia (Azhgikhina, 2001).

The practice of red envelope journalism in China is habitually analyzed in light of the strong state media tradition. According to Guozhen Wang and Peng Hwa Ang (2010), the ethical problems of Chinese media practices are institutional and structural in nature rather than personal and individual. Weihua Huang (2006), however, argues that there are different attitudes among journalists when it comes to actually taking bribes. According to official Chinese policy, receiving red envelopes in journalism is considered corruption, but the offence will pass unpunished unless particularly high amounts are involved (Wu, 2010). Despite the commonness of the practice, surveys suggest that journalists unanimously view monetary incentives as unethical. Trivial freebies and paid trips, on the other hand, are regarded as acceptable. This goes for both mainland China and the more liberalized media markets of Hong Kong and Taiwan (Lo, Chan & Pan, 2005).

Neighbouring South Korea provides an interesting comparative case in that it has catered for a freer media market for a number of years, but informal monetary incentives still prevail in the media (Suk, 2009). In justifying the practice, Korean journalists are found to distinguish between bribes and gratuities ("*chonji*"), of which journalistic enticements mostly belong to the second category (Youn, 1994). Commenting on the supposedly accepted tradition of *chonji*, however, David Halvorsen (1991) rhetorically asks: "If cash gifts are justifiable, why not tell your readers?" *Chonji* received some attention in David Weaver's (1998) renowned worldwide survey of journalism profiles and attitudes, in which more than three quarters of South Korean journalists testified that the phenomenon existed in their media operations. However, less than half of them said that they accepted *chonji* themselves (Auh, Lee & Kang, 1998). Another survey study found that only 30% of Korean journalists believe bribes should never be accepted (Kang, 2005). Overall, what these data imply is that a liberalized media culture is not a guarantee for the eradication of journalistic bribery, although it has been suggested that South Korea's problems in this regard could be explained in terms of the long history

of authoritarian rule which cultivated clientelism and a corrupt underground society (Suk, 2009).

Research elsewhere in Asia suggests that brown envelope journalism is widespread and perhaps an increasing problem, for example, in Cambodia, where 84% of the respondents in a survey said bribery was the normal way of doing business (McDaniel, 2007); in the Philippines, where political campaigners have used a sizeable amount of their budgets to bribe journalists (Florentino-Hofileña, 2004); in Indonesia, where white (rather than brown) envelopes in the most extreme sense have created a "nefarious criminal subculture" (Romano, 2000, p. 157); in Thailand, where a journalist was killed in 1998 after reportedly having rejected the offer of a bribe to stop investigating a story on corruption (Stapenhurst, 2000, p. 12); and in Papua New Guinea, where a media academic observes that there has been a "dramatic rise in junkets and freebies being used as inducements to win over journalists" (quoted in Robie, 2006, p. 82).

It is pertinent at this point, however, to make a comment on the many claims that brown envelope journalism has intensified in various media societies since the 1990s. Although there may be good reasons to believe that this is the reality in various communities, evidence tends to be anecdotal and there are hardly any studies conducted on a longitudinal basis to determine the developments of brown envelope journalism over time. The impression of escalation in incentive-driven journalism may also partly be attributed to more focus on the issue, and the significant growth of media research worldwide over the past two decades. It should also be noted that if brown envelope journalism is indeed generally on the rise, it would be a paradox given that journalism communities around the world are becoming increasingly professionalized.

Experiences from Latin America testify that brown envelope journalism ought to be evaluated in light of the political system (Rockwell & Janus, 2003); and, indeed, changes in official policy are deemed to affect bribery in the media as well. In Mexico, "*chayote*" or "*la mordida*" (a bribe given to a journalist to ensure the publication of certain information) was previously institutionalized in media practice to the extent that the government itself handed out the enticement (Buckman, 1996). However, the election victory of the National Action Party in 2000 resulted in a much stricter policy against bribery, which also meant a decline in journalistic *mordidas*, according to journalists (Ramírez, 2005). Adding to this explanation of less bribery is the effect

of formal journalism education from the 1990s onwards, which led to a new generation of ethically reflective journalists entering the newsrooms (Ramírez, 2005, p. 68). This does not mean that journalistic bribery is eradicated in Mexico, however. All respondents in Ramírez' research testify that it still thrives, and a number of them propose that the main reasons for the practice are poverty and low salaries. That exactly is the most common explanation given by media workers on the African continent as well.

Brown envelope journalism in Africa: Four research perspectives

The following section suggests four areas of focus which characterize research approaches to brown envelope journalism in African media literature. The areas of focus are: (a) Research on the extent of brown envelope journalism; (b) analyses referring to the consequences of the poor economy; (c) implications of the political and societal environment; and (d) ethical and professional considerations.

a) Extent of brown envelope journalism

As earlier explicated, due to its clandestine nature, it is difficult to determine the exact levels of brown envelope journalism. However, the many ad hoc references to the phenomenon in media research necessitates some investigation of the extent and flavour of the practice. To this end, several studies have aimed at exploring the degree to which brown envelopes are common among journalists in various African media environments by means of surveys, interviews and observation methods.

Kasoma's (2007) comparative survey of 215 random journalists from Ghana and Zambia found a significant difference between the two countries. In Ghana 63% of the respondents admitted taking brown envelopes, compared to only 28% in Zambia. However, Kasoma (2007, p. 115) concludes on the basis of subsequent qualitative interviews that both figures are a "gross under-representation" of the phenomenon. The study did not detect any significant differences in categories of age, gender and type of medium. More surprisingly, the survey suggests that the more educated the journalist is, the more susceptible he or she is to accept brown envelopes. Looking more closely at the data, however, this is probably best explained by the fact that all MA degree holders in the study (N=6) came from Ghana, where brown envelopes are more accepted; while all respondents with only high school certificate (N=7) came from Zambia, where journalists generally are

more critical regarding monetary incentives. In this regard, the accompanying in-depth interviews gave the impression that more education generally meant less sympathetic attitudes towards brown envelopes (Kasoma, 2007).

A similar survey from Nigeria, in which 184 journalists from ten different media organizations in Lagos participated, testifies to the magnitude of brown envelope journalism in this region. In Nigeria 61% said they habitually receive brown envelopes on reporting assignments, while 39% rejected it (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2009). An interesting finding in the same study emerges from the response to the posed research claim that "brown envelopes encourage favourable coverage of the giving organization". As many as 74% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the claim. This echoes Chinenye Nwabueze's (2010) present study of 116 journalists in five Nigerian cities, in which 78% rejected the claim that brown envelopes affect objectivity in news coverage. Seen together, the consistent rejection of the claims in the two studies is significant. It may suggest that many Nigerian journalists are convinced that they are able to remain independent as reporters despite being subsidized by sources. It could also indicate that brown envelopes are so common that their effect is limited, or that the contribution is usually so small that it is not considered a threat to journalistic independence. The optimistic response to this question might also stem from respondents wanting to distance themselves from assertions of unethical reporting.

Focusing on Ethiopia, Berhanu Lodamo (2009) posed the question in a slightly different manner to get an idea of journalists' attitudes towards brown envelopes. To the claim "I don't mind if I were paid additional per diem and pocket money from a workshop I cover", 71% replied "agree" or "strongly agree" (the total number of respondents were 70; all came from the state media). In other words, a clear majority of these journalists were receptive of brown envelopes in one form or the other. Peter Mwesige's (2004) research among Ugandan journalists, both private and government-affiliated, revealed that 75% justified being paid by sources to facilitate the information-gathering process, while 5% justified being paid to change a story on certain occasions. It is important to note that what such surveys do not necessarily reveal is the meaning that the respondents put on a brown envelope. For example, journalists may accept a small envelope of say USD 1, but would perhaps reject a large contribution of say USD 100. Such nuances are usually not detected by questionnaire approaches.

This points to the need for supplementary qualitative research (which was indeed included in the concerned Ethiopian study).

Are there media societies in Africa which are free or almost free of brown envelope journalism? The many accounts from all regions on the continent point to the opposite; however, it is significant that there are so few references to the phenomenon in research literature concerning South Africa, even though that country (together with Nigeria) accommodates the most extensive scope of media research on the continent. The uncommonness of the practice in South Africa is insinuated in the persisting media attention of the suspension of two journalists from the *Cape Argus* newspaper in 2006. They were suspended on allegations that they had received large brown envelopes (ZAR 5,000–10,000; equals USD 700–1,400) from a PR company to promote a political candidate through media exposure (Underhill & Rossouw, 2009).

Although some media managers suggested that the exposure was only “the tip of a much, much bigger iceberg” of government interference in South African journalism (Smook, 2010), others, such as media commentator Anton Harber, maintained that “the vast amount of journalists in South Africa do not practice brown-envelope journalism” (quoted in Ross, 2010, p. 10). Similarly, African Media Barometer 2010, like the reports for earlier years, concludes that brown envelopes “are not a major issue in South Africa” (2010, p. 65). An intriguing topic for research, then, is the question of what conditions in the South African media climate make journalism practices in that country different from practices elsewhere on the continent. Possible key factors in this regard are the status of an established journalism culture, reasonable economic conditions for journalists, and self-regulation through media pluralism.

Frank Kruger adds to this observation about South Africa (2010), on the basis of his comparison of the Ugandan context with South Africa, that brown envelope journalism in the latter country persists “partly because of the nature of the extraordinarily rich Ugandan media landscape”. The paradox in the Ugandan case is that a liberal media situation does not seem to cultivate ethical journalism practice. Krüger (2010) attributes the adverse condition of media ethics in Uganda to the poor economy of the media, as he concludes that “professional standards [...] cost money”. That brings us to the second major focus area in current research on brown envelopes, whose concentration is on the economic conditions for journalists and media organizations.

b) Linking brown envelope journalism to poor pay

The overwhelmingly dominant explanation given for brown envelopes in African journalism practice is poor salary for journalists (e.g. AMDI, 2006; Berhanu, 2009; Chari, 2007; Diso, 2005; Dunn, 2010; Frère, 2008; Holtz, 2008; Kasoma, 2007, 2009; Lush, 1998; Nogara, 2009; Nworah, 2006; Mendes & Smith, 2006; Mudhai, 2007; Mupfurutsa, 1999; Myers, 2009; Olukotun, 2004a, 2006; Omenugha & Oji, 2008; Robins, 1997; Suleiman, 2002). This explanation is reasonable given the many accounts of economic misfortunes. In Cameroon (Ndangam, 2009, p. 834) and Nigeria (Adeyanju & Okwori, 2006, p. 10), for example, it is common for journalists to go unpaid for months. They therefore consider other ways of securing a reasonable income, thus moonlighting – i.e. having a second (often covert) job besides the main occupation – has become common (Mabweazara, 2010; Okunna, 1995; Oloruntola, 2007). As pointed out by many researchers, this frequently leads to conflicting interests because one of the markets where journalists can make a decent second income is in the clandestine segment of the PR industry. They may, for example, sell editorial space in their newspaper to local politicians (Frère, 2007, p. 64). Frère (2008, 2010) has widely documented the existence of such “advertorials” in the Central African media, maintaining that the practice contributes to deceiving the public because the material is falsely presented as neutral news reports. In this regard, Frère’s research, as well as other contributions, create a ground for seeing various factors together when analyzing brown envelope journalism. Poor salary, weak media, unethical reporting and uninformed audiences may be seen in conjunction with each other, together with still other factors.

That poor pay affects journalism performance is indeed implied in Kasoma’s (2007) research, in which she found a certain correlation between low salary levels and acceptance of brown envelopes among Ghanaian and Zambian journalists. Even so, other surveys indicate that raising the journalists’ salaries would not necessarily eradicate hidden monetary supplements. In Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe’s (2009) study of Nigerian journalists, only 34% agreed or strongly agreed that increase in salary would curb the brown envelope syndrome. Corroborating this, less than half (43%) of the respondents in Nwabueze’s (2010) study agree that poor remuneration is the main reason for journalists taking brown envelopes. In Kenya (and probably

elsewhere), well-paid journalists were found to take bribes, too (Mak'Ochieng, 1994). Furthermore, Berhanu Lodamo and Terje S. Skjerdal (2009) question causality explanations of brown envelope journalism by drawing attention to the fact that informal monetary incentives largely disappeared in European and North American journalism in the early 20th century despite media workers continuing to earn very little. In light of this, other explanations are called for besides the indicator of low salary levels.

c) Political and societal impact

Research literature habitually evaluates brown envelope practices in light of conditions in the extended society. The contention is, in the words of Muhammad Jameel Yusha'u (2009), that journalism "cannot be practiced outside the culture and political system in which it is practiced" (p. 167). Thus, in the case of Nigeria, which has a strong tradition of clientelism, journalism practice adopts a habit of nurturing ties between reporters and sources to the extent that investigative reporting will be subdued because the reporter and the source have a mutual interest in not exposing the scandal; the reporter for financial reasons, and the source for status reasons (Yusha'u, 2009; cf. Adesoji, 2010). "Settlement" has subsequently become a familiar term in the Nigerian society to refer to various types of informal compensation, including media incentives (Adeyemi, 1995). Ndangam's (2006, 2009) research on Cameroon similarly suggests that one must take into consideration the country's patronage system and culture in order to understand *gombo* (brown envelope) practices.

The patronage system, where the giver (patron) expects certain services in return from the receiver (journalist), has become institutionalized in Cameroonian journalism since the mid-1990s. This happens in light of societal developments, as "the prevalence of *gombo* is reflective of the broader corrupt social and political system in the country" (Ndangam, 2006, p. 197). A societal condition that has a bearing on the frequency of brown envelopes is for example the growth of NGOs (Ndangam, 2006), or changes in the political system, as demonstrated by the introduction of Nigeria's Second Republic (1979–83), which led to a proliferation of journalistic bribes (Uko, 2004). It is also commonly suggested that the degree of commonness of bribery elsewhere in society eventually affects journalism activity; in other words, corruption fuels corruption (Omenugha & Oji, 2008). Other researchers emphasize that weak media societies – defined as

environments with few competing media outlets, lack of independent media, a low sense of professionalism, and a lack of personal integrity and ethics – tend to attract journalistic bribery and media manipulation (Chalk, 1997). To this end, it has been demonstrated by means of a global cross-national analysis that “a free press is bad news for corruption” (Brunetti & Weder, 2003).

Societal, if not cultural, explanations are also Hasty’s (2005b, 2005c) preferred thesis in her analysis of *solì* in Ghanaian journalism. She points to the ambiguity of the practice, illustrated for example by journalists in the private press investigating corruption in the government while at the same time receiving *solì* from sources. Furthermore, Hasty (2005c) suggests that certain types of corruption involves a “self-consciously local attempt to repersonalize and re-enchant the relation between civil society and the state” with the view to “resist certain disempowering aspects of liberalization and globalization” (p. 366). This and other analyses contribute to understanding media corruption in light of cultural and societal realities; however, they do not quite explain the variations between media outlets and individual journalists in the attitude towards brown envelopes even within the same media environment.

d) Ethical and professional considerations

Freebies and brown envelopes are, unsurprisingly, commonly condemned by media ethicists and journalism textbooks. Illustratively, the very first rule in Joseph Igbiniedion’s (1996) “Steps to professional ethical conduct” for African journalists concerns “Monetary and material reward” (p. 65). At least 17 national codes of ethics for journalists on the continent warn against journalistic bribery (codes of Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somaliland, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia). Reinforcement of the codes, however, tends to be a major challenge (Ndangam, 2006, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Toure, 1996). The discrepancy between ideal standards and actual practice attracts different explanations. Several researchers emphasize that there are differences between individual journalists in their attitudes towards brown envelopes (Berhanu & Skjerdal, 2009; Hunter-Gault, 2006, p. 138; MSI, 2009, p. 218). Conducting research in Ghanaian newsrooms, Africanus Diedong (2008) observes that there is a large degree of freedom for the individual journalist to decide which ethical standards to follow. Some journalists, like the late Carlos Cardoso of

Mozambique (Rønning, 2009a, p. 251), attain strong reputation for not taking bribes. Frère (2007, p. 165) reports an incident from Chad where journalists were pressured by government officials to take envelopes with generous amounts of cash with the purpose of influencing media reports, but the reporters declined on ethical grounds. Adding to these accounts of ethical variations between individual journalists, there is also documentation of substantial differences in the standards between different news organizations. Journalists in foreign-funded media organizations in Central Africa are deemed to be the only ones consistently rejecting bribes in this region, which may be attributed to the fact that these organizations pay decent salaries (Frère, 2010). Some media outlets in Nigeria are infamous for letting their reporters live by the financial contributions offered by sources, such as *This Day* (Yúsha'u, 2009), while others, such as *The News* (Olukotun, 2006), are renowned for an uncompromising attitude towards any financial contribution that could put their journalistic integrity into question. In this regard, many researchers have pointed to the inconsistency of media organizations reporting on corruption when their journalists accept informal incentives from sources (Adesoji, 2006; Armao, 2010; Byrne, Arnold & Nagano, 2010; Jibo & Okoosi-Simbine, 2003; Ruzindana, 1997; Rønning, 2009b; Sowunmi et al., 2010; Walulya, 2008). Unethical reporting practice is eventually a sign of unprofessionalism, which in turn is interlinked with the inescapable social and political context (Nyamnjoh, 2001). Nyamnjoh (2005) thus argues that it is "difficult even for the most committed professionals to excel ethically in the African context" (p. 65).

In discussing brown envelope practices as an ethical issue, two main positions may be identified in the research tradition: one preferring to assess the phenomenon in light of universal ethics, thus condemning the practice (as in most of the references above); the other seeing it from the perspective of the peculiar norms of African society, thus being open for alternative judgments and explanations. The latter position inclines to take the position that Western journalism ethics are not useful in African media work for various reasons. One contention is that rejecting gifts and incentives collides with the value of African hospitality or solidarity (Adio, 2001; Hasty, 2005c), or simply contradicts the very basics of survival for media workers which is to make ends meet. Another rationale takes note of the various contradictions when introducing Western media ideals to African conditions. To this end, Ndangam (2006) suggests that a pluralistic

media society associated with liberal democracy paradoxically “thrives and sustains itself through an institutionalized culture of bribes, self-censorship and compromised integrity” (p. 838) in the *gombo*-infected Cameroonian media market. Others argue that the peculiar context of African media practice calls for a set of ethics that are essentially different from Western (“universal”) ethics.

Maintaining that global journalism values are rendered ineffective and obsolete in Africa, Hilda Mupfurutsa (1999) calls for “developing and adopting an African ethic that is best suited to African journalism” (p. 116). Corroborating this, Agbanu (2009) suggests “a new brand of journalism based on an indigenous ethical standard and news judgement that will take into cognisance the various factors that make the attainment of Western ethical standard a mirage” (p. 13). These requests could be said to resonate the rationale behind Francis Kasoma’s (1996) proposed “Afriethics” for African journalists, comprising an ethical system which is essentially communal-oriented in contrast to the supposedly individualistic-minded professional norms of the North. Viewing this model in light of *gombo* journalism in Cameroon, however, Ndangam (2006) finds that Afriethics is not quite suitable to explain the practice, although *gombo* represents “collective notions of personhood with responsibilities to society” (p. 179) as well as obligations to the journalistic community. Researchers thus differ both in their view of whether African journalism needs a reasoning around professional ethics that departs from established Western ideas and whether certain brown envelope practices may be justified within this alternative system.

Future research

This review article has identified four loci of research which characterize current scholarly contributions on brown envelopes in African journalism, focusing on (a) the extent and nature of the practice; (b) the link between poor economy and brown envelope journalism; (c) the impact of political and social conditions; and (d) ethical and professional considerations. While all areas deserve more focus in the research, I will conclude this review by suggesting some less explored areas that could contribute to the scholarship in the future. First, pertaining to the extent and nature of brown envelope practices, there is need for research with longitudinal perspectives. As noted earlier, frequent claims are made about the supposed proliferation of brown envelopes in various societies, but few studies

actually verify the developments over time. More systematic research – both survey style, observation and interviews with media professionals – could substantiate (or negate) these claims. Seen together with other societal and political developments in specific societies, such information has the potential to elaborate on the relationship between journalism conduct and changes in the socio-political situation. Secondly, with regard to methodology, anthropological approaches have still got great prospects within this topic area. A laborious undertaking, anthropological methods have not been much used in the analysis of brown envelope practices apart from Hasty's (1999, 2005) contribution; however, given the clandestine nature of the phenomenon, it is all the more important that researchers engage in vigorous enquiry by stepping into reporting sites and newsrooms with the intention to extricate the "anatomy" (Pankin, 1999) of brown envelope journalism. As in much other research, the most interesting insight into unethical journalism practice would stem from research that is also the most demanding in its methodological approach.

Thirdly and lastly, one should encourage further discussion of the relationship between "unwanted" journalism practices and philosophies of the local society. Such discussion is partly stimulated by the previously mentioned perpetual discrepancy between "universally" acknowledged professional norms and local practices (Mfumbusa, 2008), as well as by the challenges induced by an increasingly globalized media environment which may or may not lead to greater consensus on professional norms and behavior across countries and journalism fraternities. The question of ethical foundation must ultimately be the focus of such research. With this in mind, studying a seemingly narrow phenomenon like brown envelope journalism is intriguing because it sheds light on a number of areas simultaneously – including issues of ethical reasoning, professional self-perception, local vs. global journalism culture, and the question of socio-political influence on media activity.

(Footnotes)

¹ 'Tory MPs were paid to plant questions says Harrods chief
The Guardian, 20 October 1994.

²The previously quoted study of Madrid journalists, on the other hand, claims to see a "significant gender difference" in the acceptance of tickets, passes and free services. 82% of women journalists were receptive of such gifts, compared to only 72% of men (Damas &

Barber, 2009, p. 77). It is debatable, however, to what extent the difference is actually significant.

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TERJE S. SKJERDAL

Business journalism ethics in Africa: A comparative study of newsrooms in South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe

By **Admire Mare** and **Robert Brand**

Abstract

This article aims to provide an insight into the state of business journalism ethics in Africa, firstly, through an examination of newsroom ethical policies and secondly through an exploration of the way in which African business journalists negotiate ethical decision-making in their day-to-day news processing practices. The researchers employed document analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine *Business Day* in South Africa, *Business Daily* in Kenya and *Financial Gazette* in Zimbabwe. In these African countries, business journalism has been steadily growing since the late 1960s, fuelled by the presence of robust stock exchanges and increasing debate on the issue of business journalism ethics. The research found that while all three newspapers had clear ethical guidelines in place and editors and journalists recognized the importance of ethical behavior, ethical practice did not always follow. This is largely due to the precarious economic basis of news organizations, lack of effective monitoring, and a pervasive culture of unethical behavior at some sites.

Key words: Business journalism, ethics, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe

Introduction:

Conceptualising business journalism

Economics, business and financial journalism are “closely related forms of journalistic endeavour and the terms are often used interchangeably, even though there are distinctions between them” (Kariithi, 2003). This study uses the term “economics journalism” to refer to journalism about business, financial markets and economics, and uses the terms “business journalism”, “economics journalism” and

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“financial journalism” interchangeably. Economics has been identified as an important area of knowledge acquisition for effective participation in modern democracies (Mogweku, 2005). Due to the importance of economics in modern societies, business news derives from, and is related to, nearly all aspects of our lives. Not only does business journalism contribute to public knowledge about the economy (Gavin, 1998), but the financial media also play a crucial role in spreading economic ideas and ideologies and setting the parameters of debate about economic issues (Brand, 2010). Furthermore, economics journalism serves a crucial informative role in the market mechanism, with the ability to move the prices of securities such as stocks and bonds (Brand, 2010). Together, those factors make economics journalism one of the most important areas of journalism in many modern media organizations (Parker, 1997).

In most of Africa, the roots of economics journalism can be traced to the continent’s protracted economic crises of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the failure of World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment programs (SAPs) thrust economics into the public limelight in many African countries (Kareithi & Kariithi, 2005, p. xi). As African nations embarked on their political transitions, the still fledgling economics media kept pace, constantly advocating through their coverage the need to open up both the political and economic systems (Kariithi, 2002). African journalists have become ever more aware of their pressing responsibility to regularly monitor and scrutinize the government to ensure that its performance matches its promise (Kareithi & Kariithi, 2005, p. 120). Nowhere is that scrutiny more critical than in the management of the nation’s economic and financial affairs. However, few African media organizations can show a track record of substantive economics reporting, given that economics reporting is generally a recent addition to the regular newsroom beats in much of Africa (Kareithi & Kariithi, 2005). Furthermore, an examination of African economics journalism cannot be complete without a discussion of the economics of journalism in Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2005). Many media organizations operate on shoe-string budgets, and journalists are poorly remunerated which accounts for the underdeveloped state of business journalism as a genre in Africa.

Business journalism ethics

The recent crisis in global banking, markets and economies has reminded us all of the importance of financial and business journalism

ethics (Tambini, 2009, p. 2). It has brought into sharp focus the intricate relationship between business journalism and the operations and behavior of financial and economic markets, and also the need for ethical journalism within the genre. The notion of business journalism ethics, like general media ethics, arguably has an Anglo-American ancestry (Ward, 2006; Schudson, 2001). Underpinning the notion of journalism ethics is the belief that the media have a role to play in society. As a result, debates on journalism ethics and self-regulation are often informed by a normative approach, centred on the social responsibilities of the media.

Business journalism ethics is located within the broader ambit of media ethics. Thinking around business journalism ethics therefore needs to be underpinned by a philosophy of the role of business journalism in society, including the relationship between business journalism and the market economy. Tambini (2009) has developed a conceptual model for understanding the rights and duties of financial journalists. At the core of this model is the understanding that the financial media, in addition to their informational and monitoring role, have the power to influence the prices of individual securities such as bonds and stocks. Whereas the broader discourse of journalism ethics focuses on the relationship between society and the media, business journalism ethics is, in addition, concerned with the relationship between news and markets.

Business journalism ethics addresses questions such as: What responsibility do journalists have when their stories can have direct impacts on market behavior? Should the ethical and professional standards of business and financial journalists differ from those of others such as political journalists? Should journalists avoid “panicking the markets”? What about direct conflicts of interest? How can journalists deal with conflicting responsibilities in relation to their various overlapping constituencies – to readers, investors, to corporations, to governments and to national economies? What happens when journalists themselves, or those close to them, hold shares in a company?

There is a large body of research on media accountability and professionalism globally and in some African countries which argues that the quality of media content is deteriorating (Chari, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Mfumbusa, 2008). A spike in ethical transgressions comes at a time when regulation of the media by the state has become a discredited practice (Duncan, 2010), yet many media systems

continue to grapple with the question of who media organizations should be accountable to. In Africa, governments have responded, in some cases, by tightening media laws and limiting freedom of expression and speech in the process. The Zimbabwean and Kenyan governments are examples of this. It must be noted that Zimbabwe has since 2000 experienced a crisis which has been described as resting on the political, economic and social tripod with symptoms being bad governance, media strangulation, economic meltdown, disputed land reforms, hyperinflation, exodus of professionals and outbreak of waterborne diseases (Mlambo, 2006, p. 16).

On the other hand, Kenya hit international headlines in December 2007 following the disputed elections which resulted in the death of thousands of civilians. Zimbabwe has both a statutory (Zimbabwe Media Commission, ZMC; formerly Media and Information Commission, MIC) and self-regulatory (Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe) mechanisms. South Africa, on the other hand, has a transparent, voluntary system of self-regulation administered by a Press Council which has a binding code of ethics (Krüger, 2009). In the case of Kenya, the voluntary regulatory body was replaced by the official Media Council of Kenya in 2007. Kenya's statutory regulatory body has a code of ethics which the media are not bound to follow. In spite of the existence of the statutory body, concerns have been raised regarding the conduct of the Kenyan press and their adherence to the code of ethics (Mudhai, 2007). All three countries have had notable debates as regards media accountability systems. Most notably in South Africa, where the ANC government has proposed the establishment of the Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT) meant to replace the South African Press Council. Politicians in the three countries have used more or less similar arguments to justify the necessity of statutory media regulation, chief among them, the perceived ethical transgressions by media practitioners and "toothless" penal system. In Kenya, the referendum on the new constitution held in August 2010 promised a different media regulation system.

Breaches of business journalism ethics are well-documented in Europe and the United States of America. Examples are the "City slickers" case in the United Kingdom, where business columnists at the *Daily Mirror* were found guilty of "ramping", or buying shares and boosting their value through favorable reporting (Tambini, 2010). In America, a *Wall Street Journal* business writer, Foster Winans, was

convicted of securities fraud after using inside information to profit from share trading (Newman, 1996). It is unlikely that African business journalists would be immune to these kinds of ethical transgressions. However, although the literature records numerous cases of breaches of general journalism ethics (see, for example, Chari, 2007; Kasoma, 1996; Ndangam, 2006) breaches of business journalism ethics have not been systematically documented.

One case of “brown envelope” – bribery – has been reported in South Africa, when a reporter at the *Cape Argus* newspaper admitted receiving money from a politician in return for negative coverage of his political opponents. But other, more sophisticated forms of influencing journalists also exist, such as the payment of a fee to CNBC Africa, the South African-based financial television channel, by the Gauteng provincial government in return for “preferential and regular programming and content slots to the Gauteng provincial government” (Steyn, 2010). As Harber (2010) points out: “The path to brown envelopes is strewn with gifts and freebies. Hand-outs to journalists are commonplace, and only a few media institutions keep tight rules and practices on how to deal with them.” What, then, are those rules, and how are they institutionalized?

Codes of ethics are at the core of media regulation, as they define the standards that are expected of the media in their reporting (Duncan, 2010). A code of ethics is a document that sets out guidelines aimed at proscribing certain types of conduct deemed unethical, and identifying other types of conduct as being ethical (Retief, 2002). Codes act as a stock of knowledge of what constitutes common business news standards. On the one hand, it allows the public to know what behavior to expect from journalists and further know the standards against which to measure their performance (Duncan, 2010). Professional norms of journalists are of two types; technical norms which deal with news gathering and reporting, and ethical norms which embrace the newsman’s obligations to the craft and include such ideals as responsibility, impartiality, accuracy, fair play and objectivity (Breed, 1955, p. 108). Codes can be either statutory or non-statutory, depending on the context in which it is used. For instance, in South Africa, the Broadcasting Code has legal force whereas the Press Code does not; in countries such as Zimbabwe and Kenya, journalism codes of ethics are enforced by statutory or professional bodies and voluntary membership tribunals such as the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe. The existence of codes of ethics at media organizations,

however, suggests more about the aspirations of journalists or their employers or regulators than about the actual practice of journalists.

Research methods

The objective of this research is twofold: to compare the policies – in the form of ethics codes – governing ethics at the three subject newspapers; and secondly, to probe how these are operationalized by editors and journalists. The choice of *Business Day*, *Financial Gazette* and *Business Daily* was determined by the fact that all the news organizations engage in specialized business reporting, operate in countries with vibrant stock exchanges and are market leaders in terms of readership figures in their respective countries.

A document analysis was carried out to identify and compare salient policy features, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with business editors and journalists to examine how journalists negotiate ethical concerns and guidelines in their everyday practice. The business news editors of the *Business Day* in South Africa, the *Financial Gazette* in Zimbabwe, and the *Business Daily* in Kenya were interviewed, as well as three business journalists from each newsroom based on an availability sampling technique. A total of nine journalists were asked to answer a set of related questions about business journalism ethics, causes of ethical transgressions and monitoring and enforcement of codes of ethics within newsroom contexts. Interviews in Kenya were carried out face-to-face, while those in South Africa were conducted by telephone and in Zimbabwe by a combination of telephone and e-mail. Interviewees were promised anonymity in the belief that that would allow them to respond more freely. The interviews enabled the researchers to complement information obtained from the document analysis with journalists' own experiences of and perceptions arising from putting those ethical guidelines into practice.

Findings and discussion

Only one of the newspapers, Kenya's *Business Daily*, has its own code of ethics, which addresses pertinent business journalistic moral dilemmas. The *Financial Gazette* of Zimbabwe does not have its own code, but relies on the industry-wide code subscribed to by the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe in conjunction with the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists. South Africa's *Business Day* subscribes to a group code of ethics – the BDFM code of ethics – which applies to all the company's publications, and which focuses on general as well as business journalism.

A range of themes recurred in the three codes of ethics, and they referred to similar journalistic responsibilities and duties, corroborating Limor's (2006, p. 168) observation that journalistic codes the world over display "remarkable similarities in the ideas, or standards of conduct and the basic tenets which are advocated". Common principles among the three codes include: the importance of accuracy; the duty to refuse bribes; avoidance of plagiarism; the obligation to honor confidentiality of sources; respect for people's right to privacy; the imperative to avoid conflicts of interest; fairness in news gathering processes; integrity of the source and the journalist; the primacy of freedom of expression and comment; and the duty to correct mistakes. While these principles apply to journalism in general, this article analyzes and compares the treatment in the codes of those principles which have a particular relevance for business journalism. They are: accuracy/truthfulness, the duty to refuse bribes, avoiding conflicts of interest, and resisting pressure from advertizers or sources of information. Although at the general level, the three codes are similar, on the level of individual principles there are qualitative differences. For example, although both *Business Day's* and *Business Daily's* codes contain sections on conflicts of interest, the former focuses on acceptance of gifts and the latter on share ownership by journalists.

Accuracy

The three codes are remarkably similar in the way they address business journalists' fundamental obligation to be truthful and report the news accurately, and what should be done in the event of inaccurate reporting. There is a clear recognition of the importance of accuracy in business journalism, where news can have an immediate impact on markets by moving the prices of securities. All three codes also recognize the importance of fairness in reporting, and include the responsibility to correct mistakes promptly. *Business Daily's* code of conduct and ethics states the following with regard to accuracy: The fundamental objective of a journalist is to report fairly, accurately and without bias on matters of public interest. All sides of a story should be reported. It is important to obtain comments from anyone mentioned in an unfavorable context. Whenever it is recognized that an inaccurate, misleading or distorted report has been published, it should be corrected promptly. Corrections should report the correct information and not restate the error except when clarity demands.

(Code of conduct, *Business Daily*, Kenya)The *Financial Gazette's* code of ethics echoes the above sentiments:

Media practitioners and media institutions must report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty and must take all reasonable steps to ensure that they disseminate accurate information and that they depict events fairly and without distortions. [...] Before a media institution publishes a report, the reporter and the editor must ensure that all the steps that a reasonable, competent media practitioner would take to check its accuracy have in fact been taken. (Code of ethics, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe).

Business Day's code operationalizes the quest for accuracy and fairness as follows:

Take every possible step to ensure that both praise and criticism are backed up by knowledgeable, independent sources, ensure that anyone who is criticised is given an opportunity to respond, make an active attempt to seek out and highlight the independent view, and written editorial policy for each publication that is distributed to all employees. (Code of ethics, BDFM, South Africa).

It is clear that the codes regard accuracy, honesty and fairness as foundational journalistic issues, and underscore the need to ensure fair and balanced reports of events. Distortion of information by exaggeration, by giving only one side of a story, by placing improper emphasis on one aspect of a story, by reporting the facts out of the context in which they occurred or by suppressing relevant available facts are marked as ethical violations. *Business Day's* code further recognizes the importance of accuracy and truthfulness in the particular role played by the financial press in the market system, and the importance of ethical conduct for the credibility of the newspaper:

As journalists working for the financial press in particular, we have to be unusually conscious of these ethical questions because our reports can dramatically affect investor sentiment. Journalists who work for the financial press make decisions daily which can affect thousands of employees and investors. In short, dishonest journalism or deceitful journalists can do immense harm to the publication, undermining its credibility and, ultimately, driving away readers and advertisers. (Code of ethics, BDFM, South Africa)

Bribery

Bribery of journalists has become ubiquitous in some African countries (Ndangam, 2006; Chari, 2007), and business journalists are not immune to temptation. It was clear that all three codes consider bribery as a threat to journalistic integrity which compromises the credibility of the media organization. The codes also recognize that the corrupting effect of bribery does not depend on a *quid pro quo* by the journalist, but that a gift or “freebie” may also compromise the independence and integrity of a journalist. The Nation Media Group code of ethics exemplifies the zero-tolerance approach to bribery:

Gifts, bribes, brown envelopes, favours, free travel, free meals or drinks, special treatment or privileges can compromise the integrity of journalists, editors and their employers. Journalists, editors and their employers should conduct themselves in a manner that protects them from conflicts of interest, real or apparent. (Code of ethics, Nation Media Group, Kenya).

This extract reflects that the organization would like its business journalists not only to avoid conflicts of interest but also the appearances of such conflicts. All situations capable of creating undue familiarity are expected to be avoided or handled cautiously. The BDFM code of ethics calls upon business journalists to desist from accepting gifts and bribes. It cautions:

BDFM employees should not accept gifts from companies, sources, suppliers or customers in excess of R200 [USD30]. All gifts of whatever value should be declared to the editor or his/her representative and the recipients are encouraged to hand them over to the editor/representative for the annual Christmas raffle. (Code of ethics, BDFM, South Africa)

On direct bribery – where a *quid pro quo* is expected – the BDFM code states: “Journalists should never undertake to publish or not publish any material in exchange for favours of any description.” It also includes a reference to a ubiquitous feature of South African journalism; corporate-sponsored travel.

Journalists must under no circumstances commit the paper to publishing a story about a company or other organisation in return for a trip. Any story based on a sponsored journey must be as balanced and well-researched as any story written in the newsroom. As with

any other story, anyone taking a trip should make a point of seeking out opinions other than those of the sponsor, e.g. competitors, analysts, other governments. Paid accommodation and transport while on assignment may be accepted on the sole criterion of whether it benefits the publication. All invitations must be routed in writing through the editor or whoever the editor delegates. (Code of ethics, BDFM, South Africa).

Financial Gazette's code is also explicit about bribery: "Media practitioners [...] must not publish or suppress a report or omit or alter vital facts in that report in return for payment of money or for any other gift or reward."

Conflicts of interest

Two of the codes – those applying at the *Business Daily* and the *Business Day* – include rules regulating coverage of companies in which the journalist owns shares. Such rules are a near-universal feature of business journalism ethics codes in the Anglo-American tradition (Tambini, 2010), and are instituted in addition to legislative measures designed to prevent insider trading or market manipulation. However, while recognizing the need to regulate share ownership by business journalists, ethics codes deal with the issue differently. Some require share ownership to be disclosed to editors or to readers, while others prohibit journalists from owning shares in companies they cover. The *Business Daily* code requires business journalists not to write about shares in whose performance they know that they, their close families or associates have significant financial interest, without disclosing the interest to the editor:

Even where the law does not prohibit it, journalists should not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication nor should they pass that information to others. They should not buy or sell, either directly or through nominees or agents, shares or securities about which they intend to write in the near future. Utmost care should be exercised by journalists in giving any interpretation to financial information. (Code of conduct, *Business Daily*, Kenya).

Business Day's code of ethics, on the other hand, does not restrict share ownership by its journalists, but requires disclosure: "Where a journalist has an interest and/or is a player in an industry, he/she should request the newsdesk to disclose this at the bottom of the article, or to assign the story elsewhere."

Another potential conflict of interest occurs where journalists do paid work outside their news organization, known as 'moonlighting'. The *Business Daily* and *Business Day's* codes of ethics address the potential conflict of interest created by accepting outside work. *Business Day's* code states: "All freelance work conducted must be cleared first with the editor or his representative."

Business Day's code also recognizes the potential of conflicts of interest arising out of membership of civic, political or lobby organizations:

Journalists should avoid any activity that could impair their impartiality. Journalists' civic duty or political beliefs could very well entail support for or membership of an organisation or a movement. But if the organisation forms part of their reporting responsibility, they should not accept payment from the organisation concerned or hold an executive post. Where potential conflict exists journalists have a duty to inform the editor. Failure to do so will be construed as a breach of this code. (Code of ethics, BDFM, South Africa)

Pressure or influence

Pressure refers to any force or influence which causes a journalist to feel strongly compelled to act in a manner desirable to the source of the force or influence (Oloruntola, 2007). The three codes address this ethical dilemma in different ways. The *Financial Gazette's* code cautions journalists to be wary of advertizers' and politicians' influence on news reports:

Media practitioners and media institutions must not suppress or distort information which the public has a right to know because of pressure or influence from their advertisers or others who have a corporate, political or advocacy interest in the media institution concerned. (Code of ethics, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe)

The *Business Daily's* policy guidelines specifically address advertisements and public relations material use:

All stories based on PR material so used will, however, be re-written in the news style of the Group, any self indulgence removed and its inclusions judged solely on its news value. Special care will be taken, however, not to alter or misrepresent the essential factual content of the PR communication. The media will not allow any advertisement or commercial that is contrary to these ethical principles. (Code of conduct, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

Despite small differences evident in the three codes, it is clear that pressure is acknowledged as impairing journalists' judgement and compromising objectivity. Pressure is conceptualized as anything exerting influence from politicians, to public relations firms and advertizers. Journalists are called upon to maintain their credibility by ensuring the "so what" question is addressed in all news articles involving powerful social actors such as advocacy or political groups.

Negotiating ethical issues in business journalism practice

Financial journalists operate within a framework of rights and duties which institutionalizes a particular ethical approach defined by their role in the market system (Tambini, 2010). Business news can have direct and powerful impacts on markets (Thompson, 2000; Roush, 2006; Tambini, 2010). This raises fundamental questions about the responsibilities of financial journalists. Business journalists are caught up in an intercalary position which on the one hand requires them to play a watchdog role in the system of corporate governance; and on the other, to be ethical when dealing with the reflexive nature of their relationship with markets (Tambini, 2010, p. 162). Journalists interviewed appreciated the centrality of business journalism ethics in this position. A reporter at the *Financial Gazette* put it thus: "We as business journalists have enormous power to influence business decisions [...]. Hence ethicality is of paramount importance."

There was consensus among interviewees about the importance of codes of ethics in relation to the coverage of markets and business corporations. Business journalists interviewed also tended to agree on the key challenges they face, although they were less unanimous on how to respond to them. Some of these will be discussed in turn.

Pressure from advertizers

During interviews with business journalists, pressures from or on behalf of advertizers were cited as major impediments to ethical news production. Pressure may come from external sources, but often also from within the newspaper management. This was evident to a greater extent at the newspapers in Zimbabwe and Kenya than in South

Africa:

In the case of Nation Media Group, bribery cases have been rare, but threats to cut advertising if the story is not toned down are rampant. There are companies which, if they threaten to pull out

advertisements, even editors are forced to kill stories in order to protect the lifeline of media companies. (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya).

Advertising is a major artery in the existence of media organisations hence 'those who pay the piper call the tune'. At times, you can get a call from the CEO or editor to kill certain stories in order to safeguard advertising revenue. The message is: Don't endanger the flow of the stream lest we are not able to pay you at the end of the month. (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

I was once faced by a predicament, where I was supposed to kill a story because it was stepping on the toes of one of our major advertisers. In fact, the boss phoned me to drop the story and focus on other newsworthy stories. (Business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe)

Pressure from news sources

News sources exert control through selective granting or denying of access, the threat or actuality of lawsuits, or by relying on personal relationships with media executives who have the power to shape the news agenda. Interviews with business journalists in the three media organizations confirm that businesses exert enormous pressure on the business press, partly due to the "embedded" nature of the relationship between the business press and the market. Pressure from news sources appeared to be more pronounced in Zimbabwe and Kenya than in South Africa, although the phenomenon was cited by journalists at all three sites:

At times you meet cunning CEOs who try by all means to push their corporate news angles. In this work of ours if you refuse to budge then he or she will approach the next guy on the line. He can be strategically located above you, which means if he manages to influence that one you have no choice but to run the story. The whole process of news production is infested with power dynamics which CEOs know how to manipulate to their advantage. Some CEOs bargain at the top level with your CEO before you are assigned to cover the story. Most of these executives have honed these social capital and networks over the years, hence they can always scratch each other's backs without you understanding the dynamics of source cultivation. They won't endanger those social relations for anything". (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

Insider trading

Most codes of ethics on business journalism, especially in America and Europe, include strict rules to prevent insider trading (Tambini, 2010). Insider trading refers to the practice of using information that is not in the public domain to invest in securities such as shares for individual gain. In many countries, including South Africa, this is against the law and in breach of stock exchange regulations. Respondents in this study stated that insider trading cannot be ruled out, even where ethics codes have rules on share ownership and trading by journalists. An interesting case is that of the *Business Daily* in Kenya, which is situated in the same building six floors above the Nairobi Stock Exchange. Journalists are well aware of the potential for unethical behaviour created by this close physical proximity with the market they cover:

We have not received any complaints thus far. However, I can say there is no concerted programme group-wide to monitor business journalists. I must hasten to say that not receiving complaints doesn't mean it's not happening and will not happen in future. (Business Editor, *Business Daily*). The Nairobi Stock Exchange is located in the first floor of the Nation Media Centre. We know the results ahead of everyone because we are strategically located close to the stock exchange and also due to our journalistic privileges. (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

Reporting on companies in which the journalist owns shares was seen as a conflict of interest, though respondents differed on how newspapers should deal with the issue:

I know of some business editors who own shares on the local bourse and they still write editorials and stories on the performance of those counters. It defeats the whole notion of conflict of interest, but business journalism is still underdeveloped in this country and the issue of ethics exists in theory but not in practice. (Business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe).

Market manipulation

Market manipulation, also known as “share ramping”, is one of the strands of business journalism ethics which is not specifically addressed in the codes of ethics from the three media organizations. Financial journalists can have impact on share prices through recommendation and thereby profit by selling shares on in the short term. During interviews with business journalists, it was clear that most of them are

aware about the influence financial media can have on the prices of stocks and bonds:

Business information is very sensitive and valuable hence we as business reporters are at an advantage to influence the market. (Business reporter, *Business Day*, South Africa). We cannot run away from the fact that business journalism is a very sensitive genre, where the impacts of news reports are far too great. One story can turn the whole business organisation up-side-down in a split of hours. It requires rigorous balance, more caution and higher level of ethical judgment and integrity". (Business editor, *Business Daily*, Kenya).

Conflicts of interest

While all genres of journalism face issues of conflict of interest, research has shown that such issues are more pronounced in relation to financial journalism (see Banda, 2010; Rumney, 2009; Tambini, 2010). The intercalary position of a business journalist in relation to the interest of the reader, investor or market makes such conflicts unavoidable. On the one hand, business journalists see themselves as information providers for market participants; and on the other hand they have a watchdog role over those very market participants (Tambini, 2010). One such conflict, already mentioned, concerns ownership of shares of companies which a journalist covers, a situation which may nurture the temptation to withhold information that could hurt the company or publish information that favors it, or engage in profit-driven market manipulation (Tambini, 2010).

While respondents were aware of the potential conflict of interest created by owning shares, some thought it did not constitute a serious problem. The economic condition of journalists in Africa was cited as a justification for investing in shares and profiting from inside information: "The paradox which business journalists are faced with everyday is whether to give market intelligence to others to benefit while I remain mired in poverty?" (business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya). Other respondents, however, believed that the poor salaries of journalists eliminated the possibility of market manipulation and insider trading: "Most of us have access to market intelligence in terms of the local stock exchange, but lack the capital base to use that information to our advantage" (business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe).

Moonlighting, which is another ethical dilemma which falls under conflict of interest, was also identified as rampant in Zimbabwe and Kenya. Some respondents justified moonlighting, or outside work, by referring to their poor salaries, even though they recognized the potential for conflicts of interest. In Zimbabwe, a respondent said, taking two jobs was now the norm among journalists. He imparts: "Freelancing is more lucrative than real work. In fact, freelancing pays per story while full-time work pays a low flat salary which means the more stories one files the better the returns" (business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe).

Disclosure

A related question is whether journalists should disclose their financial interests, for example ownership of shares in a company they cover. Most business journalism ethics codes, if not banning share ownership outright, require that journalists disclose their interests either to editors or, in some cases, to their audience (Tambini, 2010). In the case of codes of ethics analyzed for this study, journalists are expected to declare only gifts received at corporate functions. Most codes are silent on the issue of share ownership except the *Business Daily*, which bans share ownership. *Business Day* requires journalists to disclose share ownership to readers at the bottom of an article. Respondents felt, however, that disclosure rules would be ineffective because they are difficult to police:

How do we ensure business journalists are not trading in shares via their spouses or families? Share ownership is a private issue which is difficult to police. Investment decisions are private issues where disclosure is difficult to inculcate. (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

At the *Financial Gazette*, a respondent stated that disclosure rules were not policed because executives simply assumed journalists' relative poverty precluded share ownership: "Disclosure of share ownership is not an issue at all. No one bothers you because they assume you cannot afford shares in the first place" (business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe).

'Brown envelopes' and other gifts

The causes for corruption in the newsrooms are varied and multiple. In most cases where it occurs, corruption is fuelled by poor working

conditions, greed, materialism and hunger for media coverage by business enterprises (Ndangam, 2006). In Zimbabwe and Kenya, some respondents in this study claimed personal knowledge of corrupt practices:

Most Zimbabwean journalists make a living through getting kickbacks from news sources whom they interact with on a day-to-day basis. (Business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe). In Kenya, inducements take place in times where information is being hidden and malpractices are being concealed. In cases, where a business organisation is trying to hide something, then you expect brown envelope journalism to be the last resort. (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

In South Africa, one respondent, while not having personal knowledge of bribery, did not rule it out: "Not hearing about complaints related to ethical violations does not mean nothing is happening. [...] It may be happening behind our backs."

Involvement in bribery appears to be driven by economic circumstances and supported by a pervasive culture of unethical behavior, even amongst senior executives:

I cannot afford to be ethical, when everyone including our bosses are accepting sponsored trips abroad and kick-backs in order to accommodate certain stories in the newspaper. At the end of the day, someone would say who would I harm if I accept a bribe for a story that is truthful? (Business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe).

To tell you the truth, journalism in Zimbabwe does not pay adequately to live comfortably despite the status associated with journalism. We are seen as celebrities by our readers but the truth is that we still have bills to pay like anyone else, we have families to take care of and needs to meet. Yet we earn peanuts. (Business reporter, *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe)

At the end of the day, low income condemns you to accepting sponsored trips for stories and other gift exchanges. In most cases, inducements take place at times where information is being hidden and malpractices are being concealed. In cases, where a business organization is trying to hide something, then you expect brown envelope journalism to be the last resort. (Business reporter, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

It is clear from the foregoing that brown envelope journalism manifests itself in different shades in different contexts. For instance, sponsored tours, corporate gifts such as t-shirts, diaries and cash inducements are all part of the “media gift exchange”. Hydén (2006, p. 73) refers to this as “the economy of affection”, that is, “investing in reciprocal relations with other individual as a means of achieving seemingly impossible goals”. There is a very thin line separating sponsored visits from cash inducements because both strategies are meant to elicit positive media coverage. The above extracts corroborate Ndangam’s conclusions (2006): journalists in Africa pay lip-service to objectivity and autonomy while remaining committed to corrupt practices. Although editors mentioned that they take the issue of bribery seriously, it seems that gifts and bribes exchange hands in newsrooms in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Interviews confirmed that some business journalists have relationships with politicians and business people which violate their institutional codes of ethics and foundational principles of journalism.

Enforcement and monitoring of code of ethics

Concerns about monitoring and enforcement of codes of ethics were raised by all interviewed editors. They revealed that there are many challenges associated with enforcing and monitoring individual business reporters’ conduct in the field. Business editors mentioned that it is difficult to keep a hard line stance against ethical transgressions due to peculiar challenges facing African newsrooms such as lack of transport, low advertizing revenue and massive labor turnover. Editors sometimes allow journalists to indulge in unethical behavior – such as accepting sponsored travel opportunities – because their publications do not have the resources to pay for travel. In other cases, editors simply rely on the integrity of journalists, with no active monitoring of behavior or policing of the ethics codes:

We operate on shoe-string budgets which makes it difficult for us to provide transport to our reporters for fieldwork. At times, we allow journalists to go for sponsored trips because without such support, news gathering may grind to a halt. In the end, monitoring journalists in the field is difficult. (Business editor, *Business Day*, South Africa).

We tell our journalists that the integrity of an individual is as good as the integrity of the organization. In fact, you cannot build an

organization of integrity with unethical individuals. It's a two-way process. It is difficult anyway to monitor reporters because as an organization we don't have such intelligence gathering mechanisms. We have no capacity hence we rely on goodwill. (Business editor, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

Although it may be difficult to generalize it seems apparent from the above extracts that business editors acknowledge that monitoring and enforcement of codes is an impossible task which transcends human resource policies to embrace what White (2010) calls "ethics of system awareness" and respect for the "ethos of professionalism". It has emerged from the interviews that the mere existence of a code of ethics is no guarantee for ethical conduct, as the following extract confirms:

Ethics is a living entity, which, like constitutions and laws, require constant refinement with changing times in order to cope with peculiarities of business news gathering. Ethical challenges keep on becoming more complex and sophisticated as economies evolve. Having a code of ethics is not an end in itself but a start of a journey towards promoting professional behaviour in the newsroom. (Business editor, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

Neither can a code provide a comprehensive 'road map' for ethical behaviour in any circumstance:

There is no document that can address all the eventualities in the field. At the end of the day, ethical guidelines continuously evolve on a day-to-day basis, as business journalists interact with editors. It's about instantaneous reactions to moral dilemmas in the field. (Business editor, *Business Day*, South Africa)

At one newspaper, a system was implemented that relies on readers to alert the newspaper regarding ethical lapses. Although this resulted in a number of complaints from readers, the system wasn't wholly effective:

When we began, we received a lot of complaints from readers. However upon investigation, we realised that most complaints were personal fights between the accused reporters and complainants. Most complainants when called upon to come and substantiate their claims, they chickened out. (Business editor, *Business Daily*, Kenya)

Conclusion

While each of the financial newspapers in this study had ethical policies in place, and journalists and editors recognized the importance of ethical behavior in the field of business journalism, there was, in some respects, a disconnect between policy and practice. Ethics codes reflect the aspirations of newspaper publishers and journalists, rather than actual practices. While journalists were aware of the existence of ethical policies, they were not always familiar with the details of those policies, and in some cases, such as restrictions on share ownership, not always in agreement with them. All three ethics codes included measures to prevent bribe-taking, but in two of the countries – Zimbabwe and Kenya – it seemed that brown envelope journalism is an accepted practice, and in South Africa, related practices such as freebies and sponsored travel are ubiquitous. This is due to the precarious economic basis of the news organizations, which do not have the resources to pay journalists competitive salaries or to fund travel for journalistic purposes. The link between economic circumstances and ethical behavior is illustrated by the fact that journalists in Zimbabwe and Kenya seemed more tolerant of brown envelope journalism and related practices than their counterparts in South Africa, where media organizations are far more profitable and journalists, as a consequence, better remunerated. Unethical journalism cannot be justified by economic circumstances, but neither can it be addressed without addressing the economic basis and status of news organizations and journalists.

A second aspect that needs to be addressed in order to improve ethical behavior in the business media is monitoring and policing of ethics rules. At all three newspapers in this study, respondents admitted that monitoring was not taking place and that editors relied on the integrity and honesty of journalists. Experience has shown, however, that unethical practices thrive when ethics rules are not monitored and enforced (Chari, 2009; Ndangam, 2006). Lack of resources was again cited as the main reason for the absence of effective monitoring.

Lack of enforcement of ethical rules, together with the economic circumstances of journalists, result in a pervasive and tolerated culture of unethical behavior, even among senior editorial executives. This was evident to some extent from responses of journalists in Kenya and Zimbabwe, and, to a lesser extent, in South Africa. Incidents were cited, for example, of pressure being brought to bear by senior editorial executives on behalf of advertisers; share ownership rules being

disregarded; and freebies and sponsored travel being tolerated. While such a culture persists, improvements in ethical behavior will obviously be difficult to effect.

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ADMIRE MARE AND ROBERT BRAND

When your “take-home” can hardly take you home: Moonlighting and the quest for economic survival in the Zimbabwean press

By Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara

Abstract

Using empirical data from in-depth interviews with journalists drawn from across the Zimbabwean mainstream press, this paper examines how the Zimbabwean economic and political context has, over the years, nurtured an environment in which journalists “illicitly” incorporate extra paid work (for other news organisations) into their daily work routines as a way of supplementing their poor salaries and surviving the economic challenges facing the country. The paper argues that this practice, commonly referred as “moonlighting”, points to the challenges that the material realities of working as a journalist for a poor salary imposes on African journalists. These conditions not only differentiate African journalists from their counterparts in the economically developed countries of the North, but also highlight how the conditions of material deprivation tend to subvert conventionalized notions of professionalism and ethical standards. The paper further contends that moonlighting also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which stories by local journalists that critique government policy and expose social ills must find space in “independent” and foreign news organizations..

Key words: conflict of interest, ethics, moonlighting, professionalism, Zimbabwe

Introduction:

This paper examines how the Zimbabwean economic and political context has nurtured an environment in which journalists “illicitly” incorporate extra journalistic work into their daily routines as a way of supplementing their poor salaries and surviving the economic challenges facing the country. Although this practice –commonly referred to as “moonlighting” – has always been part of journalism practice in Zimbabwe, the severe economic crisis that followed the post-2000 events promoted an unprecedented mercenary approach to

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post-2000 events promoted an unprecedented mercenary approach to journalism. Consecutive years of political crises resulted in severe economic decline which led to periodic shortages of food, fuel, electricity, medical supplies and other necessities basic for survival. Soaring inflation and currency depreciation became “the most visible manifestations of Zimbabwe’s economic woes during the first half of 2008. By mid-July, estimates of annual price increases “exceeded [...] 2,000,000 %, while the domestic currency lost practically all its value” (Gilpin, 2008). This precipitous economic decline was closely related to a number of complex political developments which created chaos and uncertainty resulting in the erosion of business confidence and the economic isolation of the country (Gilpin, 2008). To “[prevent] their meagre cash resources from completely evaporating” (*The Economist*, 2008), most workers (including journalists), developed imaginative and extremely agile strategies to survive. Attempts to catch up with the galloping hyperinflation saw the informal economy overtaking the formal one (*The Economist*, 2008).

While this economic situation impacted on the operations of the media, other factors also came into play, particularly the political (and legal context). In the wake of increasing dissenting voices which reflected the country’s worsening economic problems the government decided to muzzle the private press as well as prohibit a number of foreign media houses from operating in the country by promulgating restrictive legislation such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in January 2002. Some Western media houses were accused of “writing falsehoods to tarnish [the government] image at home and abroad” (Mano, 2005, p. 62). These developments prompted the closure of several private newspapers, although a number of publications succumbed because of the biting economic environment. Consequently, some observers argue that journalists in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, suffer increasingly the restrictions of media owners and are often without job security. They are also paid very little and live in direct contact with the deprivation, problems, and sufferings of the wider public¹ (see Baglo, 2008).

Although the formation of a coalition government between rival political parties in September, 2008 brought significant changes in the Zimbabwean media terrain, in particular, the “loosening” of restrictive media laws which led to the resurfacing of previously banned papers (such as the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe’s *Daily News*) and the registering of new ones (such as Alpha Media Holdings’ *Newsday*), still,

the repressive political and economic conditions of Zimbabwe highlighted above have had a lasting impact on the everyday professional practices of journalists in the country. In particular, the prohibition of a number of foreign media houses provided space for some public and private journalists to act as “underground” foreign correspondents for independent online newspapers as well as for the Western media. To juggle between the incompatible interests of their everyday jobs and the “underground” employers, journalists resort to the use of pseudonyms as a way of avoiding recognition by formal employers and protecting themselves from the perceived threat to personal security by the authorities. This has implications for professionalism and ethical standards as accountability is buried in anonymity. While journalists justifiably seek economic survival through moonlighting, this has many negative influences on the quality of journalistic practice and weakens their watchdog and critical role in society.

A central argument of this study is that the combination of moonlighting, bad treatment by editors, repressive conditions and poor salaries are undermining the professionalism of journalists not only in Zimbabwe but in many other countries. These conditions not only differentiate African journalists from their counterparts in the economically developed world of the North, but also illuminate how the conditions of material deprivation tend to subvert conventionalized ethical canons of journalism such as independence and impartiality. The paper further argues that while the practice of moonlighting in Zimbabwe is clearly tied to the struggles for economic survival in the context of a severe economic crisis, it also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which stories that critique government policy and expose social ills are forced out of the broader public forum and find space only in “independent” online publications and foreign media houses that most Zimbabweans do not have access to.

The present study of the impact of economic insecurity and government repression on journalists draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with over 40 journalists from six Zimbabwean mainstream newspapers: the dominant state-controlled Zimpapers (two dailies, *The Herald* and the *Chronicle* and two weeklies the *Sunday Mail* and the *Sunday News*) and two weeklies from the small but vibrant Alpha Media Holdings (*The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The*

Standard). Interviewees were selected using purposive criteria and convenience sampling methods. Central criteria in the selection were to include journalists from different news desks in order to cover all key “beats” as well as a diversity of positions and roles across the newsrooms. The goal was to make sure that the analysis “adequately understood the variations in the phenomenon of interest in the setting, and to test developing ideas about the setting by selecting phenomena that are crucial to the validity of those ideas” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293). Interviewees were selected on the basis of their representation of different professional journalistic roles but working in the same newspaper environments under common conditions, rather than bringing together participants from a variety of newsrooms.

Some of my interviews were carried out *in situ*, at the journalists’ desks in the newsrooms. This facilitated a direct interactive engagement with the reporters and an understanding of the foundational motivations behind their moonlighting activities. As Robert White (2010, p. 43) puts it, “It is the direct observation and the in-depth discussions with journalists about their practices that reveal the underlying reasons and their socio-political philosophy”. This approach facilitated a close understanding of “insider” perspectives of practices and cultures relating to moonlighting in the newsrooms studied.² The research was carried out between June and December 2008, a period during which Zimbabwe’s political and economic crisis reached its peak following the disputed first round of presidential elections and the subsequent runoff elections.

Moonlighting in journalism: Framing the debate

“Moonlighting” generally refers to the second full-time or part-time job taken up by employees for a variety of reasons (Kanyane, 2005). Journalists have plenty of opportunities for moonlighting which may not necessarily be directly related to their core professional activities. As Yehiel Limor and Itai Himelboim (2006, p. 267) observe: “Journalists may choose to engage in a variety of additional activities, such as political engagements, working in advertizing and public relations, and performing educational and celebrity-type activities such as interviews”. While some moonlighting opportunities will not have a potential for a conflict of interest, others not only pose a conflict of interest but also undermine professional and ethical standards in varying degrees (Lo et al., 2005, p. 159). In the present study,

moonlighting specifically refers to additional journalistic work taken up by reporters to augment their income.

It is important, however, to see moonlighting in journalism through the lenses of its implications for the professional-normative practices of journalism as well as the ethical standards. According to professional norms, "journalists must avoid situations that create a conflict of interests, whether actual or merely perceived, to remain loyal to their major stakeholder: the public" (Limor & Himmelboim, 2006, p. 266). Conflict of interests arise from situations in which employers have private interests that appear to clash or defeat the objective exercise of official duties (Kanyane, 2005). For Sandra Borden and Michael Pritchard (2001, p. 79): "[a] conflict of interest involves being involved in circumstances that give others reason to worry about whether one's judgement is actually vulnerable to secondary interests that tend to make that judgement less reliable than others are entitled to expect". In journalism conflict of interests arises in situations where "there is reason to be concerned that the judgement and performance of journalists might be unduly influenced by interests they have that lie outside their responsibilities as journalists" (Borden & Pritchard, 2001, p. 74). As Franz Kruger (2004, p. 101) puts it: "The pay may be good but the costs to credibility are substantial" as some moonlighting opportunities "set the broader ethical alarm bells ringing" (Kruger, 2004, p. 101). Thus, when a reporter is involved in multiple interests, this may corrupt the primary motivation of the mother employer (Borden & Pritchard, 2001).

In this sense, conflict of interest interferes with professional responsibilities, judgements and the very reason clients and employers value journalists as "professionals" who are expected to be objective and independent of any private and personal interests that either interfere or appear likely to interfere with the performance of their core duties (Kanyane, 2005). In fact, the very principle of "independence calls on journalists to remain free of associations or activities that may compromise their integrity or damage their credibility" (Black et al., 1995, p. 98). It is therefore essential for individual journalists and news organizations to honor that principle if they are to be effective in fulfilling the primary obligation of journalism.

Although conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may arise in many areas, very little research has been done on the professional implications of moonlighting for journalism in Africa. While it is certainly not the only practice that may cause conflict of interest, it is a

widespread practice that has received very little scholarly attention. This article is therefore an attempt to shed light on the “salience of the phenomenon and its legitimacy on the socio-political and organizational environment of journalists” (Limor & Himelboim, 2006, p. 268).

Newsroom attitudes and approaches to moonlighting

Although there was consensus among reporters that newsrooms are strict on moonlighting, there was no clear formal policy or semblance of homogeneity in terms of the organizations’ positions and approaches to the practice. As one senior reporter at *The Herald* noted:

We are only allowed to write for those organizations where there will be no conflict of interest. You can’t write for *The Zimbabwe Independent* or *The Financial Gazette*, but perhaps you could write for the *New African* and *The Southern Times* because their editorial policies are more or less similar to ours. If you are caught moonlighting for rival organisations you will be dismissed instantly. We have had several cases of people who have been dismissed because of moonlighting allegations.

This scenario is, however, not peculiar to the Zimbabwean situation. Kruger (2004, p. 100) observes that in the South African context: “news organizations have various policies: some rule out moonlighting completely, others positively encourage it as long as it does not impact on them in any way”.

A common position across the newsrooms studied, however, was the disapproval of members of staff working for rival groups, especially the use of company resources for these purposes. Newsrooms thus sought to monitor and track emails generated from their computers through the use of spyware – computer software that obtains information from a user’s computer without the user’s knowledge or consent in order to identify reporters moonlighting for rival news organizations. At the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, a Zimpapers editor was suspended and subsequently dismissed on allegations of moonlighting after his emails were intercepted and used as evidence against him in a disciplinary hearing³. In the light of these circumstances, journalists are extremely cautious in their use of email communication for private business within the newsrooms. This was particularly the case with company emails which they saw as easily

susceptible to interception. As one senior editor at the *Chronicle* explained:

[...] you see, at the moment there are a lot of suspicions on company email. People suspect that if you use the company email the Information Technology (IT) department can intercept and read your private mails, but if you have a web-based email the belief is that it's more secure. For that reason, I have a company email and a personal web-based email. I prefer to use the web-based [...] I don't really feel comfortable with the company email.

The IT manager at *The Herald* confirmed the presence of a system that monitors journalists' email traffic and a general commitment towards censoring journalists' online activities within Zimpapers.

We have a system in place that enables us to see who has generated what email and what content. So, we regularly do random checks for abuse from our main server[...] Sometimes if we are not sure with the nature of the content we simply intercept and quarantine the email[...]. Our major challenge, however, is in monitoring the web-based emails. It continues to be a big challenge as *journalists smuggle (sic) stories from our newsrooms to foreign media houses on a regular basis*. We could be more drastic actually by using stricter ways of controlling and monitoring email traffic, but we want people to be responsible [...](emphasis added).

Journalists in the private press were equally cautious in their use of email for moonlighting purposes because of fears and suspicions of snooping. One senior reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

I have got two private web-based emails, one of them is completely anonymous. Even if I write to you, you will not recognise the email is from me because I use a secret username. It is strictly for private business. *You see for most of us to feed our families, we have to freelance, which is against our company policy [...]* you cannot freelance using the company email [...]. We are also aware that management has surreptitiously installed malicious spyware on our computers *to monitor who is sending stories* because they suspect that most of the content on these Zimbabwean news websites is originating from our newsroom [...] So, we use private emails like Yahoo to wire stories abroad and the company email for business related to the newspaper. Essentially, the private email is for business which you don't want to be detected by management [...] (emphasis added).

Although these circumstances render the deployment of email in news making difficult, journalists “are far from being mired in ‘backwardness’ or passively awaiting external salvation” (Berger, 2005, p. 1) in regard to using email for their private business. Thus, as noted above, journalists have resorted to the use of private web-based emails for personal business, including filing stories to their “underground” employers. As one senior reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, explained: “You see, for most journalists to survive they have to freelance and you can’t freelance using a company email. It’s a dismissible offence. So we use private web-based emails like Yahoo with anonymous usernames to wire stories abroad [...]”.

This scenario not only reflects the ethical ambiguities concerning moonlighting which are rooted in the journalists’ quest for economic survival but also the newsrooms’ attitudes and approaches towards moonlighting by their staffers which are anchored in concerns over “corporate self-interest rather than professional ethics” (Kruger, 2004, p. 101). This points to the “lack of stable, deep value commitments” in the newsrooms (White, 2010, p. 42). Like their staffers, the newsrooms seem to be only concerned about their private gains, and not the “noble objective of ‘serving the people’” (Kasoma, 1996, p. 95) as a whole. In some of the newsrooms, however, editors have struck an informal compromise with their reporters by “allowing” them to moonlight as a way of keeping the newspapers afloat as well as retaining their key staff under the dire economic conditions in which they are operating. As one reporter at *The Standard* put it:

Well, we reached an informal understanding with the editor-in-chief of the newspaper after looking at the economic situation that we are living in. We had to come to a compromise on how best to try and survive. Basically, if the truth be told, we are helping out the company by taking up extra paid work elsewhere. Everyone knows that *our take-home can hardly take us home* (emphasis added).

The laissez-faire approach towards moonlighting in some of the newsrooms is thus partly explained by the economic challenges facing the newsrooms and their battle to retain key staff in a context where staffers largely view themselves as subsidizing their employers. However, as this study attempts to show, the laissez-faire culture also encourages a disregard of professional standards. It hampers recourse to professional codes of ethics (as instruments of self-regulation) and results in reporters and editors glossing over ethical violations. As

Limor and Himelboim (2006, p. 280) rightly contend: "The economic conditions in which African journalists operate turns any form of prohibitions and constraints on additional work into lip service only, as the journalists find themselves unable to abide by these rulings".

Journalists' quest for economic survival

As noted earlier, moonlighting in the Zimbabwean press is deeply anchored in journalists' quest for economic survival by supplementing their meager salaries. New technologies (in particular the Internet), play a central role in sustaining this widespread practice (I will return to this point shortly). The new technologies become important because the news organizations that the journalists moonlight for mainly consist of foreign media houses and online newspapers with an interest in Zimbabwean issues. The latter are predominantly run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists who have maintained contact with their former colleagues in Zimbabwean mainstream newsrooms. The interview extract below with a senior news reporter at *The Standard* is telling in terms of the economic drive towards adopting extra work outside one's regular employment in the mainstream newsrooms.

Knowing as you do that here in Zimbabwe working as a journalist is tough [...] particularly in terms of the salaries we earn, this means that within my main daily business, I have to look for more ideas in order to be able to formulate stories to sell to some outside news websites and get a few extra bucks[...]Thus, I would give my newspaper its own piece of the flesh (sic) first, and then I would do my other work. Basically I think we are helping out the company [...] So, I would say that my work routines revolve around that kind of culture in which I have to browse the Internet in the morning, look at daily newspapers and try and set an agenda that caters for my company's interests as well as mine.

This response typifies the taken-for-granted and almost naturalized explanation of the "conflicting" professional practice that characterizes news work in the Zimbabwean mainstream press. As shown earlier, the surge in moonlighting is directly related to the political and economic environment following the post-2000 developments. According to Mano (2005, p. 62) this era "presented the media with new political, economic and legislative challenges" which increasingly saw the tightening of the media's legislative environment and the prohibition of foreign media houses from practicing in Zimbabwe following

accusations by government “of writing falsehoods to tarnish its image at home and abroad” (Mano, 2005, p. 62). This scenario provided space for “[s]ome public and private journalists [to act] as foreign correspondents for Western media, some of which are traditionally hostile in their coverage of Africa” (Mano, 2005, p. 62).

This state of affairs promoted the development of “underground” relationships between foreign media houses (with restricted access to Zimbabwe) and local mainstream journalists who were forced to look elsewhere to supplement their poor salaries. Nyamnjoh (2005, pp. 73-74) observes that poor salaries and working conditions in African newsrooms have “inevitably led to “prostitution” by journalists or what one may term a hand-to-mouth journalism, if not a journalism of misery. Any bit of money can lure a journalist to write anything”.

In the newsrooms studied journalists chose to retain their contractual obligations with their regular employers for a number of reasons that include: financial security in case their part-time jobs fail them; to maintain cover from surveillance forces, to safeguard their legitimacy and maintain visibility to prospective foreign media houses; and more importantly, as regards the present study, to ensure guaranteed and regular access to the technologies that sustain their part-time work; particularly, the Internet. As Nyamnjoh (2005, p. 70) explains, this predicament forces many of the practitioners to opt for a “Jekyll-and-Hyde personality” that allows them to accommodate the interests of their regular as well as their “underground” employers.

The new media and the professional implications of “moonlighting”

One of the main findings of this study was the centrality of the Internet in facilitating the burgeoning of ‘underground’ extra paid work for journalists in the mainstream press. Although moonlighting has always been part of mainstream journalism practice in Zimbabwe, journalists’ exposure to international news organisations through the Internet – coupled with the prohibition of foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe – has cultivated a mercenary approach to journalism. For most journalists, making money has taken precedence over professional and ethical standards. This development was clearly articulated by one desk editor from *The Zimbabwe Independent* in a lengthy interview at the Harare Press Club:

The Internet has economically empowered a lot of journalists in Zimbabwe where the majority of top journalists were forced to flee the country. Those that have remained have managed to use the opportunities offered by the Internet to break into global media organizations that were traditionally very difficult to break into [...]. There are people right here in this very club who are doing jobs for *Reuters*; *BBC*; *The Washington Post*; and *The New York Times*: some of the biggest news organizations in the world. It has all been made possible by the Internet. I can say 90 per cent of the journalists operating in Zimbabwe survive through the Internet because these are the guys that feed the outside world with stories. For instance, almost everyday we have a story on BBC from Harare and Bulawayo yet the BBC is banned from practising in this country.⁴ It's a similar story with the CNN and numerous other media organisations that are banned from practicing here; they are being serviced by local journalists [...] we are talking here of journalists in Zimbabwean newsrooms. These are journalists that can now be classified as some of the richest guys in Zimbabwe...some of these guys drink here [in the press club] everyday and drive very good cars...and all these are benefits accrued through the Internet [...]

Interviewer:

But doesn't that whole scenario have negative professional implications?

Journalist:

It does to a certain extent, because we have had instances where we discuss rumors in this press club and ten minutes later you find the rumor on the Internet as a story. A case in point was during the March 29 [2008] parliamentary and presidential elections. Rumors were circulated here in the press club that Mugabe was losing and that his sister, Sabina, had collapsed and died in shock. In no time at all, there was a story on the Internet that Mugabe's sister had died. Someone had picked it up and written a story under a pseudonym and the editor of that particular news website published it without cross checking. Embarrassingly, two hours down the line the government was denying it.

From the above, it is clear that although the Internet has provided Zimbabwean mainstream journalists with opportunities for economic survival, the opportunities are fraught with negative professional and ethical implications. Journalists are clearly "oblivious of the effect of their reportage on society, as long as they make money" (Kasoma, 1996, p. 97). As one desk editor at the *Chronicle* put it: "People don't care what they are selling to these online publications [...]" anything

that brings money on the table will go, including unverified information". Commenting on the impact of the Internet on African journalism practice, Kasoma (1996, p. 95) writes:

In a world in which the information superhighway has made journalists practice their profession in a hurry as they strive to satisfy the world's craving for more and quicker news and other information, the humaneness of journalism has increasingly been giving way to the expediences of cut-throat financial [...] competition.

In light of the ethical and professional challenges posed by the revolutionary changes emerging with new technologies, Clifford Christians (2008, p. 6) calls for an urgent need to develop an "ethics of integrity" that updates ethical and professional concerns articulated in the pre-digital era among media professionals. For Christians (2008, p. 6), a new "media ethics agenda must be developed for the cyber world" of online networking.

It is perhaps important to highlight that the interview extract above reinforces a point noted earlier, that moonlighting in the Zimbabwean mainstream press also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which news organizations that carry stories which critique government policy and expose social ills predominantly find space in "independent" and foreign news organizations that are restricted from practicing in the country. In fact, at the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, many foreign news organizations deemed hostile to government policies such as the BBC and CNN had been banned from practicing journalism in Zimbabwe. Hence their reliance on local journalists.

Journalists' use of pseudonyms as a way of disguising their identities from their regular employers and protecting themselves from a perceived threat to personal security by the authorities further compromises ethical standards as accountability is buried in anonymity (Moyo, 2007; Chari, 2009). Moreover, the speed with which the Internet allows for the publication of stories also fuels the publication of "unsubstantiated and often highly opinionated stories" (Moyo, 2007, p. 91) as seen in the publication of press club rumours about the alleged death of Mugabe's sister referred to in the interview extract above.

The pressure to maintain efficiency in the face of a demanding workload divided between one's regular employer and the "underground" employer also led to unprofessional behavior in the

newsrooms as journalists resorted to “stealing” stories from colleagues in order to sell them to their “underground” employers. The entertainment editor of the *Sunday News* described this scenario thus:

“moonlighting has resulted in several problems in this newsroom, people steal stories from each other and sell them to online publications [...] there are also growing incidents of fabrications”. Reinforcing this response, one assistant news editor at *The Herald* gave an insightful illustration of how journalists “stole” stories from each other in a newsroom interview:

Interviewer:

In your experience in this newsroom, have you witnessed any forms of abuse of these technologies?

Journalist:

A lot, because of the editorial system that we use [...] I will show you something [looks around], you see that reporter, look at his monitor – he is going through other people’s raw copies, he is on “read only”, come closer, come and see what I am talking about [we both move towards the journalist]. Look, now he is in his own “basket”, but [seizes the mouse to illustrate his point] if he moves up here he can see all the stories that have been filed for tomorrow’s paper, but he can only read, he can’t edit them. So, what he does is, he secretly copies these stories, spices them up (sic) a bit and sends them to an online publication that he works for clandestinely, no one can tell he has done it [...]

The challenges faced by newsrooms in their attempts to monitor and control moonlighting were further articulated by one desk editor at the *Zimbabwe Independent*:

There are a number of challenges that are beginning to emerge in this newsroom because of moonlighting. First, reporters are in the habit of nicking colleagues’ stories and selling them to other publications. Even if you were to monitor them there is very little you can do [...] because of technological advancements. Journalists will simply use flash disks to transfer stories from one computer to another without being detected. Some even have computers at home and they do their business there without even coming to the newsroom [...]

The professional and ethical challenges posed by the increase in moonlighting among mainstream journalists were also a result of competition for breaking news among foreign news agencies and online newspapers with an interest in Zimbabwe’s unfolding socio-political crisis. As one reporter at *The Standard* explained, the

competition among journalists to be the first to break a story exposed the profession to ethical challenges:

[...] because of the competition among news agencies and online publications for the Zimbabwean story [...] each journalist wants to be the first to break the story and make more money. This has damaged the profession as people don't even wait to adhere to the cardinal rules of journalism of verifying and crosschecking issues.

This perhaps finds further explanation in Edward Wasserman's (2010) observation that: "News media, especially on the Internet, are developing greater reliance on producers of content who are not full-time employees". News organizations thus find it beneficial (and less expensive) to get more and more of their content from people who are not on their fulltime payroll. However, "This poses a huge challenge to traditional ways to ensure independence and guard against conflicts of interest" (Wasserman, 2010). From the above, it is clear that moonlighting journalists "focus attention on the potential conflict between a commitment to other employers or extraneous interests represented by additional work" (Limor & Himelboim, 2006, p. 267).

Clearly, the phenomenon of moonlighting points to the challenges that the material realities of working as a journalist for a poor salary imposes on journalists in Africa. It highlights how such conditions tend to subvert conventionalized notions of journalistic independence and impartiality. While this practice is entrenched in Zimbabwean newsrooms and has assumed a particular dimension, research has shown that it is equally widespread in other countries. For example, Lomir and Himelboim (2006, p. 265) observe that The Croatian Journalists' Trade Union has maintained that the country's journalism has deteriorated as a result of extensive moonlighting. The same goes for countries like Pakistan where journalists are said to double as state agents (Limor & Himelboim, 2006).

Moonlighting is, however, by no means the only kind of conflict of interest that arises for journalists. It is not isolated from related practices that have been seen to "either compromise journalistic independence or force journalists to negotiate the universal norm of objectivity" (Mabweazara, 2011). The practice has close links with other commonly known corrupt practices in journalism. For example, Berhanu Lodamo and Terje S. Skjerdal (2009, p. 134) discuss the practices of "freebies (taking items such as free tickets or dinners for the journalist's personal gain) and brown envelopes (the informal

transfer of money from sources to journalists" among broadcast journalists in Ethiopia. They argue that these practices are mainly as a result of "lack of ethical consciousness" (2009, p. 152) among journalists. Writing about similar practices in Cameroon, Lillian Ndangam (2006, p. 180) notes that the quest for "self-enhancement and even self enrichment" through the practice of *gombo* (a metaphor for various payments, freebies and rewards solicited by journalists) breaches and subverts professional standards. Ndangam sees these practices as being more than ethical lapses and slips, but rather as institutionalized and "deeply entrenched" (2006, p. 196). In Tanzanian newsrooms journalists are also alleged to "indulge in corrupt practices and conflict of interest undermining the credibility of the media in the process" (Mfumbusa 2006, p. 259). For these reasons the press in Africa "has been called all sorts of names, from "cocktail", "bread-and-butter", "chechbook", "yellow", "attack-collect", "brown-envelope" or "survival journalism" (Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 59).

However, these practices highlight the impact of the conditions of material deprivation which differentiate African journalists from their counterparts in the economically developed world of the North. Nyamnjoh (2005, p. 65) is thus quick to contend that: "to blame all these shortcomings on the media and their practitioners would be to overlook other factors that make it difficult for even the most committed professionals to excel ethically in the African context". A number of writers point out that the economic conditions generally prevailing in most African countries have pushed journalists to trample ethical codes in pursuit of economic survival. Writing from a Tanzanian context Mfumbusa (2006, p. 267) observes that "poor and irregular pay encourage moonlighting and acceptance of 'junkets'". Nyamnjoh concurs in his observation that financial hardships have led many African journalists to "seek positions as stringers for the major Western media" (Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 87). Against this backdrop, moonlighting in journalism has to be seen in the light of the economic context in which African journalists operate. This differentiates its impact on journalism from experiences in the economically developed countries of the North. Whereas in Western countries the underlying conflict may be between professional interests and the individual right of occupation, in African contexts where journalists are poorly paid "professional norms may conflict with the very basic commitment to individual and family survival" (Limor & Himelboim, 2006, p. 268). It is perhaps important to highlight that political, economic and cultural

differences across countries render it difficult to conceptualize an ethics that is “fundamentally transnational in character” (Christians, 2008, p. 6).

On the other hand, while the practice of moonlighting in Zimbabwe is clearly tied to the struggles for economic enhancement in the context of severe economic crisis, it also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which stories that critique government policy and expose social ills mainly find space in “independent” online publications and foreign media houses that make use of local journalists (see Mabweazara, 2010).

Concluding remarks

This study has examined how the Zimbabwean economic and political context has broadly nurtured an environment in which journalists “illicitly” incorporate extra journalistic work into their daily routines to supplement their poor salaries. With the increased exposure of journalists to international news organisations through the Internet and the prohibition of selected foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe, moonlighting has taken on “new” meanings that pose critical professional and ethical questions. The pressure to maintain efficiency in the face of a demanding workload divided between one’s regular employer and the “underground” employer has compromised professionalism in the newsrooms as journalists resort to unethical practices such as “stealing” stories from one another and plagiarism in order to meet their targets. As Kasoma (1996, p. 95) puts it: “the African press, seems to be abandoning the noble objective of “serving the people” for the selfish cause of “serving self”. Journalists have a selfish and self-centred approach to journalism rather than a societal one (Kasoma, 1996).

Given the challenges that newsrooms face in paying their staffers, one can argue that the answer to the problem of moonlighting does not lie in discouraging or prohibiting the practice (especially in situations where journalists cannot rely on their employers for principal financial support), but in devising ways of ensuring that journalists act transparently and fully declare any activities outside their main employment which are likely to have a potential for a conflict of interest. What we perhaps need are well thought-out formal newsroom policies that clearly articulate the problem of moonlighting and prohibit situations that pose conflict of interest. However, this can be complicated and controversial especially when matters of survival are

at stake. As Borden and Pritchard (2001, p. 89) note, the major challenge is that “conflicts of interest may escape detection precisely because the secondary interests that oppose themselves to journalists’ primary responsibilities are worthy in their own right”. It is, however, crucial that practices that pose conflicts of interests such as moonlighting are recognized “so that they may be avoided – or when this option is not reasonable – so that they may be managed with a minimum of damage to the crucial mission journalists perform” (Borden & Pritchard, 2001, p. 89).

Most importantly, newsrooms should foreground ethical values and “the grounding of practices in a form of fundamental commitment to the citizenry or national development” (White, 2010, p. 43), rather than private commercial interests. The individualistic approach by journalists in the practice of their profession could thus change to a more accommodating, societal one, based perhaps on Kasoma’s much contested notion of “Afriethical foundations” which advocates a “society centred” (1996, p. 96) rather than a money-centred profession anchored in “self-enrichment and self-aggrandisement” (Kasoma, 1996, p. 95). This is particularly important given that: “In today’s world, we are highly dependent on journalists for furnishing information that enables us to make meaningful decisions about our lives, and we have little choice but to trust that journalists will strive to meet our needs and interests in this regard” (Borden & Pritchard, 2001, p. 75). Practices that pose a conflict of interest put into jeopardy this trust. For this reason, secondary interests should not be allowed to interfere with the primary goals of truthful, fair and thorough presentation of news.

More empirical research is needed across cultures if we are to fully understand the notion of moonlighting in terms of its trends and implications for the practice of journalism across Africa. This empirical research can lead to more substantive theoretical propositions that illuminate our understanding of the practice of moonlighting and the rules governing conflict of interest.

Notes

1. On average, in January 2009 when the Zimbabwean economy was dollarized the least paid journalist across all the newsrooms was earning US\$160 and the highest paid was taking home US\$300 per month (Mabweazara, 2010).
2. Due to the sensitivity of some of the responses provided by interviewees, I have deliberately avoided using their names referring

only to their generic titles in place of actual names in order to protect their identity.

3. 'Zimpapers Managers Spy on Suspended Editor', reported in *The Standard*, September 27, 2008. Retrieved December 3, 2008 from: <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/local/18997-zimpapers-managersspy-on-suspended-editor.html>
4. However, with the formation of a coalition government between opposition and the ruling party ZANU-PF in September 2008, government softened its stance towards foreign media.

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Zambian PR practitioners' perspectives on "brown envelopes" and freebies: Working through the confusion

By Twange Kasoma

Abstract

Existing studies on "brown envelopes" and freebies in journalistic practice in Africa have mainly focused on understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the "receivers" (journalists). Largely ignored has been the perspective of the "givers". One such "giver" that the journalists have cited is the PR practitioner. The purpose of this exploratory study, therefore, was to examine the phenomenon from the perspective of PR practitioners. In-depth interviews conducted with 15 PR practitioners in Zambia showed that while they perceived "brown envelopes" as unethical, unprofessional and detested any association with them, they were surprisingly responsive to freebies. The reason for their responsiveness was three-fold: (1) The PR practitioners perceived freebies as an inevitable offshoot of the interdependent relationship they shared with journalists; (2) the PR practitioners perceived freebies as part and parcel of their news management function; and (3) the PR practitioners perceived freebies as instrumental in achieving their boundary-spanning role.

Key words: Brown envelopes, freebies, PR practitioners, Zambia

Introduction:

"Brown envelopes" and freebies have been a recurring theme in scholastic discourse on African journalism in recent years (Kasoma, 2007, 2009; Lodamo & Skjerdal, 2009; Mwesige, 2004; Nyamnjuh, 2001). This discourse has been situated within the broad paradigm of professionalism, which is itself a contested concept in journalism. To date, there is still no consensus as to whether journalism is a craft, profession or trade. Henningham (cited in Weaver, 1998, which remains probably the most compelling work on journalistic

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professionalism) noted that: "The concept of journalism as a profession appears to be age-related. Younger journalists are more likely to describe journalism as a profession, but those over 50 reject the term."

One of the reasons advanced for the rejection of the notion of journalism as a profession is the lack of standardized entry criteria when compared to professions such as medicine or law where entrants undergo rigorous aptitude tests. According to Mwesige (2004), in Uganda, in an attempt to professionalize journalism and standardize entry criteria, a law was passed in 1995 requiring journalists to have university education if they were to become full members of the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda (NIJU). However, not only was enforcement of this law poor (Chibita, 2010) but it also pitted two professional journalistic associations against each other. As Mbaine (2010, p. 4) writes, the journalists that lacked the qualifications to full membership of NIJU joined its rival Uganda Journalists Association (UJA). The rivalry between the two associations reached its climax in 2000 when UJA also successfully lobbied against NIJU's application for accreditation to the International Federation of Journalists. By 2005, NIJU was largely phased out (Mbaine, 2010).

In public relations, which Rodman (2009) defines as the art or science of establishing and promoting a favorable relationship with the public, the concept of professionalism has not been as contested. An elaborate discussion of this, although mostly from a Western perspective where such scholarship abounds, will be presented later. Professionally, what public relations and journalism have in common is a desire to serve the public's news and informational needs, albeit in a varying manner. While journalism's linchpin in serving the public is objectivity (theoretically at least), public relations, which divides its public into two, i.e. "internal" and "external", employs subjectivity. According to Jenkins (2006), while a reporter is enslaved to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, public relations must be enslaved to the client, the whole client and nothing but the client. Sievert (2007) noted that journalism can be seen as an autonomous social system that fulfils a unique function in society: to provide subject matter for public discussion through its observation of society from the perspective of a disinterested professional. Conversely, public relations is part of other social systems like business/companies or politics and plays a specific role within these larger systems.

There is a dearth of research on public relations in Africa (Aggrey, 2009; Akpabio, 2009), let alone research focusing on the relationship

between public relations and journalism. In the West, however, a number of studies have analyzed the relationship between the two professions (Larsson, 2009; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Sallot et al., 1998; Shoemaker, 1989; Charron, 1989). Larsson (2009) surveyed 64 Swedish public relations practitioners and journalists, and found that they shared a mutually dependent relationship. Despite the mutually dependent nature of this relationship, however, Turow (1989; cited in Shoemaker, 2005) sees the role of public relations in news work as sociologically problematic. Salter (2005), applying Habermas' theoretical disposition that sees public relations as an industry in which the message sender hides his/her real motive and instead poses as someone interested in the public welfare, argues that the communication structures of journalism and public relations are in conflict. Perhaps even more worrisome is the ethical disposition of practitioners in both professions. Cabot (2005) who surveyed 168 undergraduate students at California State University found it problematic that both journalism and public relations students exhibited "low" levels of moral reasoning. This suggests that neither profession can claim to be an unadulterated advocate for the public.

Significance and purpose of study

Studies that have sought to understand and contextualize the roots of "brown envelopes" and freebies in African journalism have studied the phenomenon from the perspective of journalists. Little or no attention has been paid to other players that may perpetuate the phenomenon. In Kasoma (2007), the 107 journalists surveyed identified public relations practitioners as one such player. Journalists reported being frequently invited to public relations events at which brown envelopes and freebies were a staple. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the phenomenon from the perspective of public relations practitioners. The significance of the study lies in giving us an opportunity of understanding the phenomenon from a key yet often overlooked perspective. The three overarching questions the study addressed were:

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners in Zambia describe the relationship they have with journalists?

Rationale: Research done in the West shows that the type of relationship that public relations practitioners and journalists share has been described using adjectives such as cordial,

suspicious, adversarial, etc. (e.g. Larsson, 2009; Sallot & Johnson, 2006). A common ingredient in the relationship that weaves through existing literature is interdependence. The two professions have a mutual existence in which they feed off each other. Since the African continent lacks studies of the type of relationship that exists between the two professionals, this exploratory study attempts to fill the void.

RQ2: What role do public relations practitioners play in perpetuating the phenomenon of brown envelopes and freebies in Zambia?

Rationale: The fact that public relations practitioners were cited as being among the top three sources that perpetuate brown envelopes (Kasoma, 2007), makes it imperative to assess this role from their perspective. Do public relations practitioners readily admit to perpetuating the practice? Why? In the Kasoma (2007) study, journalists' own admission was that the phenomenon of brown envelopes and by extension freebies affected their objectivity, which is the linchpin of good journalism, and are thereby unethical practices. Are the public relations practitioners similarly aware that the practice is considered unethical?

RQ3: How do public relations practitioners in Zambia perceive the phenomenon of brown envelopes and freebies?

Rationale: Following from the rationale for RQ2, how public relations practitioners perceive their role in perpetuating brown envelopes and freebies in journalistic practice depends on their professionalism, ethical orientation, and above all, their role in society. Research shows that public relations practitioners perceive themselves as playing a news management role in society. Larsson (2009) has defined this news management role as strategies for controlling the news agenda by producing and serving the media with material that promotes the instrumental purposes of the sender's interests. Is it therefore plausible that public relations practitioners will perceive brown envelopes and freebies as a means of arriving at their stated role in society?

Public relations, professionalism and media regulation in Zambia

The public relations profession in Zambia has been dogged by much the same problems as the journalism profession with regard to

establishing an umbrella body to oversee professionalism. Paramount among these problems in both professions has been apathy. For the journalism profession, however, it also encounters the subtle rift between journalists who work for the state-owned media versus those that work for the privately-owned. An early attempt at forming an umbrella body to promote professionalism in journalism was via the Press Association of Zambia (PAZA). PAZA, established in the early 1990s, was a voluntary association for journalists, student journalists and all those working in allied professions. Unfortunately, some sectors of the privately-owned media such as the biggest newspaper, *The Post*, shunned the association, perceiving it as being too government-inclined.

Taking advantage of the status quo, government pushed for its own style of media regulation. Thus, in 1995, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting presented a draft bill on the formation of the Media Association of Zambia (MAZ). The government's idea of MAZ would ensure that no media organization could operate without enrolling its staff in MAZ. Anyone who withdrew from MAZ would lose his or her status as a journalist (Sangwa, n.d.). The media fraternity fought against the formation of MAZ and won the case on grounds that the government had not consulted them despite being the main stakeholder (Matibini, 2006).

Following their victory, the media fraternity established their own voluntary, self-regulatory body known as the Media Council of Zambia (MECOZ) in order to keep government away. MECOZ' efforts at policing the profession included drawing up a national code of ethics, the first of its kind in the country. The national code of ethics even included a clause on bribery, which covered MECOZ's stance on brown envelopes and freebies. The clause read: "Journalists should regard as a grave professional offense, the acceptance of bribes in any form in consideration of either dissemination or suppression of information" (MECOZ, 2006).

Unfortunately, MECOZ's existence was short-lived, and the government has renewed its commitment to regulating the media. The media fraternity has responded with yet another attempt at self-regulation in the name of Zambia Media Council (ZAMEC), which was officially supposed to be launched on 3 May, 2010. Due to, among other things, a technicality on whether membership would be voluntary or compulsory, this initial attempt to launch ZAMEC failed. A second attempt was slated for 26 August 2010, which also fell

through. The Society for Senior Zambian Journalists, one of the bodies opposed to the August launch, noted that the launch was premature and called for further consultations with all stakeholders. Others in the media corps continue to argue that before launching ZAMEC, it is imperative to make membership compulsory rather than voluntary. This way, ZAMEC would not be treated dismissively like MECOZ, which had adopted voluntary membership. At the time of this writing, ZAMEC's official launch was still in limbo.

Unlike the journalism profession, the public relations profession in Zambia has fortunately not endured any regulation attempts from government. This could be explained partly by the subjective nature of the profession itself. If need be, it is easier to manipulate a profession that is already subjective than one that professes objectivity. Until recently, one commonality between the public relations profession and the journalism profession in Zambia was the lack of an umbrella regulatory body.

Figure 1: Newspaper advertisement for the launch of ZAPRA

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE



ZAMBIA PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

The interim National Council of the Zambia Public Relations Association (ZAPRA) wishes to inform Public Relations practitioners, Communications Specialists and the general public that ZAPRA will be officially launched in Lusaka on Wednesday, 19th May, 2010.

Foreign Affairs Minister, Honourable Kabinga Pande, who is also ZAPRA Patron, will be Guest of Honour at the event which will also be attended by Public Relations experts and other dignitaries from various organisations in the country.

This is a historical moment for the Public Relations profession in Zambia which should be supported by all professionals who realise that the profession is an essential management function critical to the success of any organisation.

Please contact Loyce Saili on 096 692 2425 or Hazel Zulu on 097 947 3284 for details.

R0003/15.16.17-5

The public relations profession's initial attempts at establishing such a body were unsuccessful, with apathy being a major problem. Finally, on 19 May, 2010, the Zambia Public Relations Association (ZAPRA) whose main objective is to enhance professionalism among PR practitioners, was officially launched. In order to maximize attendance and participation from all PR practitioners in the country, advertisements such as the one in Figure 1 were run in mainstream media a week prior to the launch. ZAPRA's launch coincided with this study's data collection period, and, as will be discussed in the methods section, the study's sample was mainly drawn from the list of attendees at ZAPRA's launch. Unfortunately, the advertisements do not seem to have helped in curbing apathy. Only 54 people attended ZAPRA's official launch. Asked what direction he wanted to see ZAPRA go, one of the public relations practitioners interviewed for this study noted that:

ZAPRA should try to concentrate on ensuring that levels of education amongst the members are enhanced. Education, in this instance, is not in reference to what degree one holds, but rather to the fact that PR practitioners must be consistent in attitude and approach. There must be education on codes and ethics of practitioners, and on the importance of maintaining these codes and ethics. This, in my view, is important because perception at the moment has it that as long as one can speak well, one can become and ultimately is a PR practitioner. (PR practitioner, personal interview, 16 June 2010)

ZAPRA's patron is Kabinga Pande, who is also Minister of Foreign Affairs. This, it can be argued, indirectly illustrates government involvement in the profession. Pande wants the association to promote Zambia's image abroad as well as influence integrity and sobriety in Zambian politics. Interim president Nicky Shabolyo wants ZAPRA to be established under an Act of Parliament to help raise the association's profile and enhance integrity among public relations practitioners. Plans are underway by ZAPRA to devise a standard national code of ethics which public relations practitioners in the country would abide by. Like the defunct umbrella body for journalists – MECOZ – membership to ZAPRA is voluntary.

Literature review and theoretical framework

To comprehend the phenomenon of brown envelopes and freebies from the perspective of public relations practitioners, an obvious

starting point is examining the relationship that exists between public relations practitioners and journalists.

Relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists

Research shows that the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists is fluid in nature. As Charron (1989) noted, this relationship is punctuated with cooperation sometimes, conflict at other times, and negotiation at yet others. Turow (cited in Shoemaker, 1989) sees public relations practitioners as adversaries of journalists. In the Zambian context, some of the public relations practitioners interviewed for this study described their relationship with journalists thus: "We have a very cordial relationship with journalists based on mutual understanding that the other [one] cannot effectively work without the other," said one interviewee. Another described the relationship as: "suspicious because while journalists have a duty to get information, [we] are under oath to keep secrets." Expanding on this, Salter (2005) noted that a client does not employ a public relation practitioner to provide a balanced account, which would assist the public in weighing up all the evidence in order to make an informed decision. To this end, half-truths are necessary in public relations while lying is formally frowned upon.

Further compounding the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, according to Sallot et al. (1998), is the lack of respect that sometimes exists. Larsson (2009) found that some public relations practitioners showed less respect for the media's professional task as attempts to manipulate the media seemed acceptable. Sometimes, as one of the interviewees for this study noted, such manipulation is necessary. "Journalists want to benefit at our events through having plenty of alcohol if they are to be willing to cover them," he noted. This seems to suggest that public relations practitioners perceive freebies as a means to an end, raising the question of professionalism and what it entails in public relations.

Public relations professionalism

Scholars studying professionalism have been preoccupied with addressing the question of what a profession is and what it means to be a professional. Wright (1981) defined a profession from the structural-functionalist perspective, which involved identifying the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes a profession should embrace. These include:

intellectualism, broad autonomy, a code of ethics and a comprehensive self-governing organization. Others are: greater emphasis on public service than on self-interests, and performance of a unique and essential service based on a substantial body of knowledge. Studies on professionalism in public relations have mostly been Western-based. These studies have argued that the public relations profession suffers from low standards of professionalism (Cameron et al., 1996; Van Ruler, 2005); particularly where ethics is concerned (e.g. Bowen, 2005; Leichty & Springston, 1996).

Since time immemorial, public relations practitioners have been faulted on their ethical disposition, which led the forefathers of public relations, Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, to make ethics in public relations part of pedagogical discourse. From as far back as the early 1900s in the United States, Ivy Lee sought to bring ethical sanity to the profession by reminding public relations practitioners that their goal was not to fool or ignore the public (Rodman, 2009). Ivy Lee particularly frowned upon techniques such as spin-doctoring (hiding the truth) that public relations practitioners engaged in and advised them to instead consider their social responsibility to the public first and foremost. He also preached to public relations practitioners to conduct themselves with high integrity.

Edward Bernays, who introduced the first university-level public relations course at New York University in 1923, reinforced Ivy Lee's stand on professionalism in public relations. Theoretically, Bernays believed in deontology, which emphasizes following laid down rules and procedures outlined in codes of ethics (Tilley, 2005). It is this school of thought that was the guiding torch in the establishment of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 1948. PRSA adopted a national code of ethics in 1950, which because of its comprehensive nature serves as a flagship, even outside the United States.

Deontological ethical reasoning, however, has its limitations. Harrison (cited in Tilley, 2005) points out that the application of codes of ethics, "in particular their effectiveness and enforcement, has been [...] problematic." Both the Australian and New Zealand public relations institutes have had "difficulties enforcing codes and sanctions." Bivins (1987) explains that the reason codes of ethics fall short is that they tend to be inflexible, yet the route to a more complete understanding of questions of ethics is circuitous and often painstaking. Codes of ethics, therefore, need to be supplemented with other forms of ethical reasoning. In this regard, Grunig (1992)

articulates excellence theory in public relations, which delineates eight principles that define what indicates excellent public relations: (1) communication is a function valued by the top people in an organization; (2) public relations practitioners participate in strategic planning for organizational effectiveness; (3) practitioners perform management (rather than technical) functions; (4) the organization practices two-way symmetrical decision-making; (5) the organization demonstrates knowledge of research and managerial functions; (6) activist pressures are present on the organization; (7) the organization has a participative rather than authoritarian culture; and (8) diversity is embodied throughout the organization.

Social responsibility theory is yet another theory that has been applied to public relations (Wright, 1979; Boynton, 2002; Kim & Reber, 2007). According to Kim and Reber (2007), responsibility to society is one of the most often emphasized concepts in public relations and an important value of professionalism. Bivins (1993) notes that as public relations continues to journey toward professionalization, clarification of its ethical obligation to serve public interest is vital and legitimizes its acceptance by society. The latest theorizing on ethics and professionalism in public relations takes on a multifaceted approach. According to Tilley (2005), since a “cure-all” ethics policy does not exist, public relations practitioners should assess the strengths and weaknesses of the main ethical philosophies under different circumstances as they reason ethically.

Tilley (2005) devised the “ethics pyramid” which is useful in incorporating ethical reflection and evaluation processes into the standard structure of a typical public relations plan. The ethical philosophies discussed in the study include: Potter Box (which focuses on values and loyalties), deontology (which focuses on following codes and laid down rules; the “means” justify the “ends”), utilitarianism (which focuses on consequences; doing the greatest good for the majority), and virtue ethics (which focuses on virtues such as respect, empathy, fairness, etc. while being sensitive to people’s culture).

Brown envelopes in African journalism

Typically, “brown envelopes” which derive their name from the color of the envelopes in which the monetary incentives are enclosed, are handed out to journalists by event organizers for showing up to cover meetings, press conferences, workshops, etc. Sometimes the brown envelopes are mailed/sent in advance by news sources to editors

in anticipation of coverage of a story (Kasoma, 2007). The practice has become so entrenched in African journalistic culture that it is somewhat of a norm nowadays. Journalists will go to such an extent that they threaten violence or media blackouts in the event that they do not get brown envelopes. University of Zambia lecturer Elizabeth Chanda narrated the following story with regard to media blackouts:

At one time we were running a project by ILO [International Labor Organization] where they wanted the media to get involved in reporting issues of child labor. [...] The journalists came to the workshop and immediately started to ask how much they were going to be paid to write such stories. ILO agreed to pay them a token for a specified period [two months], and believe you me, for that period, journalists wrote a lot of stories on child labor. After that period ended the stories disappeared – that is how serious the problem is. (Lecturer Elizabeth Chanda quoted in Kasoma, 2007, p. 120)

As far as threatening violence goes, a World Food Programme (WFP) source shared an anecdote where journalists had to literally be restrained from manhandling the visibly shaken WFP country director because they were not paid at the end of a workshop (Kasoma, 2007). The journalists pointed out that prevailing social economic factors, such as poor pay, made brown envelopes a necessary evil. "I'm a father of six who has to stretch my [small] pay to cover children's education, transport, food and other household necessities, and on top of that, rent," noted one of the journalists in an interview. The average monthly pay of journalists in 2006, as indicated in Table 1, was about USD300.

Table 1: Monthly pay for Zambian journalists

Salary	Journalists (N = 107)
Above USD500	19 (17.8%)
USD400–500	6 (5.6%)
USD200–399	32 (29.9%)
USD100–199	4 (3.7%)
Below USD100	2 (1.9%)
No response	44 (41.1%)

Source: Kasoma (2007)

In studying Ugandan and Cameroonian journalists, Mwesige (2004) and Nyamnjoh (2001) respectively, also found that poor pay was instrumental in perpetuating brown envelopes. Beyond poor pay, Lodamo and Skjerdal (2009) found that poor journalistic training was also a factor. The researchers however, rejected the notion of systematically explaining the practice of brown envelopes by material conditions or social-cultural phenomenon. Instead, a multi-faceted approach is needed (Lodamo & Skjerdal, 2009).

Methods

As noted earlier, the study's convenience sample was drawn from the list of attendees at ZAPRA's official launch. This list was obtained from the event organizers and contained 54 names, complete with contact information, which included email addresses and phone numbers. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2000), convenience samples can be helpful in collecting exploratory information and may produce useful data. Since the current study was an exploratory one, a convenience sample was deemed appropriate.

A public relations practitioner in this study was defined as a person who is responsible for promoting a favorable image of his/her organization with its various publics by using the mass media and other conduits. Additionally, in the case of highly specialized fields, such as science, technology, health, finance and so forth, a public relations practitioner is one tasked with the crucial role of boundary-spanning. According to Ankley and Curtin (2002), boundary-spanning involves mediating between the experts, with their often highly technical reports, and the media. A quick scrutiny of the list showed that not all of the attendees fit the study's definition of a public relations practitioner. Therefore, those attendees who listed their professions as "consultant", "journalist", "sales executive", "lecturer", "administrative assistant" and "student" were excluded from the study's sample. Only those who listed their professions as "head PR", "PR manager", "spokesperson", "head corporate communications", "communications manager" and "communications officer" were contacted to participate in the study.

Of those contacted, the majority were from the banking sector so a weighting mechanism was used to ensure that this sector was not over-represented. To supplement the ZAPRA list, a few other public relations practitioners who were purposefully selected on the basis of acquaintance were also included. These were mostly drawn from the

public sector, which was under-represented on the ZAPRA list. Ultimately, the sample consisted of 15 public relations practitioners, 10 of whom belonged to the private sector. It must be noted that this study was conducted during a time when most of the public relations practitioners were preparing for the annual Zambia International Trade Fair (ZITF), which made most of them unavailable. The ZITF gives companies and organizations countrywide the opportunity "to showcase their products and services with a view to creating sustainable partnership for wealth creation" (www.zitf.org.zm).

Given the small sample size, the quantitative method was coupled with a qualitative method that involved in-depth interviews to elicit more detail. When contacted by phone, those in the study's sample were given the option of either being interviewed face-to-face or via email. The majority opted for the email interview as it gave them more flexibility. A major drawback with the email interview as opposed to the face-to-face interview was tardiness. Some of the interviewees took over two weeks to respond. Information collected from the public relations practitioners included: demographic and professional orientation data, perspectives on brown envelopes and freebies, as well as their relationship with journalists. Below are some of the questions (starting from the general to the specific) posed about brown envelopes:

1. How often does your organization organize events at which journalists are invited?
2. Do you ever offer "brown envelopes" at these events? If so, roughly state how much you offer per event.
3. Roughly how much of your annual contingency budget goes toward brown envelopes?
4. What are your perspectives on brown envelopes?

Profile of public relations practitioners in Zambia

The portrait of a Zambian public relations practitioner painted by this exploratory study was that of a middle-aged man/woman (in the mid 30s to late 40s). The men slightly outnumbered the women (53 percent male compared to 47 percent female), but the difference was not significant. S/he was university-educated with a bachelor's degree

in a communication-related field. Some even had graduate degrees, mostly from Scandinavian countries. Of those that had graduate degrees, the majority reported having started off as journalists, then went back to school and returned to the job market as public relations practitioners. The reason for this shift in careers was “greener pastures”. Salaries in public relations are more attractive than those in journalism. For others, venturing into public relations was a way to break free of journalism, which they perceived as a “thankless” profession. As one journalist-turned-public relations practitioner noted: “If you are looking for money you don’t become a journalist because there is no money there. All you find are the same things, you’re bribed, there are monetary incentives. [...] You’re being exploited, you’re just being used for other people to climb the political ladder” (Kasoma, 2007).

The PR practitioners interviewed valued the extrinsic factors of their profession such as good pay and interacting with clients more than the intrinsic factors (e.g. membership in professional associations). Prior to ZAPRA, the majority of the public relations practitioners reported that they did not belong to any professional association. This revelation reinforced a point made earlier in the study about apathy. One of the reasons advanced for this apathy was a general lack of knowledge about what public relations professional associations existed locally. However, one interviewee pointed out that even in cases where the public relations practitioners were sensitized about professional associations, paying membership dues was an issue. She added that failure to pay membership fees was partly the reason why initial attempts at creating an umbrella regulatory body for public relations practitioners failed and hoped that ZAPRA will not encounter the same problem.

Results

Public relations practitioners described the type of relationship they shared with journalists in both positive and negative terms. Three groups emerged. The first group comprised public relations practitioners who worked for tightly monitored government institutions that preferred to keep information confidential. This group described its relationship with journalists as “suspicious” and/or “adversarial”. As one public relations practitioner from this group noted: “While journalists have a duty to get information, [we] are under oath to keep secrets.” The second group consisted of public

relations practitioners who worked for non-governmental organizations that strived for ample publicity but always felt short-changed by the media for one reason or another. This group described the relationship as "not very good" and/or "contrived". This group reported experiencing minimal coverage and sometimes a total media blackout whenever they failed to offer incentives. The final group comprised mainly public relations practitioners who worked for the banking sector and some quasi-government institutions. This group described its relationship with journalists as cordial. For instance, when asked to describe his organization's relationship with journalists, the public relations manager at the Drug Enforcement Commission, who also happened to be a former journalist, described it as: "Cordial because we are now more media-friendly and transparent." Of the public relations practitioners that used positive adjectives in describing their relationship with journalists, the majority also reported having worked as journalists before becoming public relations practitioners.

Research question 2 asked about the role public relations practitioners played in perpetuating the phenomenon of brown envelopes and freebies in Zambia. During interviews, public relations practitioners were specifically asked if they ever offered brown envelopes to journalists for attending their news events. All, save one, of the 15 PR practitioners interviewed said they did not. In fact, they took strong exception to any association with brown envelopes, which they deemed as an "unethical practice". This finding was contrary to the response that the 107 journalists surveyed in the Kasoma (2007) study gave when asked who the main sources of brown envelopes were. Public relations practitioners were among the top three sources cited, together with politicians and business people.

The only public relations practitioner who responded affirmatively to offering brown envelopes explained that having worked as a journalist in a prior career he understood the financial trials journalists encountered in their day-to-day work, adding that: "If I can do something to help, why not?" Ironically, although the majority of the public relations practitioners interviewed detested any association with brown envelopes, they did note, as the interview transcripts below indicate, that when incentives (monetary or otherwise) were not offered, it was not uncommon to get media blackouts.

Interview question: Some PR professionals have indicated to me that, short of providing brown envelopes to journalists at events they organize, they get media blackouts. What has been your experience with this?

Response I: It is true to some extent because journalists want to benefit at our events through having plenty of alcohol if they are to be willing to cover them.

Response II: Partially the statement is true. Brown envelopes motivate them somehow.

Response III: In a situation where you don't have anything to offer, you find that there's low or no coverage about the event you're performing.

Where freebies were concerned, the public relations practitioners responded affirmatively to playing a role in encouraging them as illustrated in the following response: "We normally organize out-of-town all-expenses-paid media seminars and workshops which serve as educational forums." These seminars and workshops, the public relations practitioners noted, took place at pleasure resorts, the most popular ones being in Siavonga, east of the capital city Lusaka. Accommodation in Siavonga, as this researcher found, can sometimes be in the excess of USD200 a night.

The final question asked how public relations practitioners in Zambia perceived the phenomenon of brown envelopes and freebies. As noted above, the majority of the public relations practitioners interviewed were overwhelmingly responsive to freebies and made a vivid distinction between brown envelopes and freebies. While the PR practitioners perceived brown envelopes as unethical, they considered freebies as part of their news management role as well as their boundary-spanning function. This news management role was defined two ways: (1) It entailed creating and distributing messages to generate favorable publicity; and (2) it entailed developing and maintaining cordial relationships with journalists.

As far as the first definition goes, a popular and innovative freebie that public relations practitioners talked about currently giving to journalists was the USB flash drive. A number of public relations practitioners said that instead of mailing press releases in hard copy

format or emailing them as attachments to journalists they saved them on flash drives with sizable memory space and sent them that way. A USB flash drive in Zambia, on average, costs about K100,000 (USD25) so this is a nice gesture, one interviewee added.

Where the boundary-spanning function was concerned, one interviewee noted that this was best accomplished when journalists were uprooted from their usual environment to serene out-of-town settings, which were more conducive for learning. Since the organizations the journalists worked for could not afford to foot the bill, the public relations practitioner said that there was nothing wrong with them offering all-expenses-paid learning retreats. He added that, "We have contingency budgets that cover such expenses." The result of these retreats, the public relations practitioner concluded, was empowerment for journalists since they got the much-needed education on technical jargon in order to sharpen their reporting skills.

Discussion

This study raises some interesting issues on the phenomenon of brown envelopes and freebies in local journalism cultures in Africa. Firstly, as we strive to understand, contextualize and theorize the phenomenon we cannot afford to overlook the perspective of those whom journalists cite as helping perpetuate the practice. Public relations practitioners, politicians and business people were the three top sources of brown envelopes and freebies cited by journalists surveyed in the Kasoma (2007) study. In that study, one of the interviewees, a managing editor at one of the newspapers, had observed the following about the role that news sources played in feeding and perpetuating the practice:

Sometimes the conduct of our sources perpetuates unethical behavior. One time when I was still news editor, I took very strong exception. [...] There was a tendency where an organization would write an invitation letter for your newspaper to cover a certain event. Towards the end of the invitation letter, they would write something like: Snacks will be provided or transport refunds will be given to those reporters who will come. This is very insolent. Such letters are very insulting to newspaper organizations because it implies that these people can only attend if we induce them with a promise of snacks or a promise of transport refund. If a reporter stumbles upon such a letter and sees that there will be transport refund of maybe K100,000 [about USD25] we've had instances where reporters hijack such letters

instead of giving it to the assigning supervisor they will keep that letter and on the material day they will present it as part of their diary. (Newspaper managing editor, quoted in Kasoma, 2007)

Secondly, the fact that the public relations practitioners in this study make a vivid distinction between brown envelopes and freebies, and detest any association with the former while endorsing the latter, presents an interesting ethical dilemma. Specifically, if both vices compromise a journalist's objectivity by journalists' own admission (Kasoma, 2007), on what basis do the public relations practitioners justify one over the other? The most common justification given by the public relations practitioners interviewed for endorsing freebies was that since the type of freebie they had become accustomed to offering journalists was the all-expenses-paid out-of-town trips, which served as educational platforms, there was nothing wrong with empowering a fellow human being. In fact, they correlated this gesture with the African custom of *ubuntu* (inherent generosity in all of us that makes us look out for our brother/sister). Specifically, the public relations practitioners in specialized fields like finance and technology saw such freebies as an innovative way of fulfilling their boundary-spanning role, which according to Ankley and Curtin (2002) involves mediating between the experts, with their often highly technical reports, and the media. In fact, Zambian public relations practitioners are not the first to employ this method. As one of the interviewees in Larsson's (2009) study noted about the Swedish PR practitioners: "Oh yes, journalists were on trips where we had seminars and further training for them."

Ethically, there is no question that the public relations practitioners see themselves as not only drawing from *ubuntu* but as acting virtuously by empowering journalists through education. The PR practitioners contended, and perhaps rightly so, that someone needed to educate journalists on how to read highly technical reports as well as understand the jargon found in highly technical areas. After all, even those journalists that have some working knowledge of specialized/technical fields, the media institutions they work for seldom offer to send them back to school for refresher courses. Media managers have attributed this to budgetary constraints. So, unless this is addressed at the institutional level, public relations practitioners will continue to take advantage of the void.

Thirdly, the fact that the public relations practitioners in this study refuted perpetuating the phenomenon of brown envelopes was

surprising, begging the question: Who then is the culprit? Why would journalists cite public relations practitioners if they were blame-free? To this researcher, the logic that public relations practitioners are the organizers of news events at which journalists receive these brown envelopes sounds plausible. However, without necessarily laying all the blame on public relations practitioners, as noted earlier, there are also times when politicians are the culprits (Kasoma, 2007). During the run-up to elections politicians have been known to offer journalists all sorts of incentives ranging from houses to money to promissory notes of better jobs once they get elected. Additionally, business people, specifically some foreign investors, have also learned the ropes as an American student who was on an internship in Zambia observed after attending a news conference that had been convened by an investor. The student wrote:

[Name of investor] was not interviewed as much as he told us what the story was to write. I thought to myself: "Wait, this is our job, not yours. We decide what to write." Afterwards, I took his picture and we left. After getting out of the door, my partner turned to me and showed me a wad of bills and looked absolutely perplexed. I had no idea if this was an act or not, but I was surprised too, because there were ten K50,000 [about US USD100] notes in her hand. (Final report, 'Journalistic Practice in Zambia' course).

It makes one wonder whether the practice of brown envelopes ends with the three sources cited above. Or is it far-fetched including countless other players and in essence speaking to corruption in society as a whole? If that is the case, what then is the starting point to curbing the practice? These are the questions we need to start asking, and there are no easy answers. Perhaps the correct starting point to resolving these questions is a macro, multifaceted approach to the study of brown envelopes, which incorporates the input of both the "givers" and "receivers". We have been overly-focused on only studying the phenomenon from the perspective 'receivers' (journalists).

Conclusion

From the findings of this study and the ensuing discussion, it is clear that public relations practitioners are important in helping to curb bribery in journalistic practice in Zambia. This can be done through a trickle-down approach where the main ingredient would be emphasis

on ethics and professionalism within the public relations industry itself. There is need for a comprehensive code of ethics to be circulated and more discussions on ethics. In this regard, ZAPRA is clearly a step in the right direction as it would provide a platform for education on ethical issues and provide moral support for public relations practitioners. Beyond ZAPRA, it is also in the best interest of public relations practitioners to belong to professional associations related to their field. The fact that an overwhelming majority of the practitioners interviewed for this study indicated that, prior to the formation of ZAPRA, they did not belong to any professional association sets a bad precedent for the profession. The apathy that characterized the official launch of ZAPRA is further testimony of this bad precedent, which needs to be addressed with a sense of urgency. There is also need for more discussions of moral philosophy and ethics, as they relate to public relations, in academic settings. This would be helpful in giving the public relations practitioner a point of reference.

Finally, since this was an exploratory study, its purpose was to provide baseline data for understanding the flip side of the phenomenon of brown envelope and freebies. In future, therefore, it is imperative to broaden the scope of the current study by increasing the sample size. A major limitation of the current study was the period it was conducted. As noted in the methods section, the data was collected during a period when most of the public relations practitioners were preparing for the annual Zambia International Trade Fair (ZITF), which made them unavailable. ZITF gives companies and organizations countrywide an opportunity to showcase themselves. Scholarship on brown envelopes and freebies can be further enriched by studying the phenomenon from the perspective of politicians and business people, who have also been cited as perpetuating the practice.

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TWANGE KASOMA

The growing influence of bribery in Ethiopian journalism

By Birhanu Olana Dirbaba

Abstract

This study reveals that bribery, including gifts of plots of land as well as money, is widespread among journalists in Ethiopia and is spreading to supervisors and assignment editors, including those in the upper leadership. The study unearthed five major mechanisms of diffusion of bribery among journalists: continuing older traditions, sources inducing journalists to accept bribes, organizational resource constraints, coaching by older colleagues and social interaction among friends. Even though further research is required to see whether cultural factors trigger and intensify bribery, it is suggested that the influence of cultural traditions of greeting enticements are minimal as compared to political and economic pressures. The study identifies as the major harmful influences of bribery are that it thwarts creativity, generates antagonistic relationships, and challenges democratic professionalism in Ethiopian journalism. Overall, the study found that bribery has become a dangerous threat hampering the development of more open, competitive and democratic professional journalism in Ethiopia.

Key words: Bribery, corruption, journalists, professionalism, Ethiopia

Introduction:

Ethiopia, the second most populous nation in Africa, comprises 82 ethnic societies. These ethnic groups represent a great diversity of cultures, traditions and values, and use a mix of traditional and modern forms of communication. The emergence of journalism in Ethiopia, as a modern mediated form of communication, is only a century old. The genesis of journalism in Ethiopia coincided with the intensification of the grip of feudal systems in the country where the rights of citizens were mostly determined by the free will of the feudal lords and the

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monarchy. Unlike other African nations, Ethiopia has never been occupied by colonial powers although Italy tried to colonize the country; first in 1896 and then again in 1936. As a result, unlike the colonized African nations, the journalistic culture of an imperial nation has had no significant influence on Ethiopian journalism (Golding, 1977). As a result most publications in Ethiopia are in local languages, in contrast to many other Sub-Saharan African countries where most newspapers use English or other European languages. Instead, the culture of Ethiopian journalism is mainly influenced by the local political, professional and literary traditions. The focus of the present article is not a comparison of the journalism tradition and extent of bribery in Ethiopia with that other African countries with a colonial background, but it is useful to emphasize how strikingly different is the historical and social context of journalism practice of Ethiopia.

For example, in Ethiopia the centuries-old custom of *eje mensha*, literally, “greeting enticement”, is a widely-practiced tradition in which official service providers receive assorted presents from citizens as a expression of appreciation of services given. In former times, the custom was not considered a form of bribery, but was looked upon as a “motivational” reward (Belay, 2009). Gradually this practice evolved into the systematic and widely rampant culture of *gubbo*, which means “bribe”, at organizational and individual levels of public service institutions in the country. There is increasing concern in Ethiopia with the evolution of innocent practices of mutual appreciation such as *eje mensha* into forms of legitimized bribes necessary to obtain services and many other forms of unlawful corruption that are creeping into attitudes in Ethiopian society. This concern is especially true in the case of professional journalism where norms of honesty, trustworthiness and integrity are expected of journalists. These contradictions have sparked off considerable interest in research on the manifestations and causes of bribery to influence journalistic reporting

It is generally argued that journalists should not take bribes either to write a positive story or to undermine the publication of a negative story. Bribery is one of the forms of corruption whereby individuals depart from ethical, moral, and professional service in order to gain private benefits. Journalistic bribery, in this study, is practiced when a journalist is induced to write a story either in favor of or against individuals, institutions, officials and/or businesses through material, financial or other means of enticements. This form of journalistic behavior can be termed corruption, an act that devalues the

professional pillars of journalism with the intent to gain private advantages. Thus, I have chosen to use “corruption” as a broad term to denote journalistic practices where professional norms are threatened as a result of monetary or material enticements.

To the best of my knowledge, no documentary evidence is available that locates the early historical beginnings of journalistic bribery in Ethiopia. However, journalists suggest that receiving incentives of different kinds (allowances from two or more offices; incentives in kind; and freebies) was common during the leadership of the military junta (1974–91). The practice of bribery by journalists in Ethiopia is commonly referred to as *bucheka*, or *buche* in short, which means “snatching” in Amharic (Berhanu and Skjerdal, 2009) or “pinching”. It is clearly understood that it is the journalist who takes bribes, thereby adversely affecting professional services. Corruption in journalism has also been named as *jetu*, which means “something wet” in the Oromo language – the major language spoken by the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. It implies that if the journalist benefits personally from the news assignment, then it is wet; if not, it is dry. Similarly, the Amharic term *derek tabiya* (“dry location”) is used in cases where the journalist does not expect *buche* or *jetu* (Berhanu and Skjerdal, 2009, p. 8). The monetary incentives granted by news sources to journalists, popularly named “brown envelope journalism”, has long been an issue in many parts of the world.

The purposes of this research are five. A first aim is to identify the different types of personal corruption in Ethiopian journalism and the extent to which these forms of corruption are found both in the state and private media. Secondly, the research will attempt to reveal the methods of spreading practices of bribery in Ethiopian journalism, adding to our knowledge of freebies and brown envelope journalism in the state broadcast media already identified in previous studies (Berhanu and Skjerdal, 2009). For example colleagues who are coaching novice journalists actually teach them how to solicit bribes. Thirdly, we are interested in identifying the factors that encourage bribery in reporting. Fourthly, the study discusses the ramifications of bribery among journalists for social and political life in Ethiopia. Finally, the article explores and explains factors exacerbating the practice of bribery journalism by highlighting socio-cultural, economic, professional, institutional and political dimensions.

A brief overview of the Ethiopian media scene

Unlike the two previous successive governments – the feudal (1930–74) and the military junta (1974–91) – when an independent press hardly existed, there has been a massive increase in the number of private print publications during the current government since 1991. By January 2010, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA) had registered 153 periodicals, 57 newspapers and 66 magazines. Of the legally registered newspaper titles, 35 appeared on the market during the months of July and August 2010. There are four television stations, all state-owned, one national and three regional only two of which are currently functioning. There are 33 radio stations in service, three privately owned (EBA, 2009, 2010). In addition, Radio Fana and Demtsi Woyane Tigray stations, which have close linkages to the government and used to be EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) party endowments, have recently been registered as "commercial" broadcasters. The number of journalists working in these mass media organizations is estimated at 1600 (Skjerdal, 2009).

Methodology

The research was undertaken by means of qualitative interviews. The interviews took place in the period between 7 July and 7 August 2010 and covered both private and government employed journalists. Respondents were selected purposely based on the snowball sampling method. The researcher interviewed 15 individuals working in different mass media organizations with different professional and administrative responsibilities. These include reporters, editors, chief editors and media managers from Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA), Oromia Radio and Television Organization (ORTVO), *The Ethiopian Herald*, Sheger FM102.1, *The Reporter* and *Awramba Times*. The former three institutions belong to the government while the latter three are privately owned. Every outlet has been represented by at least one reporter and one editor. Pioneer journalists were included in the group so as to gather input about the older legacy as well as the current practice of corruption in Ethiopian journalism.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in the frameworks of, but not limited to, semi-structured questions such as:

1. To what extent do you see corruption being manifested in Ethiopian journalism?

2. Do you think such practices are being diffused among colleagues?
3. What do you suggest as the major factors that instigate practices of bribery in journalism?

These general questions were presented to all respondents during each interview session. Based on their responses, I asked follow-up questions in a bid to provoke specific explanations and personal accounts from the respondents. These questions may appear to be framed in a way that assumes that corruption is taking place in Ethiopian journalism. I duly acknowledge that this is a limitation in the research approach, though at the same time recognizing that my background as a journalist gives me fair reason to believe that corruption or rumors of such practices are familiar to most workers in these media organizations. The respondents participated in the study with their full consent, and anonymity was promised. Some of the respondents were still willing to be identified. However, for the sake of consistency and minimizing potential harm to the interviewees, I decided to keep the identification of all respondents anonymous.

Manifestations of bribery in Ethiopian journalism

The questions were phrased in a general form leaving room for the respondents to articulate their own experiences and points of view freely. To the question of the extent of bribery, I observed a mix of responses. Some respondents spoke from their own direct experience while others preferred to speak indirectly by referring to the experience of others. Accordingly, similar to the findings of Berhanu and Skjerdal (2009), there is consensus among the respondents that corruption exists widely in Ethiopian journalism. Certainly, none of the respondents in this study questioned the existence of corruption in current journalism practice. Instead, they raised their concern about its extent, the increasingly sophisticated methods of covering up corruption, and its adverse influence on healthy journalistic professionalism in the country. The indications are that not only the frontliners in the profession, but a range of personnel in the leadership of the profession have been engaged in serious corruption practices.

Berhanu and Skjerdal (2009) report that “brown envelope” journalism is a common practice in the Ethiopian state mass media. Even though it is beyond the scope of this research to compare the practice of bribery among the media of different ownership,

informants expressed that this form of corruption is also common in the private media.

“Prostitute Journalism”

A growing problem in Ethiopia is that journalists run after stories only if there is some monetary enticement. Increasingly, journalists will only work on those stories where a source is willing to pay, and, of course, the journalist goes only for the highest bidder. Journalists wait for event organizers or press conferences to make clear that there will be payment and the willingness to actually report depends on the size of the reward.

Some practitioners apply the term “telephone box journalism” to describe this practice. You put your money in the slot and you get a line of communication. Not only does the reporter expect payment, but is ready to write anything he or she is paid for: lies, defamation, puffery, or promotion. A professional with senior managerial responsibility in *Reporter*, a private twice-weekly newspaper, explains the term:

You just put a coin in and it works, or it doesn't. It's also referred to as *kemet* journalism [prostitute journalism]. The newspapers which run this form of journalism are established by corrupt individuals. They pay rental fees for them, they buy computers for them, and then ask them to publicize whatever they say, for example by writing articles against individuals or organizations they wish to see denigrated or attacked. This is clearly observable not only in the so-called private press but also in government mass media institutions. Writers are being paid to produce articles on the columns which they put totally under the control of [corrupt individuals]. The situation has become very terrifying. (Senior manager in *Reporter*, personal communication, 7 Aug 2010).

The “bread and banana” defense of bribery

One of the most disturbing aspects of the growing acceptance of payment for writing stories the source wants is that it is quietly condoned even by leaders in the journalistic profession with the justification that journalists are so poorly paid. Unless the salaries of journalists will be raised, some argue, they should not be criticized for accepting payment from sources. The attitude of tolerance of bribery has become so widespread that even journalists who recognize that it should stopped become cynical about the pretence of meetings promoting journalistic ethics.

One of the editors in Sheger FM 102.1 – a private radio station – described this cynicism regarding monetary-driven journalism among professionals in a criticism of a recent conference on corruption in journalism. He recalls what the president of one of the professional journalism associations told a media forum which focused on preventing corruption.

[The president of the journalist association] said, “Without improving the life of the journalist, corruption can’t be stopped. As long as a journalist needs to eat bread with banana and we avoid the issue of raising journalists’ salary, it is not meaningful to organize such a forum as this. So, we can’t eliminate corruption this way”. (Editor in Sheger FM102.1, personal communication, 27 July 2010).

In the opinion of this informant the leadership of the professional association thinks that corruption is legitimate given the low economic status of journalists. The line of reasoning that material benefits of the journalist may justifiably override ethical aspects and professional values is widespread among professionals in media in Ethiopia.

Pocketing the surplus per diem

Forms of bribery in Ethiopian journalism include money under the table and expensive gifts from sources, but also freebies in the form of accommodation and lavish receptions or “training courses”. One of the most common practices is to claim additional payment from sources over and above the per diem that the news organization ordinarily provides (Berhanu and Skjerdal, 2009). Journalists eagerly seek to cover those events where this double per diem is available, but avoid reporting assignments where such extra remuneration is not available.

For example, ERTA reporters say that paying generous amounts of per diem to journalists is especially common in the regional states of Oromia, Afar, Somalia, and the Southern region, but excludes the Tigray and Amhara regional states. According to an ERTA reporter, the political administration and government-affiliated cadres in Tigray and Amhara regional states do not pay money or facilitate freebies for journalists. As a result, unlike the other regions where generous money incentives available, some journalists are reluctant to undertake news assignments in Tigray and Amhara. Moreover, private businesses and some NGOs such as the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) are known to pay reasonable amounts to reporters whenever they have

news events (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010). This practice of reporting only where there is extra payment obviously distorts the news coverage in favor of those who can pay.

“Land grabbing”: In the hire of politicians

Since 2005, adding to monetary incentives, land-grabbing corruption has emerged in Ethiopia. According to government policy it is illegal to sell land. Leasing land as property is normally a long and complicated bureaucratic process in Ethiopia, and, as the price of land has skyrocketed, bribing officials to speed up the process to get hold of land is frequent. The practice follows the massive land-trafficking campaign during the 2005 election period in which certain government officials, cadres and municipality staff were found to be involved. Within the media, journalists belonging to state media organizations have preferred to get land as a form of per diem given the profits in land speculation. Getting mayors to make these land grants guarantees them and their political friends favorable media coverage.

Journalists have reportedly been in the business of land-hunting in urban municipalities of the Oromia region (the largest regional state in the country). Respondents from ERTA and ORTV – both of which are state broadcasters – claim that a number of journalists have grabbed expensive plots of urban land since 2005. As a result, they have changed their living standards in a very conspicuous way. Journalists, who normally get by on a monthly subsistence salary, are now on an extravaganza spending spree in expensive hotels and bars, driving fancy vehicles and building modern houses up to four storeys high. An ERTA reporter equates the movement of land-grabbing with “campaigning”.

Instead of asking per diem, journalists have been bargaining with urban mayors to grab plots of land. Some of the journalists have grabbed massive plots of lands in different towns. Some of them gained not one or two plots of land; they grabbed eight to nine plots. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010).

One plot of land, usually 200m², would sell for 60,000 birr (about USD 5,000) on average. This means that a journalist who has grabbed nine plots of land could sell them for 540,000 birr (about USD 45,000). Not only the frontline professionals— reporters and program producers— have allegedly been heavily involved in this land-grabbing bribery campaign, but also management staff have been accused of

cooperating in this form of corruption in subtle ways. An editor in ORTVO explains:

In some news organizations, editors have been involved in setting up direct deals with urban municipalities and then sending reporters to facilitate and carry out the land-grabbing scheme. Some of these journalists were openly promoted in the organization [...] Besides, the managers involved the staff down the line of command in facilitating the corruption. They used to send lists of some seven to eight journalists for advancement as a group promoted on the basis of favouritism and cliques of collaborators. (ORTVO editor, personal communication, 21 July 2010)

When corruption involves staff other than the leading journalists, sophisticated techniques of covering up the bribery are used. Some professionals in supervisory and editorial positions have started to arrange news assignments to facilitate their own private benefits. They bargain with the news sources with or without the knowledge of the reporter who eventually takes the assignment. The assignment editor may inform the reporter about the deal if the money is assumed to be shared, or, in other cases, the deal may totally exclude the reporter. A reporter of ERTA cites one incident of property promotion that involved supervisors in the newsroom.

A reporter was sent by the assignment editor to Debre Berhan [a zonal town some 200 km north of Addis Ababa. The reporter was responsible for the production of a program on urbanization projects of the town. However, his boss here in Addis Ababa repeatedly called him on the phone to focus on one particular hotel and on the nearby beauty salon. The business owners had already worked out a deal with the supervisor. This suspicious case was raised during general evaluation sessions in the station. The reporter was declared innocent. But later, the program was suspended and the assignment editor found guilty for that. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010)

According to the reporter, this form of journalism has created an antagonistic relationship between professionals in the newsroom. Another incident of corruption in ERTA involved an ETV (Ethiopian Television) manager who apparently tried to disrupt an investigative program that dealt with the issue of land-selling corruption in the *Sululta woreda* (a local administrative unit), 10 km to the north of Addis Ababa. As noted above, according to the public and government

tenure laws, it is illegal to sell land in Ethiopia. The administrators of Sululta, however, violated the law. A crew from ETV's *Ayinachin* investigative program was sent to examine the case. In the midst of the investigation, it was revealed that the *woreda* administrators had directly dealt with the then manager of ETV and offered him the highest priced plots of land in the town. The crew was immediately taken off the story. Some of the journalists, including the immediate boss of the investigative reporters, became very aggressive about the intervention and wanted a convincing reason. The explanation they were given was that the tipsters of the story were organized OLF members (Oromo Liberation Front, an influential rebel organization that has been labelled as terrorist by the Ethiopian government), and ETV would not pursue stories based on information provided by OLF. According to an informant in ERTA, the manager harassed the crew members and assigned another crew to produce the success story that narrated and promoted the "extra-ordinary" development achievements of the administrators (personal communication, 14 July 2010).

The pervasive practice of accepting bribes in Ethiopian state media

This information concurs with the findings of Berhanu and Skjerdal (2009) that bribery is customary at all organizational levels in the Ethiopian state media. In an anonymous letter to the editor of *Reporter*, an ETV staff member condemns corrupt practices among the station's management. The staff worker quotes from an evaluation session which took place in ETV in October 2009, in which senior officials were examined for corruption. The corruption allegedly involved land-grabbing in the Oromia towns and the receiving of money from clients in exchange for re-broadcasting property promotion programs (anonymous ETV staff, letter to the editor, 17 October 2009).

Since allegedly very few journalists refuse to take bribes, corruption has become a common practice among journalists who are loyal to bosses and to the ruling party as well. Journalists who refuse to take bribes have been called *wogamis*, meaning "deviants", because they refuse to follow the practices of the majority who take bribes. The deviants include journalists who have been assigned by EPRDF, also called UNMEEs in the newsroom (named after UN peace keeping force between Ethiopia and Eritrea) (Berhanu and Skjerdal, 2009; Skjerdal, 2008). A reporter from ERTA maintains that these days, some of the so-

called deviant UNMEEs have finally adopted the corrupt practices as well.

After the UNMEEs had left the news event and had gone back to the newsroom with other crew members, I returned to the person who organized the news event and received my *buche*. The organizer encouraged me to take the *buche* dispensed to all the other crew members. I would say that whether they were influential in controlling the accuracy of reporting as *wogamis* or not, they have also benefitted by getting promotions and different privileges. The government offers them public housing and condominium houses. They have opportunities of promotion for better positions and salary increment as well. They get plots of lands, scholarship opportunities and overseas journeys. Yet, some of them because they are trusted have become the most dangerous corrupters, the worst. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010)

An editor in Sheger FM102.1 cites bribery practices that involve false identification. He reports that the radio station has had three cases of individuals from other institutions claiming payments from event organizers by pretending to be journalists from Sheger FM102.1 (personal communication, 27 July 2010).

A reporter of the same station says he has observed journalists writing for newspapers which have special issues on sports, fashion and entertainment. Under the guise of gathering information for special issues some reporters seek to attend political and economic seminars that are irrelevant for their media organizations, but which they know will provide generous payments. A senior reporter in *Awramba Times*, a private weekly Amharic newspaper, makes the same observation and calls these reporters “cocktail journalists”. He feels that journalists who run after events sniffing for payments instead of searching for genuine journalistic material are a disgrace to the profession.

I met the journalists at an event I organized at the Intercontinental Hotel. They arrived late after the event was over, but I saw them signing for the 100 birr (USD 7) allocated for transport by the organizers. Then they quickly left without even taking one note about the event they had received the money for. I feel ashamed. (*Awramba Times* senior reporter, personal communication, 27 July 2010).

Bribery initiated by news sources

The respondents in this study maintain that corrupt practices may be initiated by both journalists and sources. An assistant editor in the *Reporter* shares how business managers sometimes try to bribe journalists not to cover an issue: “The owner of a factory that polluted the environment tempted me and my editor by pushing us to negotiate on the amount he could pay if we stopped investigating the case” (assistant editor of *Reporter*, personal communication, 27 July 2010). Sometimes news sources go to the extent of threatening journalists if they refuse to take bribes. An editor in *Reporter* recalls a case in which a journalist was forced to accept a bribe in exchange for undermining a very controversial case.

She didn’t want to take the money. They [the news source] forced her to take the money. She then took the money because they scared her by putting a pistol on the table. She didn’t tell us what had happened. She finally disclosed that she had received a lot of money. She should have told us the truth in the first place, however. (Editor in *Reporter*, personal communication, 27 July 2010).

On the other hand, journalists also use ingenious strategies to pressure sources into giving bribes. There are accounts of investigative journalists who use their position to harass and force individuals to pay money to them. Others promise positive and glorified coverage for sources in exchange for good amounts of money. Yet others apply sneaky agitation to win generous amounts of money from sources. An editor who used to work for the state daily *The Ethiopian Herald* explains how the negotiation of the bribe takes place.

When I go for news gathering, I discuss with him [the news source] whether the news event should be covered in a news flash or be given more space. If he needs more space, I will arrange an appointment for further interview. I then send him some three or four copies of the newspaper. I post the person’s photo on the front page, and write the article very emphatically. I may not openly ask him to give me the money. But – I agitate him by calling him several times and discuss in a manner that makes him understand the intention. [...] You can agitate him to give you the money, you blow up the article using lots of adjectives, enumerate all the positive sides undermining all the weak and negative sides, even when the institution is practically very weak. You pump it up to make the weak organization very strong. Then, the person himself expresses his appreciation to you via telephone. And he invites

you to his office. You get the money placed in a white envelope from the secretary with great gratitude. (Former editor with *The Ethiopian Herald*, personal communication, 17 July 2010).

Other journalists plan news and program production with organizations where they think there is potential profit. NGOs, private businesses and religious institutions are among the institutions known for paying generous amounts of money in the exchange for good coverage of their activities.

Methods of introducing practices of bribery among journalists

The respondents in this study identify a number of methods on how bribery gets diffused among journalists. The methods can be discussed under five major categories. These are: legacy from old habits, source induction, collegial coaching, social interaction and observation among colleagues, and resource constraints of mass media organizations.

First, the legacy of older practices of bribery journalism appears to bear significance for today's practice. A pioneer journalist in the previous political era (the Dergue regime 1974–91), contrasts the purposes and scope of bribery journalism in Ethiopia.

During the Dergue regime, president Mengistu used to promote certain officials after watching them on TV. Therefore, knowing that they would be watched by Mengistu, officials in remote regions and villages, ministers and other local personnel were very interested in being shown on TV or having their photos posted on the front pages of newspapers. To this end, they bribed journalists by providing them full accommodation for free and generous per diem – two months allowance for a field work of 10 days. We were assigned to the Sedamo province. The administrator offered 500 birr (USD 200 during that time) to each of the crew members. He also ordered free hotel accommodation and a high-profile reception for us. The next day, while I was interviewing the administrator, the cameraman took repeated shots of the administrator. In fact, he used up all the film. Later, I asked him why. He responded to me saying, “Had I not been afraid of you, I would have also done the camera shooting in an acrobatic way.” (Pioneer journalist and media manager in the Dergue government, personal communication, 17 July 2010)

The second type of encouraging corrupt journalism involves induction into the practices of event organizers and news sources. An ERTA reporter recalls the first bribery experience of one of his colleagues.

She was assigned to cover a workshop at Ghion Hotel. It was her first assignment after she took up the TV journalism career. At the end of the workshop, the organizers paid some 300 birr to each of us. With this first day experience, she became very happy for the payment added to her regular monthly salary. The next day, she was assigned to the National Palace to cover the president's reception of an ambassador. At the end, other crew members were about to leave when she insisted on waiting till they were paid 300 birr (USD 24). She took for granted that every assignment came up with the value of 300 birr. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010).

This incident reveals an important lesson on expectations by revealing that news sources inadvertently initiate bribery practices among journalists even when the journalist is unaware of the existence of such bribery in the first place.

The third way of introducing journalists to the sweet taste of bribery is coaching by senior colleagues, as was noted by Berhanu and Skjerdal (2009). This often happens when a new news organization is being set up and experienced journalists are brought in to train the younger journalists. For instance, as editors in ORTVO explain, when this new television broadcast organization was set up, novice journalists in the organization learned corrupt reporting practices from senior journalists who were transferred from the mother company ERTA.

A fourth way of spreading journalistic corruption is through sharing of ideas of how to increase income or simply observing that others have found ways to improve their financial status. As explained above, some journalists consider bribery a legitimate means of obtaining income. To compensate for a meagre official salary, they take bribes. Thus, colleagues get curious about the wealth accumulation and become anxious to learn the strategies of doing it. An ERTA reporter tells the experience that led her into land-grabbing corruption described above.

I was surprised that many of my friends whom I used to lend money to so that they could get by until payday suddenly had transformed their lifestyle. I started to enquire about the sources of this incredible increase in income. Then, though somewhat late on the scene, I also learned how to grab valuable urban plots of land. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 24 July 2010)

The fifth inducement to bribery can be identified as resource constraints within the media organizations. For the most part, Ethiopian media organizations lack the financial and material resources

to provide adequate allowances and services, such as transport, for their reporters. News sources and event organizers, however, are happy to fill the gap. It has become common practice for event organizers to offer generous payments that journalists would not get from their own organization. It follows that journalists develop certain expectations whenever they go for news assignments. While this is a common problem in all mass media organizations, respondents agree that the problem is particularly serious in private media organizations.

Factors aggravating bribery in journalism

As mentioned earlier, journalistic bribery existed during the previous Dergue regime (r. 1974–91). The extent of the bribery, however, is less certain. According to one informant, the scope and forms of bribery during the Dergue were very minimal and were mainly restricted to excessive receptions. Today, the scope and forms of bribery represent a threat to the profession's credibility. Respondents agree that journalistic bribery has now become a common practice. The factors in this are many — political, economic, socio-cultural, institutional and professional.

With the coming of the new regime in 1991, a new economic policy was declared. The country abandoned its socialist economic model and introduced semi-liberal policies, allowing some degree of government intervention in the economic system. The policy also paved the way for the privatization of certain government-held businesses and this set the pace for the expansion of private enterprise. Private investors no longer had a guaranteed market but had to depend on mass media to promote their products and services. Some of the respondents claim that the growth of bribery in journalism is related to the growth of the free market economy. Says a manager in the *Reporter* newspaper,

As private economy and privatization expand, as bank transaction increases, and with the mushrooming of competitive bidding in various sectors, corruption has become a huge instrument to win in the business field. As this phenomenon gets diffused in society, journalism is affected as well. This is also the reality in Ethiopia. (Professional and senior manager in *Reporter*, personal communication, 7 July 2010)

Similarly, a journalist who used to work with *The Ethiopian Herald* notes that private investors prefer to bribe journalists as an effective means of promoting their business instead of paying huge amounts of

money for advertisements. “It’s very economical for private business owners to bribe journalists in order to get extended coverage by paying them 1,000 birr [USD 70] rather than paying 5,000 birr [USD 350] for half a second air time of advertisements” (former editor with *The Ethiopian Herald*, personal communication, 17 July 2010).

Another noted factor is the lack of a plural broadcast media environment in the country. Some respondents argue that with its glamorous nature, sources prefer television to other media. An editor who worked with a state daily says while this irritates journalists from other media, it also aggravates corruption in Ethiopian Television – the sole national broadcaster.

Organizers usually don’t start their event until journalists from television arrive. Even government officials don’t commence interviews or events before confirming the arrival of the TV crew. This has opened the way for them [the TV crew] to feel that they are expensive. (Former editor in *The Ethiopian Herald*, personal communication, 17 July 2010)

A closely related explanation is the lack of competitive broadcast media due to the limited ownership of private broadcast media. Due to the state monopoly of ETV, audiences have no alternatives in television, and the demand/supply balance principle breaks down. This imbalance arguably provides a space for bribery. Still others claim that the lack of autonomy in the state media intensifies unethical practices. According to an editor in ORTVO,

The role of journalism has been restricted to propagating and praising the executive in the government system. As a result, journalists have lost the principles of professionalism. Some 90% of Ethiopian journalists are government employees. They don’t have professional autonomy; the system doesn’t allow them either to expose the wrongs or to write against the government. (ORTVO editor, personal communication, 14 July 2010).

Frustrated by this situation, respondents argue, journalists have been encouraged to accept bribes. A reporter of ERTA believes that whether they receive money or not, journalists cannot investigate government officials.

Another factor aggravating the practice of brown envelope journalism is the poor economic status of Ethiopian journalists. Unlike the other factors, some respondents have reservations about this

explanation. An editor of Sheger FM102.1 says poverty is not unique to journalists and poor economic status exists in other professions, too. In this regard, some previous studies have questioned whether the causality between low salaries and unethical behavior is valid. It has been suggested that while it is an invalid and perhaps unjust line of reasoning, it has served as a convenient way for journalists to justify practices of bribery (Berhanu and Skjerdal, 2009).

Lack of professional awareness may also be a contributing factor to journalistic corruption. Some of the informants of this study agree with this point. However, others completely disagree, contending that all journalists understand that bribery is unethical. For instance, an ERTA reporter argues the following:

It is common sense that *buche* is unethical, and the majority of the journalists know it. [But] they see it as a privilege. It has become customary. I joined the profession without journalism education. I received *buche*, but I knew that it was wrong. "Habit becomes second nature." So, receiving *buche* is natural. It is no longer a shameful thing among the journalists. It is not because of lack of awareness, but because it is perceived as normal. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010).

In this regard, Birhanu (2006) found that Ethiopian journalists are professionally oriented, and most of the journalists favored the professional and ethical aspects of journalism rather than the material gains of journalism (Birhanu, 2006, 2009). A decade has passed since the introduction of journalism education in the country. In spite of the increased number of university graduates in journalism, the intellectual capacity and professional ethics of journalists have not improved with the passage of time. Instead, with the current mushrooming of journalism education institutions in the country (Skjerdal and Ngugi, 2007), the practice of demanding or accepting of bribes is clearly increasing in Ethiopian journalism.

The lack of ethical commitment in the management of news organizations has also been taken as a major factor aggravating corrupt behavior among journalists. A related factor in news organizations' lack of professionalism, an editor of ORTVO explains, is the "lack of transparency among the top management in the organization, lack of commitment, and protectionism of corrupt journalists due to favouritism" (personal communication, 21 July 2010) All this has aggravated corruption. Many of the respondents agree that lack of

strict control and supervision adds to intensifying corrupt practices.

Informants rarely mention socio-cultural factors as a major exacerbating cause of corrupt behavior in Ethiopian journalism. Very few respondents suggest as influential factors in growing practices of bribery the culture of generous hospitality and socialable reception or, the customar" to public service providers. A senior manager of *Reporter* says that "even though *eje mensha* is customary, the society's value for *yelunta*, which means "sense of propriety"; *feriha egzihabeher*, which means "sense of fear and respect for God"; *hati'at*, which means "sinister"; *nawur*, which means "immoral"; and the society's morality in communal bonding, all restrict the intensification of unethical behavior such as bribery" (personal communication, 7 July 2010). Some of the respondents mention ignorance as a factor aggravating bribery. In many cases, people and sources are found to compensate journalists simply because they are unaware of their right to contribute news and information to the media without having to pay for it. In this regard, more study is required to determine whether socio-cultural factors could provide a further explanation of bribery.

How journalistic bribery is a threat to the information society

Respondents unequivocally agree that bribery is a major threat to the development of professional values in Ethiopian journalism. To this end, various research findings conclude that Ethiopian journalism lacks competent, creative, courageous, critical and investigative journalists (Aadland and Fackler, 1999; Birhanu, 2006, 2009; Gebremedhin, 2006a, 2006b; Gudeta, 2008; Hallelujah and Skjerdal, 2009; Shimelis, 2002). Obviously, the first casualty of bribery and other forms of journalistic corruption is the collapse of independent, accurate, objective, and informative journalism. The journalistic watchdog, monitorial role is eliminated. With this comes the decline in the public's confidence in the news media and the economic decline of the information industries.

Another major debilitating effect of bribery is its limitation of journalistic creativity. A reporter of ERTA notes that the feedback he received on one of his televised programs was very frustrating.

I tried hard to be creative in crafting the program. They [colleagues] gossip about me saying that "he crafted the program very nicely, so there must be something behind the program". Even when you tell the camera person to shoot the scene from different angles, he will become suspicious. You will not feel free to

professionally evaluate your program, either. That makes me fearful of being labelled as corrupt. So, the attitude of corruption in journalism has got a real influence on the creative production of broadcast programs. (ERTA reporter, personal communication, 14 July 2010)

Respondents from ORTVO have similar experiences. One reporter shares how he is always suspicious whenever he watches beautifully crafted programs and news reports (ORTVO reporter, personal communication, 21 July 2010). Other journalists say they habitually poke fun at reporters when their stories appear shiny and promotional, saying that “the story smells *buche*” (bribed). This type of suspicion has become common within the journalistic circles even though there is no concrete evidence as to whether the journalist has received *buche* or not. However, most of the editors who participated in this study are certain that they can easily identify any bribed story in the course of their editing duty. An editor of the *Reporter* newspaper says, “When you read any bribed story as an editor, you smell the company element, not the human element. In that case, I change both the theme and style; or I reject it” (personal communication, 28 July 2010).

While it is deemed easy for editors to detect the credibility of a story, what follows after *buche* has been unveiled is very unforgiving in terms of the reaction of the reporter against the editor. This may lead to antagonistic relations between the editor and the reporter. Therefore, as the second ramification, the attitude and perception of journalists towards bribery would easily jeopardize the democratic, productive and professional relationships of journalists in the newsroom. Reporters commonly react emotionally when the editor declines to consider a story for broadcast or publication, which in turn contributes to the development of troubled relationships in the newsroom.

Conclusion

This article has argued that bribery is rampant in Ethiopian journalism, both in private and state-owned mass media institutions. The means of receiving bribery have expanded with journalists now receiving land, money and other less savory forms of remuneration. Not only has bribery infected leading journalists, but forms of corruption have also been diffused among supervisors and assignment editors, including those in the upper leadership.

The study unearthed five major diffusion mechanisms of corrupt behavior among journalists, namely a legacy inherited from older

traditions, source induction, organizational resource constraints, collegial coaching, and collegial social interaction. Another five factors – economic, political, organizational, institutional and socio-cultural dimensions – were found to exacerbate the practice of bribery in Ethiopian journalism.

Even though further investigation is required to see whether cultural traditions trigger and intensify bribery, reporters and editors suggest that local cultural traditions of greeting enticements in influencing and exacerbating bribery behaviour is minimal as compared to the other factors. In a related development, future investigation is required to study whether society's ignorance about the principles of professional media operations is related to the level of bribery among journalists. The ramifications of corrupt behavior among Ethiopian journalists – hindering creativity, creating antagonistic relationships, and challenging democracy – are a major challenge to the development of journalistic professionalism in the country. Overall, the study suggests that bribery has become a dangerous threat hampering the development of open, competitive and professional journalism.

This paper concludes with the suggestion that the practice and promotion of ethical journalism in Ethiopia is topical and vital. If the expansion of mass media organizations both at national and regional levels in the country is to increase effective information services, it is important that the number of journalists should increase not only in quantity but also in quality. The data in the paper is a wake-up call to the burgeoning field of journalism education and training in Ethiopia. Above all, it calls mass media organizations to devise their own way of attacking bribery in journalism. The critical examination of current practices demands that the news media seek more competitive, democratic and credible ways of serving the public. Above all there is need of a much improved individual professional commitment on the part of journalists. Personal character, together with the collective efforts of professional associations, are actions central to the struggle against unethical behavior and attempts to develop professional conduct.

Bribery in journalism undermines journalists' efforts to provide truthful and independent information about the always complex and volatile political, multicultural, multilingual and religious realities of Ethiopian society. Greater journalistic professionalism, in terms of the

increased intellectual and ethical force of journalists, is a vital virtue in this regard.

Acronyms

EBA	Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERTA	Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency
ETV	Ethiopian Television
ORTVO	Oromia Radio and Television Organization
UNMEE	United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia

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Brown envelopes and the need for ethical re-orientation: Perceptions of Nigerian journalists

By Chinenye Nwabueze

Abstract

Operating in a depressed economy, Nigerian journalists are often faced with the ethical dilemma of accepting gifts or gratifications at the expense of ethical tenets of their profession. The practice of accepting gratifications popularly referred to as the *brown envelope syndrome* has created a perennial credibility problem for the profession in Nigeria. This research work was aimed at finding out from practicing journalists what their perception of the brown envelope syndrome is, including their views regarding why the syndrome has continued to exist in the profession. By means of a survey of practicing journalists, it was discovered that the basic reason behind the continued existence of brown envelopes in the profession is the orientation of journalists. Most of the journalists see nothing wrong with the acceptance of brown envelopes. It is recommended that the welfare of professionals should be improved to provoke a change in the perception and attitude towards the acceptance of brown envelopes.

Key words: Brown envelope syndrome, journalism ethics, professionalism, societal values, Nigeria

Introduction:

The journalism profession thrives in a challenging environment, where practitioners are put through various kinds of tests that shape their mode of operation on a daily basis. Aside from the challenges associated with insecurity in the pursuit of news, a major hurdle journalists are regularly faced with is the quest to survive ethical pressures encountered in the line of duty. In a bid to carry out its responsibility accurately, objectively and responsibly, the press pass

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through what could be described as ethically kindled “fire” to subdue extraneous influences in the interest of professionalism.

One ethical challenge which poses a threat to the image of the journalism profession and ability of practitioners to perform their duties objectively is the brown envelope syndrome. This refers to the practice of accepting gratifications for performing journalistic tasks. Aiyetan (2002, p.33) describes this practice as a cankerworm eating deep into the journalism profession. The brown envelope syndrome among journalists is not peculiar to Nigeria. Mfumbusa (2008, p. 151) writes that “it is a prevalent practice, which is largely condoned in African media circles.” Its origin in Nigeria could be rooted in the culture of presenting kola nuts to visitors, a hospitality practice common in many African societies. Accusing fingers have also been pointed at the various military dictatorships in Nigeria said to have introduced corruption in every sector of the nation. These excuses notwithstanding, the fact remains that journalists, like other professionals, have ethical codes which should serve as guides in the face of challenges.

Nigerian journalists often come face-to-face with ethical dilemmas when striving to meet the responsibilities they are saddled with in the nation’s fragile democracy. The Nigerian press is operating in a depressed economy and “is barely managing to keep its head above water” (Edeani, 1990, p. 183). This situation leads to poor remuneration of journalists and neglect of their welfare, a situation which exposes them to ethical dilemmas in the field. The journalists are often faced with the quest to protect their “stomach” at the expense of journalistic ethics. The aim of this study therefore is to assess the perception of Nigerian journalists of the brown envelope syndrome. Before presenting the results of this study, it is pertinent to take a look at the background environment within which Nigerian journalists operate and the concept of the brown envelope syndrome.

Ethics, societal values and the Nigerian journalists

Professionalism cannot be divorced from ethical standards. Ethics ensures that people practicing a particular profession are led to decipher what is morally right from what is morally wrong without being policed to do so. Ethics is a set of guiding principles which are not laws but become binding to people who adopt it as a moral boundary for the practice of their profession. Ethics could also be described as a moral *modus operandi* adopted or willingly accepted by

a person or group of persons in day-to-day dealings in a particular trade or in relationship with others.

However, a problem arises where an individual is faced with an action which may not be legally wrong but ethically unacceptable in his profession and begins to develop “moral cold feet” probably for financial gain or otherwise. This is apparently why Agbanu (2008, p. 348) suggests that the most difficult ethical dilemma exists when ethical conflicts arise between two or more “right” moral obligations. To this end, Day (2000) (cited in Agbanu, 2008) observes that ethics consists of balancing of competing good actions when there is no “correct” answer. Among the issues contained in the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists are editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, privacy, privilege/non-disclosure, decency, discrimination, reward and gratification, public interest, social responsibility and plagiarism (Nwabueze, 2006, p. 193). The issue of rewards and gratifications tends to constitute a most challenging issue which Nigerian journalists operating in a depressed economy and corrupt society have to wrestle with.

The value system of a society exerts pressure on a journalist and could possibly cause the reporter to operate with unethical practices if he is not strong enough to resist the culture-induced temptation. It is pertinent to note that cultural values and journalism ethics are constantly at war. Journalism ethics is played up where a journalist is faced with conflicting values in the society, especially values that are incompatible with tenets of professionalism. Kasoma (1999, p. 447) notes that journalism ethics is concerned with making sound decisions in journalistic performance, and that it assumes the presence of societal morality. Morality consists of actions guided by generally acceptable human values and responsibilities which, according to Kasoma, constitute a moral system. Human beings subscribe to several moral systems at any point in time and “ethics begins where elements within a moral system conflict, and a person (journalist) is called upon to choose between various alternatives”. (Kasoma, 1999, p. 447).

Inherent in the postulation above is that the journalist is always battling with conflicting norms, values, and interests in the society which derive from the culture within which he exists and the need to foster professionalism in his profession. Professionalism in journalism simply means “performing journalistic chores responsibly by following the tenets of the profession whose function lies in disseminating news and informed opinion to the public” (Kasoma, 1999, p. 446). A

journalist battles with meeting the challenges of living in an environment shaped by a specific culture and the challenges of allowing ethical codes to guide the practice of his profession.

Culture has been defined as the totality of way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing them from their neighbors. The journalist is part of the society, living in a value system cherished by people in that society. However, the challenges faced by journalists would be understood better if, as Zelizer (2005) observes, the profession is seen as a culture. According to Zelizer,

Seeing journalism as a culture thus allows for a wide range of attributes not included in other constructs for thinking about the phenomenon – notably, as a profession, an industry, an institution and a craft. Unlike the profession, which emphasizes the values, beliefs and practices by which journalists are constituted as professional beings, the culture of journalism presupposes a wide range of internal and external conventions that identify certain activities as journalistic but without the honorific aura attached to ‘being professional’. (Zelizer, 2005, p. 200)

Implicit in Zelizer’s postulation is that certain practices come to be accepted as part of the journalism profession by those in the profession, without such practices being originally part of expectations or goals of the profession. Undoubtedly, the brown envelope syndrome has regrettably crept into journalism practice in Nigeria and has assumed what looks like a permanent position in media circles.

Studies have shown that most Nigerian journalists accept brown envelopes. After a study of media practitioners in Southwest Nigeria, Adeyemi and Okorie (2009) found that 75 per cent of the respondents regularly accepted brown envelopes, though 64.6 per cent of those studied, agreed that it was an unethical practice. Similarly, Okoro and Ugwuanyi (2006), after studying journalists in four Southeast states and one North-central state in Nigeria, found that a good number of journalists studied (54.2 per cent) view brown envelopes as material favor, a perception which made these journalists see nothing wrong in accepting it. Also, 51.4 per cent of those studied do not see acceptance of brown envelope as unethical, even though their organizations condemn it. The situation is the same in Kenya where after a study of

the shaping of news values by young journalists in Kenya, Ogongo-Ongong'a and White (2008) revealed that all young journalists studied acknowledged that they accept help and compensation (which included cash) from news sources, though the journalists quickly added that the compensation does not prevent them from sticking to professional norms.

However studies of the brown envelope syndrome in the Nigeria media sector (Okoro & Ugwuanyi; 2006; Adeyemi & Okorie, 2009), did not establish whether acceptance of brown envelopes would continue if remuneration of journalists was improved. Most of these works stopped at establishing the basic reason for the growth of the brown envelope syndrome – poor remuneration. However, this work set out to fill such gaps by establishing what would happen even if remuneration were to be improved. Furthermore, this work establishes that such organs as the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria (NPAN), and the Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE) cannot do much in curbing the brown envelope syndrome because members of these bodies are part of the problem. This work also establishes that in Nigeria, editorial policies of media institutions against brown envelopes exist on paper but management is not strict on ensuring adherence to such policies, and cases of people punished for indulging in such practices are not common. The study also establishes that poor remuneration may not be the only major reasons for the growth of the brown envelope syndrome because journalists from organizations that pay relatively good salaries still collect brown envelopes.

Though some journalists claim that gratifications do not influence objectivity in news reporting (Adeyemi & Okorie, 2009), the fact remains that there is no "free lunch", and media organizations view acceptance of gratifications for performing journalistic duties as unethical and frown at it. Ogbondah (2003) posits that the best situation is to resist the temptation of accepting brown envelopes because such resistance not only strengthens media credibility but also ensures press freedom. According to Ogbondah, "journalists must understand that compromising their moral and ethical principles can be a greater threat to press freedom than any body of oppressive press laws" (2003, p. 108).

The brown envelope syndrome cannot be divorced from the nature of the society within which a journalist exists. Corruption in the media,

an example of which is brown envelope syndrome, is said to be a reflection of the corrupt nature of the larger society. Reuben Abati, a member of the Board of Directors of Guardian Newspaper, one of Nigeria's foremost newspapers, while explaining the nature of corruption in the media, observed thus: "The journalist is also a member of the society and if we are an exceptionally corrupt society, then the media cannot be innocent. They are just as corrupt as the society" (cited in Aiyetan, 2002, p. 34).

While explaining how the American society shaped a brown envelope free media, Onyisi (1996) narrated the experience of a Nigerian journalist, Mr. Basil Obi, who, after an encounter with some American journalists, concluded that the practice of accepting brown envelopes did not exist in God's own country, as the United States is known. The Nigerian journalist had attended the victory party of a politician in Kansas city, Missouri where everyone, including journalists, paid for their drinks. The journalist observed that an average American abhors "bribery" or any form of free lunch. He described the victory party experience as a big difference between Nigerian journalists and American journalists. This analogy does not mean that there may not be elements of corruption among some journalists in America but the practice may not be as common as it is in African countries due to the corrupt nature of most nations on the African continent. In Nigeria for instance, the Federal Ministry of Information organized a national media tour in 2001 during which journalists were taken round the country to inspect the state of development in the various states of the nation. Hotel bills, feeding and transportation fares of journalists were taken care of by the federal ministry of information. This includes cash allowances for participating journalists, provided by the state governors and the federal ministry of information. According to Ogbondah (2003, p.104), "the 2001 media tour organized by the federal ministry of information was an example of [a] media event during which news reporters accepted the federal government's payment of their transportation, accommodation, meals, telephone calls, etc." The development is a sharp contrast to the story above on Basil Obi's encounter with American journalists.

Understanding the concept and nature of the brown envelope syndrome

When the phrase "brown envelope" is mentioned in connection with journalism practice, the first thing that comes to mind is that it is

simply money given to journalists to “tailor” stories in favor of the individual or organization that offered the money. However, the meaning of the term brown envelope goes beyond a financial offer. It includes any form of gratification (cash or otherwise) given to a journalist for covering or to cover a media event (Nwabueze, 2003, p. 3). It is any form of gesture (often tied to publicity) extended to a journalist before, during or after a media event which requires the services of that journalist. Media event here could be press conference, press interviews of any sort, workshops, impromptu or organized press briefings, and so forth.

Akabogu (2005) defines brown envelope as the practice of offering or accepting gratifications in the form of gifts, drinks, food or money in order to influence the judgment of a journalist. Okunna (cited in Akabogu, 2005) sees the brown envelope as a monetary bribe handed out to a person to pressure him or her into doing what the bribe giver wants. Onyisi (1996, p. 80) notes that brown envelope “is generally used to refer to the practice of offering and receiving gratifications in the form of gifts, drinks, food, sex or money – in order to influence the judgment of a journalist.” He further observes that it may be given to a journalist as an appreciation for an act or demanded by the journalist, stressing that the underlying motive is to influence the judgment of a journalist immediately or in the future.

The brown envelope offer could be in cash or non-cash forms. The non-cash form includes various gift items such as products, plots of land, contract awards or off-setting transportation or accommodation bills for journalists on assignment. In this work, however, the brown envelope definition is restricted to only the cash form. The brown envelope syndrome refers to the corporate or individual practice exhibited by journalists in pursuit of gratifications (brown envelopes) in the exercise of their profession. It includes all activities geared towards sourcing, scouting or requesting for, brown envelopes. In Nigeria, the brown envelope is known by various names; journalists in different regions or states have specific names for referring to brown envelopes. For instance, journalists based in Southwest Nigeria refer to brown envelope as, *matter*, *load*, *largesse*, among others. Those based in Southeastern state call it *jewu* (meaning food), and *paragraph*; in Northwestern states, journalists call it *kwa*, *welfare*, *roger*, among others. Other names include *shooting*, *kola*, and *gbalamu*.

In exploring the rationalizations or arguments for and against the practice of the brown envelope syndrome, Onyisi (1996, pp. 83–85),

identifies four classes of people who view the practice from different perspectives – idealists (who see brown envelope as a form of bribery and unethical practice in journalism and should not be accepted for any reason); altruists/culturists (who opine that it is offered to be nice to journalists and in line with the hospitality nature of African culture); realists (who believe that though the practice is morally wrong, the Nigerian society is such that you need to do something to get your story published); and opportunists (who have no firm conviction but simply believe that to accept or reject brown envelopes depends on the situation).

Among the key factors responsible for the growth of the brown envelope syndrome in Nigeria is the nature of the society in which the profession and practitioners exist. Another major factor is relatively poor remuneration for practicing journalists in Nigeria. A study by Nwodu (2004) showed that most journalists working in media organizations based in Nigeria earned less than NGN 15,000 (about USD 110) monthly. The situation is virtually the same today with most journalists, especially those working for privately owned media establishments, earning below NGN 20,000 (less than USD 180 monthly). Studies have also shown that that Nigerian journalists insist that poor/irregular salaries is a basic reason why they accept brown envelopes (Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2006; Adeyemi & Okorie, 2009). The practice of acceptance of gratifications has continued to pose a credibility problem to the journalism profession, invariably affecting the role of the press as a watchdog of the society.

Theoretical base

Guiding this study is the social responsibility theory of the press. Propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), the theory has as its major premise that freedom has corresponding obligations attached to it, and that the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out essential functions of mass communication (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). McQuail (2005, p. 172) gives the basic tenets of this theory as follows: (a) the media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust; (b) news media should be free but self-regulated; (c) the media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct; and (d) under some circumstances, government may need to intervene to safeguard the public interest. In relation to this study, the press is expected to guard against acceptance of

gratifications which could affect their social responsibility to the society. That responsibility demands objectivity, fairness and adherence to professional codes of ethics. To effectively play the watchdog role, journalists ought to be socially responsible to the society in the practice of their profession. Lapdogs and pet dogs cannot be effectively responsible to the society. Brown envelopes could turn the press into lapdogs or pet dogs that dance to the whims and caprices of the "fingers" that feed and pet them (news sources) instead of using their liberty in the interest of the society. The social responsibility theory connotes a watchdog press that factors in public trust in exercise of the freedom to practice their profession. Acceptance of gratifications of any form could lead to distortion of objectivity which invariably affects the social responsibility of the press.

Problem statement

Okunna (2001, p. 74) describes the ethical journalist as the bastion of democracy who must stand out in the fight to sustain democracy and who should be indestructible, incorruptible, beyond change and decay, and ethically sound. But with the perennial problem of the brown envelope syndrome threatening the credibility of the journalism profession, it becomes difficult to dispassionately and objectively regard the Nigerian journalist as an unbiased ethical umpire and bastion of democracy.

Much as some factors have been suggested as responsible for the growth of the brown envelope syndrome, the journalists themselves who are enmeshed in this credibility/ethical crisis would be in a better position to point out why the practice has continued among them. Such observations could assist in making result-oriented suggestions on how the problem could be addressed. The specific objectives of the questionnaire used for the study were to determine (a) what the perception of the Nigerian journalists is about brown envelopes, (b) the proportion of journalists that accept brown envelopes, (c) whether acceptance of brown envelope affects objectivity in news reporting, from the perception of journalists, (d) whether journalists see the acceptance of brown envelopes as an unethical practice, (e) whether poor remuneration (salary) is the basic reason for acceptance of brown envelope, (f) whether the acceptance of brown envelope would continue even if the salary of journalists is increased. In-depth interviews with media professionals sought to give further understanding to each of these points.

Methodology

The survey research method was adopted for this study. The sample consisted of 150 journalists in five selected cities across Nigeria. The selection of the cities, including the variation in the number of journalists studied was a matter of convenience and according to the discretion of the researcher. They include Abuja (30 journalists), Owerri (30 journalists), Ibadan (30 journalists), Umuahia (20 journalists) and Enugu (40 journalists). However, the selection of Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria, was premised on the fact that journalists from different parts of the country (in terms of geographic affiliation) operate as correspondents for various media organizations. The city also represents the northern part of the country while Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo state, represents the southwestern part of the country. The other cities – Owerri (Imo state capital), Umuahia (Abia State capital), and Enugu (Enugu State capital) – are all located in the southeastern part of the country. The questionnaire copies were administered to the journalists by the researcher, who was also assisted by field workers. The number of journalists studied (150) was as a result of the unavailability of funds to engage in an expanded study of more cities and journalists in Nigeria. The researcher suggests an expanded study where funds are available.

Out of 150 distributed copies of the questionnaire, 116 were returned, giving a response rate of 77 percent. The number of copies returned from each city is as follows: Abuja 25, Owerri 21, Ibadan 16, Umuahia 17, and Enugu 37. The study also adopted the in-depth oral interview technique in finding out the attitude of professionally trained journalists towards brown envelopes. To this end, ten reporters and editors were interviewed for the study: two work for electronic media (one each from the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, and Channels Television); eight work in print media establishments, one each from the following media: *Daily Sun*, *Punch*, *This Day* (prominent privately owned national dailies), *New Nigeria* (a national daily owned by northern state governments), *The Tide*, *Ambassador* (both state-owned newspapers), *The News* (magazine), and *Nigeria News World* (a city newspaper in the southeast of Nigeria). These journalists were interviewed in October 2010. There was need to include the in-depth interview as a tool in the methodology of this work since the theme of the study is on professional practices and attitudes towards brown envelopes in the line of duty. This provided an in-depth reflection on the thoughts of these reporters and editors about the brown envelope syndrome in the journalism profession.

The journalists were given the liberty to freely discuss the brown envelope issue from the perspectives of their understanding of the concept, the basic reasons why journalists accept brown envelopes, their attitude towards it, their perception of its implications on objectively in news reporting, and its influence on the image of the journalism profession. This includes questions on what they think is the way out of the ethical problem, particularly the role of bodies such as Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), among others. These questions helped shed light on the justifications journalists have for collecting brown envelopes. "Brown envelope" in this work operationally refers to cash form of gratification offered to journalists in the line of duty.

Description of sample

For the questionnaire survey, 20% of the 116 respondents (n = 23) are female journalists while 80% (n = 93) are male journalists. Moreover, 55% of respondents (n = 64) work in newspaper establishments, 25% (n = 29) work for radio stations, 11% (n = 13) work in magazine establishments, 7% (n = 8) work for television stations, while 2% (n=2) work for wire services. 53% (n = 62) of the respondents work for privately owned media houses while 47% (n = 54) work for government-owned media houses.

In terms of work experience, 50% (n = 58) of the respondents have practiced journalism for 10 years or less, 32% (n = 37) for between 11 and 20 years, 16% (n = 19) for 21–30 years, while 2% (n = 2) have practiced for 31 years and more. The salary scale of respondents per annum is as follows: 15% (n = 17) of the respondents earn NGN 60,000 (about USD 400) or less per annum (i.e. USD 35 a month); 25% (n = 29) earn between NGN 60,000 and 180,000 (about USD 400–1,200) per annum (i.e. between USD 35 and 100 a month); 31% (n = 36) earn between NGN 160,000 and 300,000 (USD 1,200–2,000) per annum (USD 100–170 a month); 10% (n = 12) earn between NGN 300,000 and 420,000 (USD 2,000–3,000) per annum (USD 170–250 a month); while 12% (n = 14) earn N420,000 (about USD 3000) and above per annum (i.e. about USD 250 a month). Eight respondents abstained from indicating their salary earnings per annum.

Results

For the questionnaire survey, the first research question sought to find out the perception Nigerian journalists have about brown envelope offer. Perception here entails whether the journalists see brown envelope as bribe or as a product of extortion, or even as gift. The responses showed that majority of the respondents see brown envelope as a gift/kind gesture from media users rather than a bribe, as shown below. In this sample, 70% (n = 81) of the respondents indicated that brown envelope offer is a gift or kind gesture given to journalists by the media user, 8% (n = 9) see it as bribe, 1% (n = 1) see it as a product of extortion, 2% (n = 2) see it as product of blackmail, 11% (n = 13) say it is a special privilege enjoyed by journalists in the practice of their profession, 8% (n = 10) indicated "can't say" as their response.

The second research question sought to find out the proportion of respondents who accept brown envelopes in the practice of their profession. The findings show that 84% of the respondents (n = 97) accept brown envelopes in the practice of their profession while 16% (n = 19) indicated that they do not accept brown envelopes.

The third research question sought to find out whether acceptance of brown envelopes affects objectivity in news coverage. Observations show that the majority of respondents indicated that acceptance of brown envelope does not affect objectivity in news reporting. A majority for the respondents, 78% (n = 90), indicated "No" as their response, showing that although they accept brown envelopes, they do not believe it affects their objectivity or stance in coverage of events; 7% (n = 8) agreed that acceptance of brown envelopes makes them less objective in coverage of events; 10% (n = 12) indicated that acceptance of brown envelope does not always affect their objective stance in news coverage; while the remaining 5% (n = 6) indicated "can't say" as their response.

The fourth research question sought to find out whether respondents see brown envelopes as unethical. The result shows that 51% (n = 59) of the respondents do not see acceptance of brown envelope as an unethical practice; 32% (n = 37) see acceptance of brown envelopes as an unethical practice; while 17% (n = 20) simply indicated "can't say" as their response.

The fifth research question sought to find out whether poor remuneration of journalists (poor salary) is the basic reason for acceptance of brown envelopes. Findings show that 43% (n = 50) of the respondents agree that poor remuneration is the basic reason for acceptance of

brown envelope by journalists; 23% (n = 27) indicated that poor remuneration is not the basic reason; while 34% (n = 39) did not have a clear opinion of the issue.

The sixth research question sought to find out whether journalists who accept gratifications (brown envelopes) would continue to do so even if their salaries were to be increased. Findings show that 12% (n = 14) of the respondents claim that if salaries were to be increased, all journalists would still accept brown envelopes; 20% (n = 23) say that most journalists would still accept brown envelope; 37% (n = 43) say that some of them would still accept brown envelope; 27% (n = 31) say that few of them would still accept brown envelope; while 4% (n = 5) claim that no journalist will take brown envelopes if salaries are increased.

Discussion

From the results of this study, it could be seen that the perennial problem of the brown envelope syndrome in Nigeria persists basically as a result of the orientation of practicing journalists who are in the middle of the issue. Data derived from the study shows that a majority of the respondents (70%) see brown envelope as a gift or kind gesture from the giver. This corresponds with the study by Okoro and Ugwuanyi (2006) which revealed that journalists saw brown envelopes as a material favor from news sources. With this kind of orientation, improvement of salary or even reduction in corruption in the society may not stop the journalists from accepting brown envelopes since they don't see anything wrong with the act. It invariably means that the anti-brown envelope campaign should also be concentrated on news sources so that once such people are convinced to stop offering brown envelopes, the journalists will have nothing to accept.

It is clear that most journalists in Nigeria still accept brown envelopes, as gathered from the study. Other studies have also established that most Nigerian journalists accept brown envelopes (Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2006; Adeyemi & Okorie, 2009). This could be a result of the fact that a good number of journalists see nothing unethical in accepting brown envelopes. However, a majority of the journalists studied (78%) stated that acceptance of brown envelopes does not make them less objective in coverage of events. This response is somewhat disputable because as the saying goes, "there is no free lunch". The giver of brown envelopes are often believed to have a hidden motive which is the expectation of positive publicity from the journal-

ist.

The issue of poor remuneration, which has often been referred to as the basic cause of continued acceptance of brown envelope by journalists, has received empirical backing. This received support from earlier studies by Okoro and Ugwuanyi (2006), and Adeyemi and Okorie (2009) which also indicated poor salary as a basic cause of acceptance of gratifications by Nigerian journalists. This plays up the concept of situational ethics which, according to Akabogu (2005, p. 203), "may justify bribery received by a journalist on the basis that he is probably not well paid and he is faced with a lot of financial problems within and outside his work environment." Situational ethics looks at the rightness or wrongness of an action in relation to the particular situation in which the doer of the action finds himself or herself.

The fact remains that there is need for the remuneration of journalists in Nigeria to be improved as a way of checking the growth of the brown envelope syndrome in the society. Currently, there is a bill in the Federal House of Representatives cited as the Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill which is aimed at improving the welfare of journalists in Nigeria, among other objectives. Part IV of the bill states:

In order to ensure the independence, objectivity, impartiality and transparency of journalists, they shall be placed on salaries, allowances, pensions and general conditions of service at least not less than 20 percent above those paid to staff in Federal and State Government parastatals and private companies, as the case may be. The media establishments that cover at least 20 percent above the rates of salary, pensions, allowances, etc. which obtain at the Federal level, while the media establishments that operate at the State or Local Government level, shall pay their workers not less than 20 percent above the rates, pensions and allowances, etc. which operate at the state level. Allowances may however differ to accommodate peculiar needs. (Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill, 2004).

The bill has yet to be given serious attention by the legislators, despite the urgency such a bill should receive. This effort at enhancing journalism practice should be backed up with a serious re-orientation campaign targeted at changing the perception of journalists concerning the acceptance of brown envelopes. This is because the answer to the last research question of this study ironically revealed that a great percentage of journalists would go on accepting brown envelopes even if their salaries were increased. This is a worrisome observation which

anti-brown envelope campaigners should work against, especially through professional bodies overseeing activities of journalists.

Similarly, there is need to look into the influx of non-professionals in the journalism profession. Journalism has become an all-comers affair with many who cannot find jobs elsewhere seeking refuge in the profession. Such non-professionals definitely will not see anything wrong in accepting brown envelopes. Karikari (1996) cited in Mfumbusa (2008), observes that the emergence of media pluralism and the entry into journalism by so many people lacking professional training is a principal source of generalized weak professional quality. Karikari writes that "the range of violations (in journalism practice) is wide, varying in form and content with many implications for media credibility, growth and expansion of media freedom, and for enhancement of respectability of the profession" (Mfumbusa, 2008, p. 147). The professionally trained journalist could find the need to protect the integrity of the profession and resist gratifications but the non-professional "gate crasher" whose basic interest is his stomach will definitely not consider integrity and professionalism when faced with ethical challenges such as brown envelope offers. In Nigeria, the Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill of 2004 has taken care of influx of non-professionals and untrained journalists into the profession, stipulating basic qualifications for the practice of journalism in the country.

Discourses on brown envelope practices among journalists

The data gathered from the in-depth interviews corroborate that brown envelopes are commonly accepted among journalists working in Nigerian media institutions. The reporters understand brown envelope to mean gratifications given by a news source to journalists for covering an event. However, one of the informants argues that if a news source invites journalists to a place where they have to travel a long distance before arriving, and gives them transport money and hotel accommodation, such a gesture is not equal to a brown envelope. "I don't see anything wrong in that. Someone can give you transport money and pay your hotel accommodation for travelling that far to cover a story for him," says one print reporter. This could be described as a way of justifying certain kinds of gratification which also falls into the definition of brown envelope.

The interviews confirm that journalists concede that the brown envelope syndrome is not a healthy sign of Nigerian journalism, but they argue that journalists could not stop accepting brown envelopes

because of the circumstances within which they operate. The interviews further reveal that the basic reason for accepting brown envelopes is thought to be poor salaries, irregular salaries or no salaries at all. As at the time these interviews were conducted, about ten prominent national dailies, broadcast stations and magazines in Nigeria were owing their workers between six and twelve months salaries. This does not include city publications, most of which are known for either offering poor salaries to staff or owing staff for a long time. The journalists gave this situation as justification for engaging in unethical practices (such as accepting brown envelopes) to survive.

A correspondent of *New Nigeria* rhetorically asks, "How do you expect a journalist to survive when he is not paid for 10 months? How can a journalist who earns N10,000 (about USD 70) or N15,000 (about USD 107) a month survive in an economy like ours?" A reporter with Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) plainly suggests that "journalists are treated as if journalism is charity work. People are owed for months, even where they are paid, it is peanuts". The journalists blame media owners for the rising incidents of the brown envelope syndrome. They note that a situation where some media organizations recruit reporters without placing them on any salary and tell such reporters that their identity card is their meal ticket, contributes in encouraging acceptance of brown envelopes.

However, a reporter from *Punch* has a contrary view regarding the reasons for accepting brown envelopes. He says the reason is that in a morally decadent society like Nigeria, people have the notion that someone should be given a reward in form of back-pay for a job well done.

Journalists use poor remuneration as an excuse, but that is not the issue. Many people are poor but they don't steal. What of editors that are paid very well yet they accept brown envelopes? In fact the bigger the income, the more money a reporter demands as brown envelope. Such reporters say 'I am bigger than the amount you are giving me'. So it is basically a moral problem in the society, not just poor pay. (*Punch* journalist, personal interview, October 2010).

The reporter's argument that the reasons behind acceptance of brown envelope is beyond poor remuneration receives credence based on the fact that reporters in some government-owned media outlets who enjoy relatively good and regular pay still collect brown envelopes. This goes to show that reorientation of journalists is one of the major

requirements in addressing the brown envelope syndrome. The data from the questionnaire instrument also showed that 95% of respondents indicate that journalists would still accept brown envelopes even if the salaries were increased. Ogongo-Ongonga and White (2008, p. 159) write that low pay is one of the reasons why journalists rationalize their lack of integrity (the other being authoritarian management practices in newspapers). The point here is that there are other crucial factors such as decaying moral values and lack of integrity responsible for the dishonest act. On the attitude of journalists towards brown envelopes and its implication on objectivity, it was revealed that the interviewees accept brown envelopes although most of them did not directly agree to that. This was discerned from their responses on the issue of objectivity. They said that brown envelopes do not stop them from reporting objectively. "If I collect, I still go ahead and do my job," says one print editor.

However, some argue that whether brown envelopes distort objectivity in news reporting depends on the nature of the story. If it is a sensitive issue such as murder, rape, corruption in public offices, and matters of serious public interest which other media houses may likely report, such stories are written objectively. But if the news source invites a reporter to do a story basically aimed at improving his image or promoting his organization's course, then objectivity may be distorted. The implication of this position is that brown envelopes influence objectivity in news reporting in various degrees. As the editor of the *Nigerian Newsworld*, a city newspaper in southeastern Nigeria says, "Brown envelope compromises your conscience." The FRCN reporter agrees by saying, "Brown envelope syndrome affects the profession seriously. Ethics is almost zero in the professions". On the other hand, the *Punch* reporter suggests that "brown envelopes affect objectivity in two basic ways, the first is that you could be very angry with the news source for attempting to buy your conscience with money and do the story to his disadvantage or to punish him, secondly it could make you write to please the news source irrespective of objectivity."

The interviews reveal that brown envelopes negatively influence objectivity and the credibility of the journalism profession. The claim that brown envelopes do not prevent objectivity is not peculiar to Nigerian journalists. In Kenya where the brown envelope syndrome also exists in the media sector, young journalists said in a study that they accept help and compensation (brown envelopes) quickly added

that they do not forget their obligation to be impartial and then write the story as objectively as possible (Ogongo-Ongong'a and White, 2008, p. 176).

Still on objectivity, the Channels Television reporter said; "Even if the money (brown envelope) is not there, if a story is a good one, you have to write it. Again, even when there is no good story from an event, you take the organizer (news source) to one corner and interview him so that you can do a good story from his response, just because he would give brown envelope." The implication here is that brown envelope makes some reporters creative, that is, they squeeze out a good story from an event just to please the news source that offers gratification.

The interviews revealed that the basic solution to the brown envelope syndrome in journalism practice in Nigeria is improved and regular remuneration of journalists in media institutions. All the journalists agreed on this point, with the exception of the *Punch* reporter who believes reorientation should come first. The journalists are of the view that ethics and issues of reorientation of journalists cannot work if journalists are either not paid or poorly paid. According to the Southeast Bureau Chief of *Daily Sun* newspaper; "Brown envelopes will die a natural death if journalists are well paid".

Two journalists opine that news should be seen as a commodity and as such should be paid for. When challenged that journalism should be viewed as social responsibility, the reporter with *The News Magazine* says, "Yes, but when someone invites you to cover an event for him or to investigate a story, the person should pay for the services just as lawyers are paid to handle cases in court." However, this plays up the issue of commercial news, a practice common among broadcast media in Nigeria. It refers to the practice whereby news sources pay for coverage of events, for example book launches, political rallies and workshops. It is a practice which critics have condemned as unethical, yet it is common in the country as a survival strategy for media houses. Some journalists argue that there should be a parliamentary act making it illegal not to pay journalists. The journalists impart that members of such bodies as NUJ, NPAN, and NGE are customarily entangled in the brown envelope problem in one way or the other. The argument goes that only a superior force, in other words an act of parliament, can make media owners ensure the improved welfare of journalists.

The Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill (2004) seeks to address this issue. It is a bill that is aimed at improving the work conditions and also offer more protection for journalists in media institutions. After 2008 known as "Bill for an Act to Enhance the Practice of Journalism in Nigeria", this bill was sponsored in the House of Representatives (lower house at Federal level) by Honorable Abike Dabiri and 16 other legislators and has gone through the first reading. It promotes and protects press freedom and welfare but has generated controversies from media practitioners over alterations made to its content (by legislators) viewed as impeding press freedom. Among the issues treated in the bill are freedom of journalists to practice their profession, mandatory qualification to practice as a journalist, and media ownership issues.

The interviewees maintain that gender does not have any impact on the acceptance of brown envelopes. Says a female journalist with Channels Television, "Male journalists collect, female journalists collect also. When an amount of money is given to journalists to share, we share it together. Even if the organizer wants to give me something extra because I'm a lady, he won't do it while other journalists are watching." Though media institutions have policies against the acceptance of brown envelopes, they do not have means of ensuring adherence to such policies, according to the interviews. For instance, there are no teams set up to monitor reporters in the field, neither has there been a case where journalists were sacked or penalized for accepting brown envelopes, to the knowledge of the researcher. The interviewees said that editors and proprietors on the contrary encourage brown envelopes. According to a FRCN journalist, "When a reporter files in a story, some editors expect that something (brown envelope) must have followed the story and expect the reporter who submitted the story to bring part of the gratification; otherwise the story may not be published."

The failure of media institutions to identify, shame and punish journalists that accept brown envelopes could be described as part of the larger journalism culture that affects the profession negatively. While discussing the limitations of self-regulation, Baran (2004, p. 487) writes that media professionals are reluctant to identify and censure colleagues who transgress ethical obligations. According to Baran, to do so might appear to be admitting that problems exist, and whistle-blowers in the profession are often met with hostility from their peers. This further buttresses the need for a body external to media

institutions or at least not exclusive to them in terms of membership composition, for example the Nigeria Press Council (NPC) to be serious and stringent on regulation of affairs in the media industry with respect to ethical and professional issues. The NPC comprises of journalists, editors, government officials and members of the public.

The study suggests that media house ownership has no relationship with brown envelopes. Staff in privately-owned and government-owned establishments approach brown envelope issue in much the same way. Personal morals and values play a crucial role in encouraging brown envelope syndrome regardless of ownership type. Value re-orientation is therefore crucial. Regular re-orientation workshops are essential for journalists to adjust their moral and societal value system to portray a profession devoid of unethical practices such as the brown envelope syndrome.

Conclusion

It is the suggestion of this study that any anti-brown envelope campaign in Nigeria should be heavily focused on changing the orientation of journalists as the key priority before working on other factors. This is against the backdrop of the fact that a good number of journalists accept brown envelopes and do not consider the practice unethical. Thus, this orientation has to be worked against, because, as Igbiniedion (in Udofia, 1987, p. 34) puts it, "Brown envelope and free tickets can compromise your integrity as a journalist. [...] If you don't accept gifts, you will feel freer to report an accurate assessment of an event or issue. Gifts are to influence your coverage. Avoid them."

Such bodies as the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigeria Press Council (NPC), Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE), Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON), should accelerate efforts towards ensuring adherence to ethics in pursuit of professionalism in the practice of journalism in Nigeria. The enabling environment with regard to welfare of journalists should also be created to make it easy for journalists to sincerely change their perception and attitude towards acceptance of brown envelopes. In a depressed economy like that of Nigeria, journalists should not be left to grapple with the temptation of accepting gratifications to make ends meet without any form of encouragement to adhere to ethics. Where a journalist is not paid for several months, the possibility of resorting to brown envelopes as a way of making ends meet, becomes a viable

option. As Osolnik (cited in International commission for the study of communication problems (1985, p. 242) observed, journalistic ethics cannot be confined to proclaiming principles and demanding that journalists respect them. What is needed are constant efforts to increase the actual opportunities for free and responsible work in the media. The extent to which those who work in the media can help their creativity and assert their moral and professional qualities depends on the way the institution is managed, on the financial resources made available, on the editorial policy and on many other concrete conditions.

This does not mean that journalists should not strive on their own to resist gratifications of any sort. Journalists owe it as a duty to the public to do their jobs responsibly and in the interest of the public. Studies from countries like Kenya and Ghana have shown that value reorientation is a basic premise upon which the fight against brown envelopes is being executed. After a study of young journalists in Kenya, Ogongo-Ongong'a and White (2008) found that the frequently cited image of journalists as essentially dishonest, lazy, incompetent and inefficient characters was not confirmed. Similarly, Diedong (2008), after a study of journalists in Ghana, observed that the common self-concept of journalists was some form of moral leadership. This implied a form of value orientation forming the basic premise for honest and professional journalism practice.

Media practitioners ought to see to social responsibility as a foundation for professional practice. As Ogongo-Ongong'a and White (2008, p. 160) observe: "It is likely that this justification of a 'culture of dishonest journalism' begins at the initiation of the journalism career." Against this backdrop, Stovall (2005, p. 26), while exploring the culture of journalism, observes that people who practice journalism should see it as a public trust. According to Stovall: "Journalists do not get into the field to make money. They want to make a good living (and most do), and they hope to do well, but they do not expect to gain wealth through their own hard work or cleverness" (p. 26). This assertion buttresses the social responsibility quotient of the journalism profession which practitioners must always have at the back of their mind.

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CHINENYE NWABUEZE

A critical view of the Kenyan media system through the perspective of the journalists

By Elisabet Helander

Abstract

This article focuses on how political reporting is perceived by the Kenyan media practitioners themselves. By thematically analyzing 15 individual semi-structured interviews conducted with a broad spectrum of journalists and editors in Nairobi, it is possible to uncover the difficulties they face and how it relates to the structure of the media system. The responses help to illustrate the relation between the structure of the media and the practice of journalism in a recently liberalized environment. The issues that run through most of the interviews are the aspects of the political economy of mainstream media, and the ethical problem of so-called “brown envelopes” and other corrupt practices.

Key words: Kenyan journalists, Kenyan media system, political reporting, brown envelopes, journalism corruption

Introduction:

After the eruption of violent political clashes following the 2007 elections in Kenya, a commission set out to investigate the causes behind it. The commission led by judge Phillip Waki produced a report, which puts some portion of the blame for the ethnically driven violence on Kenyan media (Waki, 2008). This stirred debate among Kenya’s media practitioners and caused some self-criticism by journalists, which is echoed in the responses that were given in the research for this paper. However, the question of the ethnic tension behind the violence has only been given marginal space here, as part of the problem of a partisan media, which impacts the practice of journalism. The structure of the Kenyan media system appears to result in many media outlets being transformed into direct political instruments during election campaigns. One result is that politicians

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use ethnicity to win votes. Making journalists instruments of partisan politics or inciting ethnic violence is only one way that journalists are pressured into becoming instruments of power struggles in Kenya. The interviews with the 15 journalists and editors in this research seek to understand how ordinary journalists and editors perceive their struggle for independence within this structure of power.

The role of media in a transitional democracy has been the starting point of this research. Kenyans have seen an expansion in broadcasting with new independent channels and some growth in the press during the past decade. Although Kenya has a more pluralist media since the early 1990s and a less oppressive legal environment, the influence of the government still looms large. Freedom of expression is regulated through the criminal libel legislation, the Official Secrets Act, and a statutory media council. The newly enacted Media Law has caused heated debate among media practitioners (Makali, 2010). However, the Kenyan journalists surveyed in this study place emphasis on a number of other factors, which also play a role in their independence, such as their collective professional status and the financial and political interests of the media owners. What comes to the fore in this context is the corruptive practice of brown envelopes and bribes. Because Kenya is regarded as having a well-developed and fast growing media industry (Makali, 2010), it is pertinent to analyze the weakness of the media system revealed in these practices of bribery and corruption. The conditions for a Habermasian public sphere – a comprehensible discourse based on truthful information – are usually fulfilled only among an elite sector of any given society (Berger, 2002).

The poorest Kenyans are serviced by media, which are either government controlled or commercially driven, sometimes with a direct connection to a political party. In this environment the more open political debate takes place in the margins of the media, which several of the interviewees give witness to. It may be the case in Kenya that both the government and business leaders are keen to feed the public with nothing that is subversive to their interest and power (Nyamnjoh, 2004). A related question is how the standards are set for political reporting and opinion making in the mainstream media. This study argues that ethical norms are very unclear in a newly liberalized media system, because common professional standards are not being upheld through trusted institutions.

The methods of this research

The present study is based on individual semi-structured interviews with professional journalists working in different sectors of the media. The aim was to find what factors impact on how stories are covered, and how journalists feel about the conditions under which they work. The responses help to illustrate the relation between the structure of the media and the practice of journalism in an environment of gradually increased freedom. The issues that run through most of the interviews are the dominating influences of the political economy of mainstream media in Kenya, and the ethical problems of bribery in journalism as an emerging profession.

Historical background of Kenya's mass media

Kenya is a former British colony that gained independence in 1963 and adopted a constitution and legal system which was similar to that of the United Kingdom. Since the country held its first democratic elections in 1992, Kenya's media has been gradually opened up to more independent voices. The right to freedom of expression and liberalization of broadcasting was called for as an integral part of the development of democratic rule. The journalists interviewed attest to the development of a climate of greater professional and editorial freedom during the last decade.

As part of the liberalization the Communications Commission of Kenya allocated 224 FM frequencies and 89 TV frequencies. About 60 radio frequencies are presently in use, which indicates how quickly both local and national radio has grown. There are 14 TV channels in Kenya, which are using only a small portion of the number of frequencies allocated (CCK 2005, cited in Maina, 2006). The process of allocating those broadcasting licenses and frequencies was not transparent and has been widely criticized in the debate on Kenyan media. The accusation is that it was based largely on political patronage and that some frequencies are being hoarded illegally (Makali, 2010). Most of the broadcasting licenses awarded during the Moi administration in the 1990s, were based on the relationship to the government officials, according to George Ogola (2009).

The media sector has been regulated via various acts such as the Public Order Act, the Defamation Act, the Preservation of Public Security Act and others (Maina, 2006). The government of Kenya has also restricted press freedom by broadly interpreting legislation, such

as the Official Secrets Act, the Law of Sedition in the penal code, and criminal libel legislation (Freedom House, 2008).

The *Daily Nation* is the leading daily in the country in terms of readership, followed by *The Standard*. All other dailies fall far below these newspapers in readership. The *Daily Nation* was founded in 1960 by the Aga Khan and is now owned by the Nation Media Group, of which the Aga Khan is the principle shareholder. The Standard Group was subjected to government-sanctioned raids on its newspaper and TV offices, where materials were confiscated or destroyed in March of 2006. The event shocked the journalist community, and is brought up in several interviews as an example of media harassment.

The two dominating media groups, the Nation and the Standard, have so-called cross-media ownership, which means that they also own influential TV and radio channels. However, the state-owned broadcaster KBC is the only channel with coverage in the whole country (Maina, 2006). Although Kenya has enjoyed fairly strong economic growth, it is still a poor country and the economic constraints are having an effect on the media. Specialized reporting is rare. The newspapers and radio stations do not have enough staff and rely instead on contributions from freelancers, especially for coverage outside the capital.

Questioning the liberal political-economy of the media

Although freeing the media from state domination has been widely acclaimed throughout Africa in the last twenty years, Kenyan media, since the liberalization during the past decade, are now susceptible to both political influence and the pressure of the market. In this aspect the Kenyan mainstream media do not differ from media in the Western world. There are values and norms that transcend journalistic practices in all mass media. Indeed, comparing the comments of the Kenyan journalists with my own experience of working as a Swedish foreign correspondent shows that there are universal issues that affect most journalists throughout the world. There are, however, socio-political conditions that have certain implications for journalism practice in a developing country that is going through a transition to democracy (Skjerdal, 2009).

A great number of the interviewees in this study are talking about the political party interests reflected in their medium as well as the influence of the business advertisers. The theoretical analysis of the

liberal political economy of the media by Herman and Chomsky (1994), McChesney (2004) and Curran(1996), although based on Western media, point to the same issues as can be found in the case of Kenya. The theoretical ideas of the more libertarian strand have great resonance when the interviewees are talking about their journalistic ideals, many emphasizing unbiased and informative reporting.

An article by Helge Rønning (2009) brings up an African culture of gifts, and the idea of *a favor for a favor*, used to make a system work smoothly. One of the interviewees in the case study uses that same expression in the context of corruption. However, I do not believe it suffices to explain a problem of bending the rules or corruption. In the same article Rønning states that Kenyans have come to accept petty corruption as part of their daily lives. Although the phenomenon of bribing is spoken of as widespread, the journalists are not accepting petty corruption as normal. Several lament it vehemently and would like to change it. Because the problem has the most severe impact on the relatively poor majority of the population, it has a demoralizing impact on society and undermines the trust in all institutions. It appears that the transition to democracy and a liberalized economy can render a society without clear social and ethical guidelines.

Rønning's article (2009) is focused on media's role in curbing corruption in the public sector, and only touches upon the issue of corruption in the media itself. The effect of corruption is that it can undermine the legitimacy of institutions, including the media. Media are often presumed to be a thorn in the side of government and able to expose corruption in the public administration. Exactly who to expose and when become something that interested parties will try to influence by bribing or in other ways co-opting the journalist and editors. The problem of corruption in a transitional democracy often stems from the many interest groups in the intermediate class who are vying for power over the government bodies and the economy. Lacking legitimacy of institutions leads to weak institutions, which leads to contestation over the rules and a scope for corrupt practices – a negative spiral. (Kahn, 1998) . As Kahn notes:

More recently, both sociologists and economists have picked up the concept of civil society in developing countries as a defender of property rights in the classical form and as potential crusaders against corruption. Political corruption is often part of a set of exchanges within patron-client networks through which elites construct compromises with interest groups who would

otherwise threaten the political stability of the system. Civil society, representing different interest groups in the intermediate class in developing countries can become involved in such patron-client networks. Far from being the solution to the problem of corruption, the civil society in most developing countries may be part of the problem (Kahn, 1998).

The above quote is in line with the analysis by South African media scholar, Guy Berger, when he states that the role of civil society and independent media is being unduly romanticized. Private media, instead of being a democratic champion can be part of the problem, when for example there is the practice of "journalism for sale" or so called "brown envelope journalism" (Berger, 2002). The respondents in the interviews are acutely aware of the undermining effect of corruption within the media but do not see how they as a collective or individually can change the trend. Their role within civil society is weak and their professional position is exposed to several threats.

In discussions on African media there has been too much emphasis on the state having undue influence over the media sphere and the only antidote seen as privatization or opening up to market forces. Little attention has been paid to media's relation to citizen's rights, i.e. the importance of a regulatory framework that sets out clear rules, regarding matters such as defamation, hate speech, undue editorial influence and ownership interests for the whole media sector. What appears to have been under emphasized is that a system of media regulation should promote press freedom, but also define what responsibility the media has to the citizens (Rønning, 1994).

The deregulated media market and the expansion of pluralist media are leaving journalists still curtailed in their work by commercial pressures and outside influence of both business and political interests. The broader questions about how the political economy and inadequate regulation of the media affect the way journalists and editors work are reflected in the interviews. Several of the journalists are noticing a certain change of focus away from worries about government control and more to market control. When analyzing the mass media in more established democracies, their role can appear passive or at worst undermining the functioning of the democratic system. This is the case when, for example, media simplify a complex issue or omit reporting topics that are expensive and difficult to cover. James Curran (2000) has exemplified several problems in his critique of

the free market media, (Curran, 2000), which has relevance when studying the current development of media in Kenya.

The liberal model presumes that, if the media is funded by the public rather than the state, it will also hold allegiance to the public rather than the state. But these presumptions fail to take into account the wider relations of power in which the media is situated. In Africa it is often the case that a private media proprietor toes the line of the government, or downplays a controversial story, for fear of repercussions on their business interests. Concentration of ownership can also limit the competition in the media market and lead to a narrowing of the public debate. This is particularly important in Kenya where the market is still small in financial terms, and ownership is concentrated in only three dominating media companies (Maina, 2006).

Those who take a more critical view of the commercially driven media worry about its consequences for journalism in practice. The commercial media model holds an inherent risk of marginalizing the new, the critical and the radical, according to this view (McChesney, 2004). This is echoed in Francis Nyamnjoh's analysis (2004) of media in Africa, in which he states that more radical or critical views can only be expressed in the weekly or monthly press, rather than the mainstream mass media. One respondent talks about this problem of the two main papers being so bland and careful to the point of saying almost nothing. This article is focused on the practice of journalism in Kenya in order to gauge its role in a recently established democratic system. The aim has been to scrutinize media's ability to promote a widespread egalitarian participation in a rational and critical discourse about political issues in society, which is one of the basic political issues raised by Jürgen Habermas in his theory of the public sphere (Calhoun, 2002).

Hallin and Mancini have developed an extensive model for comparing different types of media systems, and analyzing the media-state relationship, and is built on the basis of research into the media systems in Western Europe and North America. (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Part of this theoretical framework has relevance for understanding the relation between journalistic professionalism and political parallelism in the Kenyan media and its historical context. Hallin and Mancini's theoretical model may only cautiously be applied to transitional democracies in the global South, because of their different economic and political context. The three models for media

and politics are a) the liberal model, b) the democratic corporatist model, and c) the polarized pluralist model. The polarized pluralist model, which displays a lower level of journalistic professionalism, a recent history of state intervention or central role of government in the media, lower mass circulation newspapers, and a high degree of political parallelism, can be found, for example, in Spain and Greece. Mancini and Hallin also include a number of political system variables to define the three models. The authors suggest that the polarized pluralist model will be widely applicable in Africa (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Some of what is relevant in their analysis of Southern Europe, including the role of patron-client networks, the history of state intervention and autocratic rule, the use of media as an instrument for political and business interests, limited development of mass circulation press, and lack of common professional norms will also be found in the Kenyan media systems.

Legal, regulatory and employment condition

The Media Council of Kenya was originally an industry body, which came into existence in 2004 to apply self-regulation and to defend the freedom and independence of the media. This was developed by the Media Industry Steering Committee (MISC), formed in 1993 by media stakeholders, such as the Media Owners' Association, the Kenya Union of Journalists, the Editors Guild, the Kenya Correspondents Association, media NGOs, training institutions, state media, and the alternative press. Although the Media Council of Kenya formulated a comprehensive Code of Conduct for journalists, its regulating role was weak when it comes to enforcement. Instead the government has historically resorted to direct legal sanctions under the public order and libel laws as mentioned earlier (Maina, 2006). It is recognized by the respondents in the interviews, that the system of self-regulation has not appeared to work well.

With the enactment of the comprehensive Kenya Media Law in 2008, the Media Council came under statutory dispensation, rather than voluntary, which makes it more powerful than previously (Freedomhouse, 2008). Fredrick Mudhai (2007) argues that it should promote accountability in the industry and that there is a need to establish credible sanctions for those who break the code of conduct. The new Media Law of 2008, as well as the Information and Communication Act of 2009, has added new regulation. Among many things the Media Law includes a detailed code of conduct, which

prohibits journalists from "accept(ing) gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage"(Kenya Gazette Supplement, 2007).

The Media Council has since 2008 received over 70 complaints of which most have been dismissed for different reasons, which suggests that it lacks the power to enforce compliance with the code of conduct. It may be related to a problem with insufficient funding. A statute law of 2009 has provided the Media Council with funding from the government, rather than relying on the media owners and unions for its budget (Makali, 2010). This recent change may result in a more effective institution as long as it can remain independent from government and hold credibility among the media practitioners. The majority of permanently employed journalists in Kenya earn below Kshs 40.000, or US\$500 per month. By comparison, secondary school teachers in the country earn about US\$600 a month. However, even more significant is the fact that about 80% of all journalists in Kenya are not permanent employees but are referred to as correspondents. The correspondents depend on payment per story or per word, typically earning as little as US\$100 per month. It is estimated that 75% of all newspaper content is generated by correspondents (Maina, 2006)

Methodology: A thematic analysis of the interviews with Kenyan journalists

For the purpose of deeper analysis, I have chosen to focus on how political reporting is perceived by the Kenyan media practitioners themselves. By thematically analyzing 15 interviews conducted with various journalists in Nairobi, it is possible to shed light on a number of issues that affect the quality and content of their work. The sample consisted of one-third broadcast journalists and two thirds print journalists. The interviews took place in different locations in Nairobi in 2009. A fixed set of questions was used for all the interviews, and the interviewees were made to understand that the material would be treated confidentially. A number of the journalists were, in spite of the assurance, quite self-conscious when talking about politically sensitive matters during the recorded interviews. Considering the worry over their safety that several in the sample expressed, it is likely that they only divulged what they also could stand by more publicly. Most of the journalists genuinely cared about the media in Kenya and wanted to engage in a debate about it. The employed journalists were more constrained and less outspoken compared with those who worked

freelance or worked for alternative or aid-funded media. Because I have worked as a foreign correspondent based in Africa for three years, I believed that I already knew something about the conditions under which the interviewees work. This caused a risk that the field research simply sought to confirm preconceived ideas through the interviews. The use of interviews for research is, in spite of the possible flaws, a useful way to explore the relationship between structure and practice in the media production process.

The different media practitioners who contributed to the research did it independently of each other. The fact that so many of them brought up the same issues in the practice of journalism may be an indication of an influential debate that is taking place among a relatively small community of journalists. However, the overlapping responses help in supporting the hypothesis that a liberalized media in Kenya has not led to independent and varied political coverage in the mainstream media. Put in other words, the media system is not as pluralist as it may appear.

Interview questions:

1. What is your job day to day?
2. How do you see your role as a journalist?
3. What are the changes that have taken place in media during the last decade?
4. Are you a member of a union?
5. What sort of stories are you mostly doing?
6. How do you get your information?
7. What do you have to think about when you do a story?
8. Do you ever find that you can't do the story that you would like to do?
9. Do you think the owner of your media has direct editorial influence?
11. Are you proud of the job that you do?
12. Are you often worried for your safety or losing your job?
13. Who do you ask when you are unsure of what you can say in a story?

The media is compromised

Several of the respondents spoke about the positive changes that have taken place regarding freedom of speech during the last ten years.

There is greater latitude, more room, to actually express your self.
But, most importantly, there were stories that would be killed
because of government (intervention), and they can now be told.

A journalist working for a news agency refers to the development of the media as a commercial market by saying that "people are investing a lot of money in the media, whereas before it seemed unviable" There are also a number of journalists who comment that "there is a lot of competition". The increased competition between media outlets is seen as both good and bad from the point of view of the general public.

In spite of the liberalization and growth of media, the same journalists state that many impediments to free speech remain. "The media are compromised" is a phrase that several journalists use in the interviews, and they explain the factors that curtail the independence of journalists and editors. One journalist describes the current climate of fear, which leads to self-censorship at two of the main broadsheets, *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. "They are deliberately vague on certain things, and it's because editors don't want to get in trouble".

The threat of being sued for libel is taken very seriously by most of the interviewees. The papers have teams of in-house lawyers, who go through all political articles for possible libellous statements. This confirms the more general trend in Africa, that media face the government's use of libel laws in ways that contradict democratic governance and the constitutional provision of press freedom (Blankson, 2007). Such repressive legal frameworks are upheld by lawmakers, which perceive the journalists as potential troublemakers (Nyamnjoh, 2005, 2010).

The issue of the media owner having direct editorial influence is another aspect, which is brought up by those who work for private mass media.

During the election violence, the company that I work for was taking one side, with the PNU. There are unspoken rules that you cannot go against. It's not there consciously, but it's there, and you look out for your job. Ethics and beliefs are being compromised

Another example is a respondent who saw the media owner's influence as something unavoidable.

This newspaper is partly owned by politicians; so of course there will be that interference and political influence.

The presumption that private media will hold allegiance to the public rather than the state, fails to take into account the relations of power, in which media is situated. (Curran, 2000). An editor with a non-commercial publication sums up the position of Kenya's media very simply.

It's an economic entity and it has to curry favor with the few corporate powers. But they are also very closely linked to the political powers.

The main papers and broadcasters are historically aligned with one or the other side of the political arena. According to many of the interviewees, these outlets are used as instruments for both political and business interests. This historical pattern has implications for the process of democratization. It is not just a matter of lifting the censorship and holding multiparty elections, but involves a transformation of the media and of relations among political, social and economic institutions (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002, as cited in Murphy, 2007). I will return to the question in a discussion about professionalism and regulation later.

There appears to be stiff competition for readers, viewers and listeners. One effect has been to compete with scandalous stories, which puts media managers "under intense pressure to actually sell political sleaze. Political news has become the biggest soap opera in this country. But it's not about a real issue - it's about a contest".

A small number of the interviewed journalists bring up the problem of media ignoring the actual issues behind the politician's statements and posturing, while the "bigger stories on socioeconomic issues, life for us Kenyans, are not the main stories in the news bulletins at night".

Most of them are more conscious of the advertisers and other business interests as a hindrance to independent journalism, as illustrated by the following examples. An article, which included some criticism of Kenya Airways, had grave consequences for the paper's advertising revenue.

Kenya Airways cut all their advertizing and went to the *Nation*. I think it was for over a year. Then we had to write a very favourable story about them in order to get the advertising back.

The telecommunications company Safaricom stopped advertising in the paper *The Citizen* because of a negative story it published. This in

turn caused *The Citizen* to file for bankruptcy, according to one interviewee. A television producer explains how advertisers are able to influence television programming content. It will often be the case that a company approaches a TV station and threatens to pull out all advertising for a month unless they stop pursuing or airing a specific story that has any negative material about the company. If it is broadcast it can have consequences also for the individual journalist.

I know for a fact that journalists have been fired for doing such stories. They just pick up the phone and say, "if this person doesn't go then you will not be getting this business".

The liberal media model has advantages not only for greater variation in types of media but also for business opportunities and market access. A liberalized and de-regulated media system leaves more room for different companies to influence consumers, as the political economy theory suggests (McChesney, 2004). Many of the journalists give examples similar to the above of how companies in Kenya can dictate the content of the media. There are also examples of the financial interests of the owner of a medium having influence on content. "The *Daily Nation* would be very careful when covering issues to do with investments done by Aga Khan, its owner", according to an interviewee. The question of direct influence of media owners is possibly even more important regarding radio broadcasting. According to a journalist there are, in practice, no limitations to who can own a radio station. "There is a law against MPs owning a station, but it's not being followed".

It is surprising how many of the journalists spoke of the issue of "killing a story" by means of bribes. One of them commented that "properties and bank accounts would tell you a lot about the editors" regarding the amounts of money and assets, which were gained by editors through bribes. Another journalist told about a publication, *The People*, which survives solely through political patronage. This type of press is referred to in Kenya as "the gutter press", where most of the articles are published under pseudonym.

The People started as a very serious investigative weekly and had become very successful running insider stories on the previous Moi regime. The owner decided to turn it into a daily, but then couldn't afford to run it. (He) had all these reporters in there who's wages weren't being paid, and the standard plummeted. Some

very good journalists stayed and lost their self-confidence. It then became all about political patronage, some of the journalists now depending directly on payment by politicians.

It is impossible to gauge the exact extent of corruptive practices and brown envelope journalism in Kenya. The phenomenon of payment in exchange for favourable coverage, or conversely for no coverage, is spontaneously talked about in many of the interviews. Corruption within the media has to do with the way media organizations are structured, and the behavior and practices of journalists in sourcing and reporting. This is where also a grace-and-favor attitude may play a role. It is unusual for someone to be exposed as a corrupt journalist, as ranks close to protect their own. That is how several journalists explain why it is very rare that journalists or editors face consequences from the illicit relations they have.

Examples of brown envelope payments surface in all the interviews. According to a reporter from South African Broadcasting Corporation attending a press conference with the mayor at the Nairobi city council, the group of journalists were each handed an envelope with money for lunch. The amount was Ksh 1000, which buys a very good lunch for two. Another example was given by a seasoned print journalist, who said those reporters that are covering parliament routinely pick up a brown envelope from the party spokesperson. The corruption ranges from petty sums in order to influence journalists to the more serious cases of large bribes for specific stories. The Communication Commission of Kenya has the function to vet and check the veracity of sensitive stories before they are published or broadcast. When asking a radio reporter whether it is possible to bribe the CCK he answered;

This is Kenya. You can bribe anyone. Particularly if you have a scandal on them, or they have something on you...If CCK goes to someone and says there is this incriminating material about you, and the person is a rich guy it will be so easy to pay to make it go away.

The intricate relationships within the media organizations are also what keep corruption from being exposed. A radio reporter told of a recent example, which shows that it is often the case that the editor is involved, along with the reporter, in receiving a bribe for killing a story. When I suggested to the reporter that it is a problem that your

colleagues know how you took a bribe, the reporter responds; "No, that's what I'm telling you. It becomes an instruction from your boss".

Typically, the journalists will lament the incidence of corruption among their colleagues but does not know where to turn. A few cases have been exposed, and the involved parties have owned up to it, but mostly the corruption goes unproved (Mudhai, 2007). One example is illustrated by the following account:

I have seen it at first hand. The cement that caused buildings to collapse, that story never got out. That investigative reporter now drives a very expensive car. It makes us look unreliable, not trustworthy, as journalists. Buildings continued to be built with the faulty cement. Could not the police follow it up? The police are even worse (than the journalists), sorry to say.

Lack of common norms and standards

In transitional democracies there is a need for the media to develop vocational principles and responsibilities (Blankson, 2007). Who decides when the codes of conduct for the media have been breached? The libel laws are being misused to stop a story from being pursued further, according to an editor. By filing a claim for libel the subject matter cannot be followed up by the media until the case has been settled. That appears to be the most commonly used form of media regulation in Kenya.. The journalist's trade union has a relatively weak position in standing up for journalist's rights or enforcing a code of conduct. A seasoned print journalist, who is a member of the journalist's union in Kenya, says, for example, that "they have not been able to articulate our issues and in fact are not journalists themselves". The lack of support from the trade union or any other organization relates immediately to their sense of insecurity.

... I do know a journalist who followed a story of a parliamentarian who was a second hand car dealer and did not deliver a number of cars. The journalist got phone calls about "if you carry that story then...". I think that the journalist was scared and dropped it.

Most of the interviewees were not members of the journalist's union, because there was no practical need for it, and some of them regarded the union with great suspicion. A journalist working for a news agency criticized it for "being compromised by the government, ineffective, and only bargaining for collective wage agreements". On the other

hand, one journalist at the dominating Nation Media Group explained that the company actively discourages trade union activity, and forbids new employees to join the Kenyan Union of Journalists. This naturally undermines the possibility of the union to support and foster professionalism. The Kenyan journalists are led by their editor's instructions rather than a common code of ethics that everyone can refer to. The Media Council now has a statutory status, which gives it greater power to implement regulation. However, among the journalists, this development was seen as more worrying than anything else. Media Council members are too closely connected to the government, according to one journalist, who also says that "there is a thin line between independence and dependence. In Africa we have something called a 'favor for a favor'".

The acute awareness of threats to journalists, and the lack of faith in government institutions are issues brought up by a number of the respondents. A news reporter had been found murdered a week before the interviews and two journalists saw it as likely to be connected to the reporter's work. They did not think the murder case would be thoroughly investigated by either the police or the press.

People are losing faith in our politicians! They don't have faith in our judicial system. We don't even go to the police. The media council are people who are rich, are people who have connections. They cannot relate to the normal reporter.

It is possible to see how the group structure of society in Kenya has until recently been organized and monitored by the state, which means that the new political dispensation is partly borne out of a weak and contrived institutional organization. The suspicion against government authority and any organization vaguely connected to it, like the journalist's trade union or the Media Council, is a reoccurring theme in the interviews. Transition to democratic governance is hampered by the absence of sustainable social organizations, which hold some respect among the public. Politics is volatile and personalized and those who have the financial resources to influence media have the advantage (Bennett, 1998). "We have a very big issue with accountability", says a journalist with many years experience of working for both local and international publications.

It is clear that there is a need for some regulation to govern the media in its relation to other organizations and its obligation to the public. But it remains to be explained why the existing code of ethics

and self-regulation is not adhered to. Hallin and Mancini's analysis of different levels of professionalism is useful in this context. Their starting point is Max Weber's definition of a rational-legal authority as a form of rule-based adherence to formal and universal rules of procedure. In this system individuals and organizations act according to procedures seen as serving the society as whole or a common good. Where this type of rule-bound authority is strongly developed, the agencies that regulate broadcasting and press are likely to be more autonomous and more respected by the media practitioners (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). This type of respected authority has not fully developed in Kenya, which may be why the journalists interviewed in this case study keep referring to their lack of trust in so many of the institutions that govern them. From this problem stems the inability to keep journalistic professional norms, and to form a united professional collective.

If one attempts to place Kenya within Hallin and Mancini's analytical framework, outlined earlier, it would fall into the category of the polarized pluralist model. By comparison, in the Scandinavian countries, the media are expected to stick strictly to common norms. Sweden, for example, would fall into the category democratic corporatist model, which is characterized among other things by strong institutions. A good example is that of a journalist, sacked from his prominent job as a foreign correspondent, because of a suspicion of a connection to organized crime in Sweden. A suspected criminal claimed in private to be getting favors from the journalist, while nothing was proved. The Swedish journalist will never be able to get a job in mainstream media again, according to the Swedish editor Peter Felman. The collective voice of the journalists, often represented by the union, works here to maintain the credibility of the media by excluding the erring journalist. This type of automatic exclusion would, according to the journalists interviewed in Nairobi, not happen in Kenya. They see no consequences for journalists who overstep ethical norms. There is no trusted collective professional voice expressed within the structure of the media. Such a voice should function as self-regulation of the media. In the words of Fredrick Mudhai...

....the Fourth Estate should expose internal scandals as much as they do scandals among political and other elites. As has been the case in Tanzania, media owners, managers and practitioners would be more transparent and accountable if they admit their ethical failings and do something to reduce them (Mudhai, 2007).

The gap between ideals and practice in journalism

The interviewees have different backgrounds in terms of their amount of experience and their type of education. The younger journalists had recently graduated from journalism school, and had the textbooks fresh in mind when responding to some questions. In spite of the variation, they all had similar ideas about what constitutes independent journalistic judgement and what is relevant information. However, there is a wide gap between the reporting that the journalists think they should do and what they are expected to do by their employer. One problem widely recognized, is that the mass media are city-centred, and ignores the issues of rural areas.

I want to reverse the trend of Nairobi-journalism, go local, and de-centring. We need to learn, enter an age of discovery, we think we know what's going on, but we are part of an elite nationalist project going around like missionaries telling people what's right and wrong.

To scrutinize a policy issue by talking to people that will be affected, for example, takes time and resources, which often is not affordable. This is one of the weaknesses of commercially driven media in a developing country. Another journalist complains "that people don't know their rights". I want to start a program to educate. Basic information and education is not given airtime because it is not deemed commercially viable. There is also a great frustration over not being able to follow up a story due to the lack of public information. Most of the journalists have the ambition to be a professional journalist, which means being objective and neutral in their work. They believe they should have the role of a watchdog in society. A young radio presenter also lays emphasis on the role to inform listeners objectively. Many of the journalists' statements exemplify how they are hemmed in by lacking information and thereby risk speculating. All are motivated by the strong ideal to be neutral and not be accused of doing biased reporting.

A problem with the simple call for independent media and freedom of speech as a catch-all solution is that it ignores the position of the journalists and the readers/listeners/viewers. Communication is sustained and produced by interpreting subjects acting within a context which is itself partly constructed by the media. It is important

to recognize that individuals are “situated interpreters” and not all-knowing subjects (Keane, 1991). The points made are relevant in Kenya, where liberalization of the media has taken place and yet the media are not classified as free nor have they been serving their role of truthfully informing the public, for example, during the election campaigns (Kadhi and Rutten, 2001). The Kenyan journalists and their editors are “situated interpreters” who will exercise self-censorship when faced with certain information and will also serve as propagandists or be polarizing when, for example, the heat of an election campaign affects them. They will also feel pressured to accept the status quo and not force their own organization to come clean about its corruptive practices. There is clearly a need for effective incentives and sanctions to amend the problem of corruption, not just in the media system, but also within other institutions.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the interviews conducted in Nairobi in 2009, it is possible to begin to understand the background and context of the media system that Kenyan journalists work within. It is difficult for the journalist to play the role that they would like to in supporting the democratic process. The mass media are described as being compromised by a number of different outside interests. They describe in detail all the different aspects of the problem including, corruption, which undermines the credibility of the media as an institution. Although several journalists have great ambitions it was found that many were despondent about their ability to influence matters. Their sense of professional pride was not strong, nor was their sense of safety. Several media theorists, including Hallin and Mancini, provide useful theories to explain the political and historic context of this phenomenon. Kenya's recent history of autocratic rule still looms large over the society as a whole and the media system specifically.

It is clear that there is a need for some regulation to govern the media in its relation to other organizations and its obligation to the public. Kenya's media are regarded as very good when compared to other developing countries. However, this study suggests that a pluralist and growing media system still has clear deficiencies in providing an open forum for debate and promoting democratic rule. The development in the last two decades has set the stage for more manipulation of public opinion through the media, while the corruption in the media continues unsanctioned.

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ELISABET HELANDER

Tanzanian journalists' ambivalent perception of their ethics: A "Jekyll and Hyde" occupation

By Denis Mpagaze and Robert A. White

Abstract

This exploratory study shows that Tanzanian journalists have a negative perception of themselves as an occupational group with low ethical standards and believe that most journalists would easily accept a bribe to falsify news reports. At the same time they want to live up to the high levels of truthfulness expected of them. Many journalists experience heavy pressure including bribery from institutions that live by a good image: government ministries, NGOs, finance and business leaders, politicians and foreign companies operating in Tanzania. In fact, 78% of those interviewed say they personally have never accepted a bribe. Even if many of the 78% are not revealing their acceptance of bribes or do not consider freebies as bribes, it is a plausible hypothesis that the perception of widespread and frequent acceptance of bribes is questionable and needs much more verification. In effect, the constant contact of journalists with an underworld of corruption tends to generate a split personality of high ideals of truthfulness and continual concessions to sources wanting to hide their lack of public accountability - a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde occupation. Clearly, however, Tanzanian journalists are poorly instructed regarding 1) the ethics of bribery, 2) what constitutes bribery and 3) the distortion in news reports caused by bribery.

Key words: Perception of journalistic ethics, bribery of journalists, journalism education, Tanzania

Introduction:

Journalists and academics associated with the field of journalism in Africa tend to have a remarkably negative perception of the honesty and the level of ethics in the journalistic occupation. Other professional groups in Africa such as lawyers and medical doctors tend to see themselves in a much more positive light. Mosoti (2007, p. 99),

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commenting on the perception of the legal profession in Kenya, states, "The legal profession remains a delectable calling, and one that often goes with a fair amount of social prestige." John Illfe in his study of the development of the medical profession in East Africa (1998, pp 244-246) speaks with great praise for medical doctors in East Africa in the following terms:

...modern (African) doctors—especially in Uganda, where African medical education had begun—had taken a leadership role of international importance in East Africa's response to AIDS, both in research. . .and in the planning of control programmes. To these they had brought both the rationality of their scientific training and the drive for national and racial dignity which had informed their research and their pursuit of (international) professional equality...(1998, p. 244).

This is not to deny that all professions in Africa are struggling to maintain standards of professional service under enormous pressures from the high levels of corruption in African society (Appiah, Chimanikire, Gran, 2004). But leading communication researchers in the journalism field in Africa have been publishing articles and reports year after year emphasizing the low levels of competence and ethics of journalists in Africa. The most common accusation is that journalists generally accept bribes to suppress information or invent information to satisfy the interests of sources (Mfumbusa, 2006, 2008, 2010; Kasoma, 1994, 2000). Media organizations are said to be corrupted by collusion with powerful political and economic interests (Chibita, 2010, p. 117; Mutere, 2010, pp 140-142; Phiri, 2010).

The perception of widespread acceptance of bribes among journalists and corrupt collusion of media organizations with politicians and business interests seems to be a peculiarly African characteristic. Lodamo and Skjerdal note that journalists and journalistic commentary in Europe and America generally take for granted that any hint of taking money from sources would destroy their credibility before the public. Codes of journalistic ethics in the Netherlands, Ireland, Turkey and the UK do not even mention bribery (Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009, p. 138). Journalists in these contexts perceive themselves as routinely strict in their objectivity and independence.

Lodamo and Skjerdal (2009, p. 139) report research articles on bribery in eight countries of Africa, and note that codes of ethics in 18 Africa countries warn of the problem of bribery. They found that

journalists in Ethiopia believe that accepting money from sources is a common practice even though directors of state media make a show of trying to discourage the practice. Although journalists often attribute the readiness to take bribes to their bad pay, Skjerdal cites evidence that higher paid journalists in Africa also commonly accept bribes and notes the opinion in surveys that insuring reasonable income would still not eliminate accepting bribes (Skjerdal, 2010, pp 387-388).

In Tanzania it is maintained that government officials commonly offer bribes to journalists in return for positive coverage, a practice which discourages investigative reporting (Forbes, 2005). Another Tanzanian source maintains that without providing bribes to journalists a story would not be published (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2006). Forbes (2005) calls on journalists to use active methods of discouraging these practices because it makes a mockery of journalists' independence. Likewise Kilimwiko (2009) in his book, *Media Power and Politics in Tanzania: Critical Analysis of Media Trends and Practice*, argues that there is widespread corruption among Tanzanian journalists.

Yet, in personal interviews African journalists affirm their commitment to their ideals of reporting public affairs truthfully and maintaining their watchdog role. Most uphold the principles of objectivity: factuality, fairness, neutrality and balance (Mwesige, 2004). The majority deny that they take bribes defined as taking money or other inducements to suppress information, a very unethical action for journalists. And when they occasionally accept the brown envelop tips in their practice, they argue that this does not influence the truth of their reporting (Ogongo-Ongong'a and White, 2008). Still, in the same interviews most journalists tend to say that most or many "others" in the occupation take bribes and this probably influences the truth and integrity of their journalism. This is a contradiction that few commentaries on bribery and brown envelopes take up.

A central question in the present research is why journalists and those commenting on journalistic practice in Africa, in contrast to other occupations, have such a negative perception of themselves as a group which readily takes bribes and is involved in other forms of corruption. Why is there such ambivalence between their perception of their own commitment to the ideals of good journalism and their belief that the occupation as a whole is deeply corrupted? If, in fact, journalists have such low standards of ethics, what do journalists perceive as the cause of this and why don't journalists, leaders in the profession and

institutions training journalists try to improve ethical performance and the reputation of the journalistic occupation?

Journalistic bribery in Africa: A series of unanswered questions

In the social responsibility conception of the role of the media—broadly accepted in Africa—journalists are expected to report the performance of elected officials and other public services so that the public may be able to continually evaluate these services and take corrective action in voting or other civil society measures (Christians, et al, 2009). In contemporary democratic cultures of Africa, citizens are perceived as having a *right* to the services of education, health, employment or other services necessary for a human existence. Citizens also have the *right* to correct information about the state of public services and the causes of better or worse service. Thus, journalists are expected to constantly monitor whether these human and civil rights are being respected. There is considerable evidence that journalists in the African context do, in fact, define their role in these terms (Ogongo-Ogong'a and White, 2008; Diedong, 2008).

This watchdog, monitorial role of the journalist is difficult in all governmental contexts but especially in Africa because of the neo-patrimonial, clientelistic political culture that tends to function outside legal bounds and often assumes little obligation to be accountable to the public or be transparent to the public through the media (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). Part of the problem is the history of African government. The African state has its roots in the colonial state which was accountable to its imperial overseas office, but not to the native peoples of Africa (Young, 1994). The colonial state and bureaucracy rejected absolutely the monitorial role of the press and enacted a series of laws restricting the right of the press to follow its monitorial perception (Chibita, 2010; Matumaini, 2010, p. 11). Not only are these laws restricting the freedom of the press still on the books in most African countries but often new laws, restricting the monitorial function even more, have been enacted (Ogbondah, 1994, 2002).

Not only do government officials commonly use bribery to manipulate economic activities and public services in their own interests, but much of the public services which should respond to the needs of the public equitably are made a part of the clientelistic favoritism of a political culture not responsive to the people (Masunungure, 2004). Most governments in Africa in the period after independence made public, professional services a part of the

government so that the culture of no accountability and no transparency was extended widely through public services.

Thus, journalists face enormous problems in trying to get the information to represent the activities of government and other services to the public. Journalists in Africa are constantly exposed to the culture of bribery, and media organizations, which are supposed to be bastions of editorial freedom, are taken over by powerful political and economic actors and corrupted to the heart of their decision making. No other occupation in Africa faces the contradictory pressures of being obliged to report with total honesty the bribery and corruption in public services and, at the same time, being subjected to pressure to accept bribery and corruption in suppressing this truthfulness.

How do journalists perceive and deal with these contradictions?

As so many have pointed out, including Helander (2010, p. 538) in her article in this issue, the central issue of bribery is justice. Where public communication is dominated by bribery, those with money and power can buy or coerce the public image they want. The poor and powerless are defenseless. Does might make right, or is professional integrity of journalists at the service of justice? Do journalists perceive this issue of justice?

There are many other questions at issue in journalists' perceptions regarding bribery. One of the issues is the accuracy of reports of widespread bribery. Much of the literature claiming that bribery is a common phenomenon among African journalists is based on impressionistic hearsay and "perceptions" that it is common practice rather than on data verifying the actual frequency. Our review of the literature on bribery in journalism could find few studies in which journalists stated unequivocally that they commonly accept bribes to change or suppress information. For example, in the survey carried out by Nwabueze (2010, p. 508), 84% said that they took the brown envelopes, but 78% said that this does not affect the objectivity of their news reporting. Even Lodamo and Skjerdal state in their meticulous study (2009, p. 140) that, although respondents agreed with the statement that attempts to bribe journalists are a common experience, "it is not evident that these journalists have experienced such pressure themselves".

Also, it is not clear just what constitutes bribery in the African journalistic practice and what is the difference between providing customary hospitality at public events and heavy pressure from

sources. These “perceptions” tend to lump together as bribery the refreshments and accommodations to attract reporters to cover public events, the “brown envelope” tip to cover expenses such as transport to draw journalists in to report press conferences and major payments to suppress information or falsify news accounts. Many so-called journalists in Africa are young free-lance correspondents who pick up bits and pieces of news around the city and are paid by the article published. These correspondents often have very superficial training regarding journalistic responsibility and little knowledge of codes of ethics of news organizations. The statements that African journalists are generally corrupt tend to throw together the reporting of seasoned journalists with these part-time correspondents.

Accounts of wholesale compliance of journalists with bribery rarely mention the role of editorial supervision, the guidelines of house codes of ethics and the mentoring of senior journalistic staff. Media proprietors and editors, however, are themselves said to be sources of threat to journalists trying to follow their ideals of reporting issues of human rights and social justice (Ongongo-Ongong’a and White, 2008). In the study of journalistic bribery in Ethiopia, Lodamo and Skjerdal (2009, p. 143) report that ERTA (Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency) did not have a written ethical code at the time, although the editorial policy did request journalists not to accept financial contributions or gifts from sources. The media councils in various African countries usually have as one of their major objectives to improve the level of journalistic integrity, but these media councils themselves are carrying on a continual struggle to maintain independence from sources of political and economic pressure (Mutere, 2010).

Although journalists in Africa often perceive themselves as operating in a sea of corruption, facing enormous pressures of naked power-seeking and greed everywhere, to what extent do journalists analyze the causes of this pressure. Although, on the whole, some journalists have a reputation of taking a stand against this (White, 2008, 2010; Diedong, 2006; F. Kasoma, 1994, 2000; T. Kasoma, 2009), journalists do not analyze how they are brought in as accomplices through political loyalties, friendships or simple “going along with the majority” (Kilimwiko, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Ndangam (2009) sees this offering of money to journalists by the powerful and the ready acceptance by journalists as part of the culture of patronage that is

constantly being defined, shaped and reshaped by both journalists and patrons.

But why do journalists and journalistic commentary not study this trap more carefully?

Journalists also reveal a great deal of confusion in their perception of just what are appropriate ethical standards in the crucial issues of editorial independence and avoiding any source of influence from sources. Diedong (2006) represents a common view that journalists expect the organizers of an event to give them money, popularly known in Ghana as “soli” after covering an assignment. Some journalists justify accepting hospitality, assistance in journalistic duties and even payment from sources as part of the culture of gift giving among Africans (Okigbo, 1989, 1994; Chutel, 2008; Rønning, 2008, 2009). Lodamo and Skjerdal (2009, p. 149) found in their study in Ethiopia that journalists do not see taking money or other help from sources as violations of their professional ethics because, firstly, they say it does not distort the objectivity and independence of their reporting, and, secondly, because journalists will exercise critical judgement in the editing process. On the whole, most journalists do think that taking money and other favors from sources is unethical (Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009, p. 149). However, given the lack of ethical clarity about the practice of bribery in the culture of journalistic practice in Africa, journalists perceive that most journalists accept bribes from time to time because most are doing it anyway (Skjerdal, 2010, pp. 389-390). One does not find good studies of just how much objectivity is distorted when journalists maintain that they can accept assistance or even payment and still maintain their independence.

As one follows the better quality newspapers of any major African city, one is impressed that there is a relatively responsible discovery and accurate reporting of the major public statements and coverage of public events of the day. The publication of so much critical analysis of political leaders and other major institutions strikes one as quite courageous and honest. If bribery is influencing virtually all news reporting, as many media researchers in Africa maintain, one wonders where is the news distortion and suppression of this bribery in the production of newspapers, television and radio reports that we all follow and discuss every day.

The present article argues that statements that journalists are generally corrupt is rooted in the subjective “perceptions” of

journalists themselves that are part of the culture of journalism in many African contexts. This gives the impression that much of the news reports in the media are not accurate and that there is widespread falsification or suppression in news. Is this true? It may be important, however, to distinguish between the subjective perception that there is a general lack of professional integrity among journalists in Africa and the verification of the frequency of acts of pressures from sources. As Skjerdal notes in the review article in this issue (2010, p. 377), it is very difficult to get accurate self reports from journalists regarding their acceptance of bribes. It is also difficult to get an accurate measure of the extent of the distortion in public information due to acceptance of bribes offered by news sources. What is lacking is more precise information of the specific contexts and procedures of actual or attempted bribery of journalists or solicitation of bribes by journalists. Many of the news reports are generated by young, inexperienced, badly paid correspondents who are not stable employees of newspapers. Are these correspondents who may have only a vague notion of codes of ethics of media houses and living in great poverty more vulnerable to forms of bribery? Is bribery associated with the weak training and schooling in media ethics? Is the acceptance of bribes due to the weakness of editorial supervision? These are questions that the research on bribery and corruption in African journalism has not answered adequately. The lack of more precise information has made it much more difficult to know the causes and ways of controlling the influence of bribery.

An even more perplexing question is the source of the perception of journalists that corruption among their colleagues is widespread. Why are some media researchers so ready to make blanket statements about their professional colleagues when so little verified evidence is available? This is surprising in a profession that is supposed to be rigorously trained in not making public statements unless there is full verification.

The objectives and methodology of the present study

The present article seeks to explore the context and dimensions of the subjective perceptions by journalists of widespread practices of bribery and corruption among Tanzanian journalists. It is a study of the way that the journalistic culture sees itself. From the analysis of these perceptions, we seek to throw some light on the broader questions posed above.

The journalists studied were in the second city of Tanzania, Mwanza, which has no major daily newspapers but is served by newspapers from five or six major news organizations based in the metropolitan urban center of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam. About half of the approximately 60 professional journalists in Mwanza work for several large television and radio broadcasting companies located in Mwanza, and the rest are reporters from Mwanza for the five or six major newspaper-focused news organizations in Tanzania. The 36 returned questionnaires (from the 45 distributed) were evenly divided between those working in radio and television and those representing the national news organizations of Dar es Salaam. The ten in-depth interviews with reporters and five interviews with editors were also evenly divided between those working in radio and television and those associated with the national newspaper-based news organizations.

Although a sample from Dar es Salaam might have included more from the managing editor level, there is evidence that this sample is typical of the better educated journalists in Tanzania. Of the 36 returning the questionnaires and the 15 who were personally interviewed with an interview guide essentially the same as the questionnaire but with extended discussions of the questions, five have at least a certificate in journalism, 15 (30%) have a diploma (approximately two years of training), 29 (57%) have a BA degree, one has a one-year postgraduate diploma and one has a two year MA degree. Some 30, almost 60%, have been working as journalists more than five years.

A survey of journalists in Tanzania done four years ago (Mfumbusa and Mataba, 2009, p. 293) showed that 41% had only secondary school education, 30% had BA degree in journalism and only 4 (2.3%) had postgraduate degrees (MA or PhD). Although the level of professional training in journalism and mass communication is rising rapidly in Tanzania because of new BA programs in journalism, this sample of journalists in Mwanza probably has a higher level of training than the average because many journalists in Mwanza are graduates from a local university which has offered a postgraduate diploma for some 20 years, a BA for ten years and MA program in communication for more than five years. Also the years of experience of those in this sample, 60% with more than five years experience, are higher than the Tanzania level four years ago (Mfumbusa and Mataba, 2009, p. 293) when only 45% had more than five years experience.

Results of the study of perceptions regarding bribery among Tanzanian journalists

Table 1. Belief that accepting bribes is common among Tanzanian journalists

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
Bribery is common among Tanzanian journalists	Strongly agree	17	47.2%
	Agree	13	36.1%
	Neutral	4	11.1%
	Disagree	1	2.8%
	Strongly disagree	1	2.8%
	Total	36	100%

As Table 1 indicates, 83% of the journalists in this sample think that bribery is common among Tanzanian journalists. If they perceive it as common, it would imply that they think that many if not most journalists are prone to take bribes. It is not clear what evidence they have for making this sweeping accusation about their colleagues. However, Table 2 indicates that 80% know of a journalist who has taken a bribe. This could indicate that many are basing their view that accepting bribes is common on knowledge of one or two journalists who have taken a bribe.

Table 2. Percentage who say they know a journalist who has accepted a bribe

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
Do you know any journalist who has ever taken bribe	Yes	29	80.5%
	No	7	19.5%
	Total	36	100%

In the open interviews, one editor said,

“The issue of taking bribes is widespread among journalists. Journalists are interested in writing stories that bring them money. Many people like to give bribes, and many are ready to accept them. The entire system is corrupt. News sources have spread the culture of bribing journalists”.

Table 3. Journalists who say they have taken a bribe

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
Have you ever	Yes	8	22.2%
Taken any form of Bribe?	No	28	77.8%
	Total	36	100%

The crucial question is the move from *belief* about what journalists do to *facts* about what they actually do, that is, the admission of interviewees that they have actually taken a bribe. That 78% of the respondents in this sample state that they personally have never taken a bribe is an apparent contradiction to the belief that bribery is common. One explanation is that given by Skjerdal in the review article (2010, p. 378), namely, that respondents tend to under report their illicit activities. Another explanation, given the lack of clarity about what constitutes bribery, is that they do not think that what they have done actually constitutes bribery.

Another explanation is that, since their belief that accepting bribes is based on hearsay and they are influenced by the general culture of negative perception of their occupational identity, actually accepting bribes to change or suppress information may be relatively rare. A further explanation is that all are referring to rumors about a few notorious acceptors of bribes among journalists or notorious cases of pressure from sources in this small pool of journalists in a provincial city. Whatever the explanation of the discrepancy between opinion that accepting bribes is common and the actual incidence of accepting bribes, it remains a plausible hypothesis that the actual acceptance of bribes is much less common than journalists believe.

Perceptions of what institutions or sources are more likely to offer bribes

Part of the culture of journalists, as revealed in this survey, are the perceptions of individuals and institutions most likely to provide some kind of payment, transport or invitation to enjoyable entertainment. According to the journalists in this sample, the institutions most likely to offer bribes in order of likelihood are: (1) government ministries, (2) Tanzania Revenue Authority, (3) all NGOs, (4) financial institutions and

business leaders, (4) news organizations, (5) political leaders, and (6) the mining companies.

A major source of brown envelopes for journalists are the institutions that are launching a business, a program or other activity which needs significant publicity. These are the classical “little brown envelope” affairs that need to attract in journalists to get significant and favorable publicity. Some journalists are always on the lookout for these occasions in the hope that they may pick up a little extra cash. Most journalists do not consider this bribery but simply one of the perks of the profession. Another mild sort of bribery are the invitations of businesses and other institutions that may have fairly large budgets for publicity and see good media relations as part of their public relations. Many respondents indicated that businessmen are looking for media coverage by creating good relationships with journalists. In one of the interviews, a reporter from one radio station said:

Nowadays, there is a tendency for businessmen to invite journalists to attend the free parties in luxurious hotels. For example, one day a constructor of boats in Mwanza, invited journalists to attend the party held at one of the hotels in Mwanza. Nothing important was discussed and at the end we were given Tshs 30,000 each.

Many journalists see no problem in taking payment from these business news sources claiming that the sources always have budgets to pay journalists. Most journalists said that payments by businesses seeking publicity are a sign of good relations with the press. One journalist said, “The issue of payment is a very good thing. After all when a source of information calls you he or she might have prepared the budget. They prepare budgets because they know that nobody is going to listen to their public relations without getting paid”. Thus, journalists perceive the public relations institution not only as an easy source of news stories but as a source of perks to maintain good relations with news organizations.

Another source of payment are the industries such as mining companies that have a somewhat questionable public image and have well planned strategies to get journalists to guarantee that journalists will suppress adverse publicity and promote a good public image. In these cases, journalists are aware that there is a certain degree of pressure by news sources to compromise their independent views.

Journalists in this survey are divided as to whether news sources are an influence in bribery. As Table 4 indicates, nearly 50% do perceive news sources as an influence in bribery while 30% said no. The interviews suggest that occasions of heavy pressure are relatively rare, and that usually the pressure is the hospitality or other perks that leave the journalists considerable freedom to maintain their independent judgment.

Table 4: The influence of news sources in forcing journalists to accept bribes

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
Some organizations force us to accept bribes	Strongly agree	7	19.5%
	Agree	10	27.8%
	Neutral	8	22.2%
	Disagree	5	13.9%
	Strongly disagree	6	16.7%
Total		36	100%

Some respondents indicated in interviews, however, that when their expenses are paid, there is at least some pressure to report favorably and certainly without questioning or criticism. One reporter said that once she and nine other fellow journalists were invited to attend ceremonies to inaugurate water wells which were constructed by the one of the mining companies. All these 10 journalists were provided with return air tickets, accommodation, lunch and drinks. The next day the company expected their coverage to be highlighted in the media. When one journalist from one newspaper failed to publish, the country coordinator of the mining company let his displeasure be known.

A common view among journalists is that advertisers put pressure on journalists to publish their stories and to give favorable publicity with the threat that advertising will otherwise be withdrawn. Table 5 shows that those interviewed are divided in their view that advertisers apply pressure in indirect ways, for example, if we do not publish their stories they never advertise in our media.

Table 5: Journalists' view that advertisers bribe in indirect ways

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
Organizations bribe us in indirect ways so that when we do not publish their stories they never advertise in our media	Strongly agree	8	22.2%
	Agree	10	27.8%
	Neutral	8	22.2%
	Disagree	7	19.4%
	Strongly disagree	3	08.3%
Total		36	100%

While 50% agreed that these pressures exist, 22% were not sure and 28% disagreed. The pressures are always present, but more experienced or better instructed journalists may put their personal integrity first and find ways to mollify sources and advertisers in order to preserve their their own independent judgement.

Avoiding source pressures by journalistic skill and integrity

In the interviews, some told of concrete experiences of bribes being offered that revealed that if a journalist does attempt to maintain one's commitments in news reporting, there are ways of doing so. In the three accounts which follow, in one case the journalist got the information and could have published it with no reprisals, but instead was ready to kill the story for a bribe. In the second case the journalists got the information of an illegal operation and published it. In the third case the journalists were prepared to publish information on a group counterfeiting money but were so frightened by the police that they apparently decided not to publish the information

In the first case the journalists involved were under no particular pressure or threat, but had no ethical values and profited from the source's fear of revealing an illegal action by readily accepting the bribe and killing the story.

A scandal occurred at one secondary school in Mwanza. The scandal was about building a classroom which was proved to have some technical problems and it was ordered to be demolished. When we made a follow up in order to publish the story, the owner of the school bribed us with Tshs 1.0 m in order to kill the story. We accepted the money and killed the story. After

we had left, one journalist from Dar es Salaam with his friend also went to the school and blackmailed the owner of the school. The owner also bribed them with Tshs 10 m so that they would kill the story. Of course, they killed the story.

I remember another case of bribery in which we were threatened with death. We were investigating the scandal of one business which imports cars from Dubai. We made a follow up and discovered that he owed the government Tshs 100 m. We visited him in order to verify the information we had. The businessman bribed us with Tshs 500,000 to kill the story or otherwise we would be in trouble. We accepted the money and killed the story for the sake of our lives.

In the second case, the journalist caught a company in an illegal action of tax evasion and went to talk with the senior manager apparently to get more information but in fact exposed himself/herself to the offer of a bribe from the manager to suppress this damaging information.

It happened to me when I was investigating tax evasion of a commercial business organization which used a religious organization as a front. I obtained the organization's bank deposit document. The organization issued cheques to pay cement distributors. When the cement arrived, it was taken direct to retailers ready for sale. I went to talk to the organization's senior manager at his home place. He asked me not to publish the story and offered me Tshs 50,000 for transport which I declined. He offered to increase the "bribe" Tsh 1.0 m after he discussed with his colleagues. I told him to prepare the money and that when they were ready they should call me. I took the Tshs 50,000 and I published the story the following day as it was. When he saw the story he blamed me for conning him. I told him to come and collect the Tshs 50,000 he gave me so that together with Tshs 1.0 m he could pay tax.

In this case the journalist was clever enough to both publish the story to put pressure on the party to obey the law by paying the tax and also to return the bribe. By publishing the story others who might be tempted to avoid taxes illegally were warned that "crime does not pay".

In a third case involving pressure to suppress information about a counterfeiting racket the journalists had enough integrity to refuse bribes, but they apparently did not realize how dangerous criminal counterfeiting is and, in the end, they got themselves into a very frightening situation. As a result they apparently did not get the story

published nor were they able to use the power of publicity to stop a damaging illicit action.

I was investigating a scandal of one businessman in Mwanza who was printing counterfeit bank notes. This man dealt with stationery services and, at the same time, he owned a machine for printing fake currency. When I got the information, we went to find out if this was true. When we arrived at his office we identified ourselves and the information we wanted. As we entered the office, we found his son printing fake US dollars. The man halted the printing and told his son to take everything home. The businessman pleaded with us, 'Please! Please! This is not my work alone but, there are some *vigogo* (important persons) who have contracted me to do this work for them. Please come back later in order to put this right'. When we went back to him as agreed, we were prepared to reject the bribe, but instead we were stung by the police. The police demanded to know why we were interrupting *vigogo's* affairs. They detained us for four days. On the fifth day we were charged for armed robbery and sentenced to 10 months in jail. We wish now that we would never have gone back.

These three cases show that dealing with pressure from news sources is not only a matter of clarity in ethical principles but also skill in dealing with a dangerous and risky world of dirty politics and criminal activity.

The perception of what practice constitutes "bribery"

There is considerable difference of perception among journalists in this sample regarding what constitutes bribery. In the survey, respondents were asked whether they consider taking money from sources of information simply as "perks" (*mshiko* in Swahili), that are a help to compensate the low salaries of journalists.

Table 6. Journalists consider mshiko (bribes) as perks

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
I consider <i>mshiko</i> as Perks	Strongly agree	13	36.1%
	Agree	5	13.9%
	Neutral	0	0.0%
	Disagree	10	27.8%
	Strongly disagree	8	22.2%
	Total	36	100%

As Table 6 indicates, respondents are divided and 50% think that bribery is a compensation that the system of low salaries makes necessary, especially for correspondents who are not regular employees of news organizations, but are paid by the story published. One editor tended to justify acceptance of monetary assistance for a story, especially in the case of correspondents.

At the place where I work, reporters who go to the field and experience a lot of difficulties are paid TSh 350,000 to Tsh 600,000 (Tanzanian shillings 1,500 = US\$ 1) per month whereas broadcasters who are not even professional journalists earn Tsh 500,000 to Tsh 1,500,000. The situation is even worse for these journalists who are paid per story. These journalists earn Tsh 1,000 to Tsh 5,000 per story published.

The editor knows that correspondents paid by the story provide most of the material published in Tanzanian newspapers, and that in an economic system dominated by the "informal economy" where most people are just getting by with whatever they can scrape together, the correspondents make a valuable contribution to the system of public information. Most newspapers are also just breaking even and could not survive without the system of underpaid correspondents. Editors and many others perceive the system of brown envelopes as a necessary evil. In this context, many do not think that the small financial gifts that are given to attract journalists to cover a public event or press conference are really bribery. They are simply intended to help poor journalists to pay for transport or other expenses.

Journalists are commonly invited to attend different occasions such as seminars, workshops, functions to cover news stories and are given envelopes with a little money for transport as an appreciation for their attendance. If at all you call this corruption I beg to differ. This is their right because, other professional workers are attending the same occasions and given a lot of money and no one can call such money corruption. Why should it be called corruption when it is given to journalists? However, the money can be called corruption when an individual source of information pays for journalists in order to promote or report the affairs of the source.

The response of one interviewee suggests that some journalists may define corruption according to the purpose of the story. One respondent said:

Before we accept payment from the sources of information we have to consider the purpose of information. If the information is for the public interest and journalist accepts some payment to kill the story that is corruption. But when the story touches only one person and the journalist receives payment to publish or kill, it is not corruption. Therefore, I would like to say that it is corruption when the information is only for the public interest.

Some journalists were not content with the use of the term corruption for any payment they receive from sources of information during their work. One interviewee said: "I am not happy with this word corruption. I think it should be changed and (the term) gift or sitting allowance be used instead". Some respondents suggested that the extent to which an act constitutes corruption depends on the view of the giver. One interviewee said: "It is corruption when he who offers, calls it corruption. But when the giver calls it payment for transport, how can I betray him and call it corruption?"

Another interviewee said that when he was at school his teacher did not teach him that taking any form of payment during some occasions is corruption. This lack of clear understanding of what constitutes bribery among journalists could be an explanation of the perception that it is so widespread. On the one hand the practice of offering remuneration to attract the presence of journalists to public affairs is so widespread and so commonly offered by all leading institutions in the community that it is hardly considered reprehensible. This form of assistance to poor journalists shades off into any form of gratuity to journalists in covering public affairs, even occasions when the intention is clearly to influence a favorable report. For example, it is taken for granted that "feature writing" on issues of health, agriculture, education or other forms development information is paid for. Research institutions often expect to pay some of the expenses of their research by "selling" the information to newspapers and other forms of publication. African newspapers are full of "development journalism" reports that come from conferences and public reports that are promoting their activities. On the other hand, most textbooks on media ethics in Western contexts condemn freebies and any form of remuneration by sources in the journalistic practice.

Most news organizations have quite stringent house codes of ethics which, according to the letter of the code, would condemn many of the practices of assistance to journalists that are taken for granted in the African context. This confusion of standards and norms, on the one hand, opens the door to accusations of "widespread bribery" and, on the other hand,

a certain wide acceptance in accepting payments on the other. It is quite possible that respondents in this survey who say they have never accepted a bribe, did not think of the financial or other assistance as a "bribe" or of sufficient consequence to consider it a bribe.

There has been relatively little research on the degree to which this confusion of norms and practices actually distorts the information on public affairs in African contexts. Schools of journalism rarely provide clear detailed guidelines on this matter. There is relatively little consensus among journalistic associations or editors' forums. News organizations do not seem to be overly concerned about the matter.

Perception of the role of editors in bribery

Normally editors are expected to be gatekeepers in news organizations, detecting when a story is influenced by distorting influences such as bribery, protecting the editorial freedom and integrity of the news organization. In this survey, however, editors are perceived to be at best ambivalent and even cooperators in the bribery. That more than 50% of those surveyed agree to the statement that editors would force journalists to take a bribe is one of the most shocking perceptions in this study.

For example one respondent said that when they take the investigative stories to editors about certain *vigogo* (VIPs), the editors in turn call affected parties so that they can get money and kill the story.

Table 7: Perception of the role of editors in accepting bribes

Statement	Measurements	Responses	Percentage
Editors force us to take bribes and freebies	Strongly agree	6	16.7 %
	Agree	13	36.1 %
	Neutral	6	16.7 %
	Disagree	6	16.7 %
	Strongly disagree	5	13.9 %
Total		36	100 %

Some journalists said that in order to survive in this profession they have to establish informal contracts with editors so that when they take bribes they have to split this among themselves. One respondent said:

One day I was assigned to cover a story on a UNDP project in Mwanza. The King from Norway was the guest of honor. My editor knew that such events pay for journalists. When I came back from the event my news editor bluntly told me, "I know you have been paid now give me (part of it) also". Because I did not want conflict with the editor I gave him part of what I had been paid.

One respondent said that sometimes editors assign them events for which editors know that there will be some payment. When a journalist comes back to the newsroom, they have to give half of the payments they receive so that journalists can be given more lucrative assignments.

At no point did respondents volunteer that editors were discouraging bribery or enforcing house codes of ethics. Whatever may be the actual behavior of editors, the perception of their conduct does not speak favorably of them.

Perceptions of the Pressures of Poverty

Everywhere in the interviews the pressures of poverty come to the surface. Tanzania is a relatively poor country and it is estimated that 50% of the people are living on less than US\$1 per day (Tanzania Country Profile, 2011). In Dar es Salaam, 46 per cent of the active population is unemployed (Pascal International Exchanges, 2011). Most journalists are living in the informal economy which means that they have no steady income, but live by the articles they get published or other work they can pick up here and there. Most newspapers are operating very close to the margin, with some continually going out of business because of the lack of advertising. The small circulation of daily newspapers (rarely over 5-10,000) means that even editors are poorly paid (a subeditor rarely makes more than US\$800 a month).

Journalists, even when they are employed, are given almost no money for expenses, and are expected to pick up what they can from sources that want their stories to appear. As one journalist said in the interview, "If the source calls you to cover an event, you depend on the source for transportation to reach the event. Last year I was invited to the celebration of the 100 years of one of the religious secondary schools in Mwanza. When they called me to cover the celebration ceremony, they gave me Tsh 15,000 for transport because I was not sent by my employer".

Most journalists come from relatively poor families and are facing the pressure of feeding their families of origin or their own young families. More than 55% said that family welfare forces them to take any source of funding they can get in their work. As one reporter said, "You feel terrible when you come home and you have no money to feed your family. Can you reject a bribe under those circumstances?" Journalists are not only poorly paid, but even those who are fortunate to get steady employment with a news organization, are not paid on a regular basis. Sometimes reporting work may take six months to get payment, especially in the case of correspondents who are not on a regular salary but are paid by the article published.

As you can see we are coming from the bank. It is almost three months without a payment. You write a story and they give you a pay-in slip or payment voucher promising that they will deposit the money in your account. But one goes to the bank and there is no money lodged in the account. Furthermore, remember that one has paid a lot of expenses to write an article for the newspaper and then you receive a miserable payment, for example, one is paid Tsh 2,000 to 3,000 per story.

Some journalists think that under these circumstances trying to enforce codes of ethics is not likely to stop journalists from taking bribes or any source of income they can get. In answer to the question, "Do you think that codes of ethics will not stop journalists taking freebies and bribes?" 25% agreed. Still, 40% think that stronger emphasis on codes of ethics would lower the incidence of bribery and freebies and 17 % were neutral on the issue.

Balancing Economic and other pressures with objectivity and accuracy

From the data of the survey and especially from the interviews, it is apparent that in the culture of journalists in Tanzania, on the whole, journalists never lose sight of their commitment to basic news values: getting major issues to the attention of the public, being critical of abuses of power and the rule of law, putting the problems of public services before the public. People in the newspaper industry are aware that they are, in some sense, the conscience of the nation, operating in a sea of corruption, especially corruption on the part of the political leaders. Hardly a day goes by without the revelation of some political corruption in the daily newspapers, with thousands of cases pending

before the national bureau of corruption in the government. As one interviewee said, "Leaders themselves are corrupt. Why not us? Even you (*the interviewee tells the author of this research*) because you are still a student. You just wait till you come to the field. There are so many who came to inquire about our accepting bribes as you are doing, but then you will be with them competing for whatever source of payment you can get".

Clearly, journalists do not perceive themselves as a profession with some prestige and financial security in the community, but as an ambivalent occupation with some claim to idealism but struggling for survival.

Discussion

In this study we have noted that both working journalists and those commenting on the occupation have a very negative perception of themselves as a group that widely and frequently violates their basic ethical commitments. However, most journalist reveal themselves personally as quite committed to the ideals of truthfulness, objectivity and non-partisan reporting and most state that they have never or rarely accepted bribes to falsify news reports. Even granted that in most surveys of illicit activities, respondents tend to under report ethical violations, still it is likely that most journalists are stating honestly that they do not accept bribes to falsify or suppress information.

There may be something of many explanations in this apparent contradiction, for example, that the perception of widespread acceptance of bribery is based on hearsay about a few notorious violators of journalistic ethics. We think, however, that the data of this study suggest a deeper explanation, namely, that the journalist occupation engenders a split personality of simultaneous high ideals combined with great pressures to violate those ideals. In the social responsibility model of journalism, the central virtue of the good journalist is to put before citizens the truth about public services so that the public can push for better public services. Yet the work of reporting public affairs brings journalists into constant contact with a world of corruption, power bargaining, dirty politics and attempts to cover over venality to create a good public image. All public institutions, from the church to the local universities, have their skeletons in the closet, and journalists generally know the "private sins" behind public affairs. No journalist can say everything he or she thinks the public should

know, and everyone ends up negotiating with many pressures to get before the world of public opinion as much as is tolerable to all parties involved. Like many occupations the greatest virtue of journalists, integral truthfulness, is very close to its greatest vice, habitual concessions with sources to hide much of the truth.

Mansunungure (2004), referring to Ekeh's (1975) well-known distinction between the primordial public realm and the civic public realm, explains the lack of ethical commitments of public officials in Africa in terms of their competing loyalties.

The public official in Africa - whether in the public or private bureaucratic organisation - is a schizophrenic official. That is, he or she has a split personality and split loyalties; one to the dictates of the civic but amoral public realm, the other to the primordial but moral realm. Thus, what is officially sanctioned, expected and rewarded in the civic realm may simultaneously be scoffed at, if not condemned in the primordial public realm. Here in operation, in the same society, are two rationalities that are disconnected, and, rather than reinforcing each other, stand in opposition to each other (Mansunungure, 2004, p. 68)

The same type of competing values may be operating in the lives of many journalists, but in a special way given the constant confrontation of journalists with the world of corruption in Africa.

Robert Louis Stevenson's strange story (1886) of a split personality, Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, is very symbolic of what goes on in the lives of most journalists. The honorable Dr. Jekyll, it turns out, has a fascination with the experience of amorality and invents a potion to transform himself occasionally into the criminal Mr. Hyde. Like Dr. Jekyll, it may be that the most interesting and exciting part of an idealistic journalist's life is delving into the quite unbelievable underworld of corruption, dirty politics, injustice, greed and venality that is typical of all societies and, in a special way, with most of Africa. Journalism is, indeed, a "dirty industry" that lives with virtual if not actual "bribes" from advertisers, reluctant sources, political cronies and shifty business colleagues. In almost every media statement, one must know how far one can go in the face of possible reprisals from political leaders or political opposition, reprisals from religious leaders or leaders of other cultural groups, reprisals from advertisers, reprisals from negative public opinion. Virtually every public statement is controversial to some degree. Occasionally one may have confirmed

evidence of acceptance of bribery by a journalist, but every journalist examines every public media statement for possible pressures and even bribes (Birhanu, 2010, p. 493). Every journalist is cutting so many corners on truthfulness, often with pressure from editors, that one's conscience gradually is hardened. It is likely that every journalist makes some concessions to pressures and many may get so used to these concessions that they may habitually accept freebies and some form of payment with the excuse that one more concession does not affect their reporting a great deal. Some journalists, like Dr. Jekyll, find it increasingly difficult to revert to their professional ideals and become permanent Mr Hydes.

An alert and experienced journalist is constantly getting many tips on illicit activities, but it is often difficult to know when some information is of crucial importance for the public to know. It is extremely important for journalists to have a clear idea of what are issues of public interest, values of democracy, human rights and the fundamental goals of a just society. Without these reference points, journalists will not have guidelines for news values and will not be able to know when a matter is a personal, trivial evil and when the matter is a public social problem. When a journalist says that bribery or other forms of pressure do not affect objectivity and one's sense of social responsibility, the individual often does not have clear criteria of what is or is not in the public interest and easily responds to the pressure of the particular source.

The biographical accounts of truly good (and sometimes great!) journalists and editorial teams are accounts of those who can make the distinction between living with the human frailty behind the public sphere and serious threats to the democratic values that must be brought into public discussion (Bradlee, 1995; Ansah et al., 1996). Great and clever journalists know how to avoid the occasions of bribery, freebies and brown envelopes and other sordid aspects of the journalist occupation. They recognize that journalism can be a precarious livelihood, but they manage to develop a career that does move themselves into positions that pay a living wage and they often combine journalism with other work related to public information that give them a fairly decent income.

The good journalist knows how to be present in public relations events, report the information that is useful to the public, but avoid being used by the promotional tactics. They recognize that their reputation for living up to a professional culture of ethics, codified and

uncodified, is their greatest asset, and that their greatest enjoyment in life is the respect from their colleagues. Evidence of these significant journalistic efforts in the African context can be found in the book on Paul Ansah's journalistic writings, *Going to town* (Ansah et al, 1996), and studies of "great journalists" such as Diedong's article (2008) on a series of journalists who won the agreed-upon respect of colleagues in Ghana.

What has made the ethic of social responsibility in journalism so much more difficult is the growth of the public relations industry and blurring of the line between journalism and image creation—as T. Kasoma's article (2010) in this issue of *African Communication Research* points out. A reception for journalists blurs into refreshments in a press conference which blurs into freebies which blur into brown envelopes until finally a journalist finds him/herself practically in the hire of the source. So many journalists are moving into the seemingly better paying public relations work in the hire of clients that journalists are losing their sense of their obligation to defend the public, citizen's interests. It would be helpful for both public relations and journalism to make a sharp distinction between the occupations. Good public relations learns to serve both the client and the good of the community. Dishonest journalism can infect and destroy good public relations.

Certainly, it would be for the good of the journalist occupation and the information industry to get hard and clear evidence of how widespread and frequent is the acceptance of bribes and how much this affects the content of news and other forms of public information. The common belief is that acceptance of bribes is widespread, although most have only whispered, anecdotal evidence from friends of its occurrence. We have argued in this article that bribery is not as common as many have thought and the creation of the idea that it is common has done much damage to both the occupation and the industry. It will be important to designate contexts of certain types of bribery: the heavy bribery that occurs in the political arena; the mild bribery that occurs in the area of public relations, promotional events, press conferences, advertising, and other planned publicity activities; the threats from controversial sources (whether there is bribery or not) and other contexts.

In every case, a close study of the distortion in public information should be determined, and then there should be education of both the different information source groups and journalists on what to avoid. Some ministries of public finance have developed good training

programs for their personnel in this regard. There is need for much more specialized areas of training of journalists such as business journalism to know the sensitive areas where social responsibility ethics are of particular importance and require particular attentiveness as intelligent journalists.

Most are aware of the general professional ideal that a journalist should never accept any remuneration or favors from sources, but, in fact, there is great lack of clarity about the professional norms of accepting payment from sources, and most journalists say that the ethical guidelines regarding bribery were never explained well in their journalism training. There seems to be little awareness that accepting payment from sources can easily distort public information and lead to a loss of public confidence in journalists and the news media. In practice, it is taken for granted by many journalists and editorial managers that when sources ask for coverage it is not a violation of journalistic freedom to accept the payment for costs of transport and other benefits offered even if this does influence somewhat the final reporting. Some think that payment by sources is bribery only if large amounts of money are involved. Others feel that if you are facing economic hardship, there is justification for acceptance of bribes. There does not seem to be much serious discussion among professional journalists as to whether this is violating journalistic freedom or other ethical norms.

According to the perceptions of this sample of journalists, the most common context of open bribery occurs when journalists have information which could be very damaging to the reputation of the parties involved if published. There is a perception that the general corruption in government and many sectors of business leads to the manipulation of news organizations. There was no mention of whether these attempts to suppress publication by bribes are discussed with editors, but journalists are believed to commonly pocket the bribe and suppress the information. Stories circulate of sources threatening even death if the bribe is not accepted and this is seen as a justification for accepting the bribe and keeping quiet. No one in this study suggested that these are serious abuses that should be controlled.

The most serious culprits in all of this are the newspaper editors and radio/television program directors. In general there was no mention of editors attempting to exercise surveillance over the possibility of bribery; and occurrences of journalists being dismissed because of bribery were not mentioned by those interviewed. In general; the

perception of editors in Tanzania is very negative: as ready to demand a part of the bribe, as being complicit in the bribery, or looking the other way when sources are offering money. None of those interviewed mentioned that they might be constrained by the codes of ethics of their news organizations.

In general; this exploratory study did not reveal journalists in Tanzania as a group of professionals proud of their personal and corporate integrity and as a group united in their efforts to reveal injustices and improve public services or national governance—regardless of the corrupt pressures put upon them. Rather they seem to be a rather dispirited group weighed down in their struggle to survive economically in any way they can. There is little or no indication of professional leadership by senior journalists, press clubs, editors or proprietors of newspapers, the Media Council of Tanzania or specialists in media ethics in Tanzanian university journalism schools. In the confusion about the norms and ideals guiding their occupational activities, it is admirable that so many journalists and editorial teams in Tanzania do maintain their ideals as well as they do, and it is not surprising that some do fall from the Dr. Jekyll ideal into the criminal role of Mr. Hyde.

Conclusions and recommendations for further research

This exploratory research is perhaps most valuable for suggesting areas for further research:

- 1) The need for serious analysis of the ways that the various forms of pressures and rewards from news sources in African contexts distort public information and lessens journalists' ability to be objective, critical and capable of defending the public interest. This would be important information for a better training program for young journalists.
- 2) The need to evaluate the role of editorial leadership in establishing clear criteria in news values and in dealing with pressures from news sources, especially in detecting and controlling practices of bribery in journalism. This can be translated into enforced codes of ethics for media houses and better training of journalists for making these house codes of ethics more effective.

- 3) Above all, the institutions providing training of journalists need to agree on norms that journalists should follow in responding to bribes and other pressures from sources and why it is necessary to follow a rather strict code of journalistic integrity. This also demands clear orientation regarding news values and what kind of news stories are particularly important for maintaining an informed public in a democratic society.
- 4) As the public relations role grows in the African context, it will be important to distinguish very carefully between the public relations occupation and the journalistic occupation and the codes of ethics that guide these two related but very different lines of publicity. Since journalists are crossing over into the role of public relations and vice versa, there should be careful instruction for young journalists on the difference of these two occupations and the difference of the ethics and ideals which guide these occupations.
- 5) Finally, it is important to also continually educate the public regarding the importance of respecting journalistic freedom and the need for the media to be the watchdog of good public services. In the government ministries and other public agencies where there is greater resistance to transparency and accountability, there should be instituted training regarding the damage to the public welfare that any kind of bribery may cause.

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