JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Root Causes of Bribery among Rwandan Journalists. A case of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes Perspectives (2022).

NKURIKIYIMANA Modeste: Senior Rwandan Journalist,

Abstract:
The main objective of the study was to examine the root causes of bribery among Rwandan journalists, focusing on members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes between 2019 and 2022. In light of this general objective, the study undertaken was guided by three clear-cut specific objectives: a) to identify the root causes of bribery amongst Rwandan journalists who are members of ARJ, b) to assess the major forms of bribery practiced among ARJ journalists, and c) to evaluate the impacts of bribery in the journalism profession within the context of Rwanda. This study used a mixed-methods research design, both quantitative and qualitative, to collect and analyze data. It gathered primary data from respondents and compiled data from existing databases for an in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon of bribery. The target population consisted of 1,031 journalists; from this number, the required sample of 91 respondents was derived using Taro Yamane's formula according to Nwankwo (2006). From the first objective, the results revealed that poor payment for journalists amongst Rwandan media outlets (29.68%) is the major root cause of bribery amongst Rwandan journalists. On the forms of bribery, the study found that journalists or media receive gifts and freebies from sources to run stories at 27.47%, followed by receiving brown envelopes containing money to influence story angles at 24.19%. Regarding the consequences, 24.17% stated that bribery compels them to write and publish public relations stories, hence compromising objectivity and professional ethics. Based on the findings, it was concluded that low remunerations and poor working conditions were the leading causes of bribery amongst Rwandan journalists. Addressing these through appropriate pay structures, strengthened ethical standards, and legal mechanisms is, therefore, a necessity for professionalism and restoration of public trust in Rwanda's media fraternity.

Keywords: Root Causes, Bribery, Journalists and Perspective.

1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, the media is as much of a requirement for society as food and clothing because of its value in informing, educating, and empowering citizens. Media is a cornerstone of democracy as a check on public institutions and an agency of accountability, transparency, and an educated debate. If the media decides and performs its function sincerely and truthfully, it can be a force for change in nation-building (Shakeel, 2009).

Globally, efforts to fight bribery in journalism include ethics training, stricter media codes of practice, and institutional safeguards. For instance, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ, 2014) suggests continuous professional education and refusal of gifts or bribes and notes that ethics lapses can kill reputations and jeopardize the public's right to accurate information. Similarly, worldwide watchdogs monitor media bribery and demand stronger enforcement of anti-bribery practices (Berger, 2007).

Internationally, media corruption continues to erode journalistic professionalism and public trust. More than 60% of journalists in developing nations say they have been approached to bribe or accept gifts to change news coverage, and meager wages and insecure employment make journalists vulnerable, says Transparency International (2022). Even in developed countries, fewer cases of direct bribery are reported but media partiality and undue political or advertising influence remain reported, claiming that ethical concerns for journalists do exist anywhere (Retief, 2002).

Bribery and "brown envelope journalism" are the norm across Africa. It has been established through studies that in other African countries, including Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana, up to 45% of journalists have admitted to being paid or given something by sources to influence coverage (Skjerdal, 2010).

On the continent of Africa, the fight against media bribery has been to some extent successful with professional associations, independent regulatory bodies, and investigative networks. Countries with stronger journalist unions and regulatory capacities have fewer instances of bribery, Skjerdal (2010) reports, while there are issues due to institutional weakness and economic vulnerability of the media personnel. Such structures are crucial for a guarantee of press freedom, ethical conduct, and accountability across the continent. The practice is more prevalent in nations with lower press freedom rankings, low remuneration, and minimal legal protections for journalists. This widespread corruption undermines public trust, undermines investigative journalism, and restricts the role of the media as a political and economic power watchdog (Skjerdal, 2010).

In Rwanda, there has been a significant shift for the better in the media landscape over the past decade, yet issues persist. The Rwanda Media Barometer (2016) indicates that approximately 35% of journalists have encountered an offer of a gift or bribe from sources attempting to influence coverage. While Rwanda ranks among the best-performing countries in the East African region in terms of ethical compliance and regulation of media, issues like low salaries, high competition, and minimal editorial independence still expose journalists to ethical dangers (Rwanda Media Barometer, 2016).

Transparency International Rwanda (2022) emphasizes that bribery in Rwandan media is not only a personal ethical concern but also a matter of broader structural issues. Bribery, gifts, favors, or cash can play a huge role in influencing reporting, particularly in the local media where financial demands are high. Such practices dilute investigative reporting, reduce accountability, and undermine public trust in the media as a free institution (Transparency International Rwanda, 2022).

In Rwanda, increased wages for journalists, strict enforcement of ethical codes, and stronger media institutions are essential in preventing bribery. Studies show that media organizations with strong anti-bribery policies and ethical reporting training courses possess greater public trust and more professionalized reporting. Strengthening these procedures will empower journalists to combat corruption while fulfilling their role as citizens to offer transparency and accountability (Transparency International Rwanda, 2022).

The researcher was therefore compelled to study the reasons behind bribery among Rwandan journalists, particularly the members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes Perspectives (2022).

General objective

The general objective of this study is to examine the root causes of bribery among Rwandan Journalists. A case of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes Perspectives (2022).

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research are the following:

1) To identify the root causes of bribery for Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.
2) To examine the main forms of bribery practiced among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.
3) To assess consequences of bribery among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What are the root causes of bribery for Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes?
2) What are the main forms of bribery practiced among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes?
3) What are the consequences of bribery among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes?

2. Review of Related Literature

(a) The situation of Rwandan media report on bribery

Bribery is now the most common form of corruption in Rwanda's media industry, a report by Transparency International Rwanda (TIR) has confirmed. Named "Survey on Corruption in Media in Rwanda: Perception and Experience of Media Practitioners and Stakeholders", the report is the first in a series to examine ethical challenges in the industry. It identifies that media professionals are highly susceptible to various forms of bribery in the form of gifts, sexual corruption, favoritism, nepotism, and extortion, all which undermine journalistic integrity and professional autonomy (The New Times Media Report, 2022).

The study involved 1,468 respondents, 76.5% of which were from Kigali. Although 70.9% reported never having been approached for a bribe, 29.1% had confessed to having undergone bribery in some form or another. Sexual-corruption was also examined in the research, where 11.4% of the respondents scored it as being very high, 28.4% as low, and 26.9% reported that it does not exist. These findings underscore that bribery within the media is a two-sides-of-the-currency kind of issue, as it includes monetary and non-monetary motivations (The New Times Media Report, 2022).

Drawing attention to the findings, Appolinaire Mupiganyi, TIR Executive Director, elucidated that the survey unveiled gender and sex issues as being particularly delicate in journalism due to the type of work. Motives for soliciting or giving bribes, according to the report, include publishing information, securing advertisements, censoring information, blackmailing, employing relatives, and approving work travel, with sexual exploitation commonly being included in some of these cases. Of the reported types of bribery, money was the most common motive at 66.5%, followed by nepotism at 60.6%, favoritism at 54.4%, and sex-based corruption at 43.9% (The New Times Media Report, 2022).

The other mechanisms of influence included gifts (39%) and coercion (38.3%), encompassing a wide range of pressures on journalistic behavior. It also queried the sources of bribery and discovered that 63.7% were from the private sector, 35.3% from the central government, 24% from local governments, and 19.3% from civil society organizations. The data provide that bribery is not limited to a single institution but crosscuts across several sectors that interact with media professionals (The New Times Media Report, 2022).

The study also revealed that media corruption is more prevalent in the print media, where 55.2% of the cases occurred, followed by radio and television at 37.2% and 14.1% respectively. The trend from the study suggests that traditional media houses with limited budget and wages could be vulnerable to bribe. Immacule Ingabire, TIR Chairperson, noted that journalists' economic hardship is the central causal factor of causing corruption, considering the financial and structural causes of media corruption in Rwanda (The New Times Media Report, 2022).

(b) Forms of bribery practiced among African journalists

African journalism has numerous ethical issues that threaten professional integrity, among them bribery, of which great concern is accepted. One of the widespread practices is accepting freebies, gifts or favors intended to influence reporting. While some may see seasonal gifts from politicians or office-holders, for instance, at Christmas or Sallah, as nothing, several editors disagree. They contend that even small gifts can compromise journalistic objectivity, leading reporters to exclude information or exploit material for the benefit of benefactors (Skjerdal ,2010).

Brown envelope syndrome is also prevalent, wherein cash is dispatched by news sources to editors or journalists for favorable reporting or exclusives. Cash received, in this instance, corrupts news reporting and erodes journalists' autonomy. For example, when a politician commits money in the process of an interview, it violates the reporter's ability to stay neutral and objective in the direction of other competing political actors, raising serious ethical issues surrounding the sanctity of news material (Africa Media Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2010).

Conflict of interest is a widespread issue in African media too, often associated with the commercial success of newspapers and the media as a whole. Newspapers with high proportions of advertising-generated income may prioritize advertiser interests over editorial independence, and journalists who are employed by politicians or other influential people may have divided loyalties. These conflicts serve to destroy good ethical judgments, and can result in biased or censored reporting when commercial or political considerations take over from professional duties (Berger, 2007).

Among the other ethical concerns here is dishonesty, through which journalists obtain information in unscrupulous ways. While coverage under cover may sometimes be justified when the public interest is high, misuse of the method can cause harm to innocent sources and erode public trust. Editors require that journalists identify themselves openly during interviews so that there is transparency and accountability (Africa Media Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2010).

Cartel journalism refers to the formation of closed clubs among journalists working on similar beats, which can censor or twist news in pursuit of safeguarding shared interests. While such clubs are likely to enhance professional associations and kindness, they are deemed immoral when they restrict press freedom or lead to censorship. This renders free reporting unattainable and destroys the watchdog role of media in society (Skjerdal, 2010).

Sycophancy or praise-singing also occurs in African media. Journalists may over-praise influential individuals or groups regardless of their conduct, echoing broader social trends in adoring money and influence. Furthermore, ethnic biases and political leanings occasionally taint reporting, leading to partial reporting or character assassination of opposing individuals or groups. These actions undermine neutrality and damage the credibility of African journalism (Skjerdal ,2010).

All these forms of bribery and malpractice emphasize the multi-level challenges of the African journalist. Low income, political harassment, and poor institutional control are structural issues that make these professional moral challenges even more entrenched ones, in need of stronger professional norms, continuous ethics training, and independent regulatory mechanisms that can guarantee journalistic integrity (Skjerdal ,2010).

(c) Root Causes of Bribery among African Journalists

Corruption within journalism in Africa finds its bedrock in the structural, economic, and institutional weaknesses that make fertile ground for unethical practices to flourish. Transparency International has described corruption as being so widespread within both public and private sectors across Africa that it has fostered a climate where journalists are too often forced to work under political duress, economic hardship, and loose professional safeguards. The ineffectiveness of enforcing ethical standards within institutions in the media has made such corruption so normalized that bribery is not only indicative of individual moral failure but also symptomatic of systemic and deeper issues which are part of the wider governance culture (Transparency International, 2019).

A prime driver for bribery among African journalists is a state of economic vulnerability. In most countries, journalists are among the lowest-paid professionals, often below the average national income. According to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, low pay structures and irregular pay schedules in a number of African media markets have driven journalists to look for informal financial "supplements" from news sources. This has promoted the emergence of so-called "brown envelope journalism," whereby reporters bargain for cash, gifts, or other favors in return for favorable coverage or censorship of information. The report further underlines that the absence of powerful labor unions and a high incidence of politically affiliated media owners reinforces this precarious dependence of journalists on external actors for economic survival (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021).

Other deep-seated causes of bribery include political interference and patronage systems within media institutions. According to Skjerdal, African journalism operates in a context of "clientelism," where media houses and journalists are often co-opted by powerful political or business figures. Such relationships blur the line between professional reporting and propaganda, as journalists feel obliged to promote the interests of their patrons to ensure continued access to sources, job security, or future career advancement. This context is not encouraging for independent journalism, while bribery serves as a strategic means for influence and control (Skjerdal, 2010).

This problem is further heightened by the institutional weakness in the enforcement of ethical guidelines. Even though most African countries have codes of conduct guiding journalists, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung observes that these frameworks are poorly enforced due to a lack of independent regulatory bodies and professional accountability mechanisms. Where media councils exist, their powers are limited, and sanctions against unethical journalists are rarely carried out. Because of this regulatory gap, bribery flourishes unhampered, weakening the public's trust in the press as a watchdog institution (Skjerdal, 2010).

Social and cultural elements also perpetuate the vicious cycle of bribery. Skjerdal notes that in societies where giving and returning gifts is part of the culture, drawing a line between pure appreciation and a bribe may be difficult. This aspect of cultural ambiguity also serves as a convenient excuse for journalists to accept "tokens of appreciation" from news sources, even when such actions violate professional principles. In addition, since ethics training in many media institutions is not conducted on a recurring basis, journalists often lack the moral acumen to navigate such challenges (Skjerdal, 2010).

The lack of transparent funding models for independent journalism further increases the risk of bribery. Transparency International noted that overdependence on advertising revenues, government subsidies, and sponsorships by politically affiliated bodies undermines independence in editorial content. When advertisers or political patrons hold a large percentage share of a media outlet's income, journalists face pressure to meet their expectations, often at the expense of factually reporting events (Transparency International, 2019).

(d) Consequences of Bribery on Journalism Ethics and Media Credibility in Africa

Bribery has compromised the ethical foundation of journalism in most African countries and undermined the integrity of the press and its credibility as a democratic institution. In accepting any forms of payment to influence coverage, journalists compromise one of the most basic ethical imperatives in journalism-objectivity. Afrobarometer (2019) reports that the erosion of journalistic independence through bribery contributed to declining public confidence in media due to growing perceptions of journalists as mouthpieces of political or economic elites rather than as impartial watchdogs. This perception diminishes the media’s role as a trusted source of public information and weakens its capacity for holding leaders accountable (Afrobarometer, 2019).

A major ethical consequence of bribery is the distortion of truth in news reporting. Transparency International (2019) observes that in environments where corruption is endemic, bribed journalists often manipulate or conceal facts to favor those who pay them, thereby turning the media into a platform for propaganda rather than public service. Such practices erode the moral authority of the press and violate journalistic codes of ethics, which emphasize fairness, balance, and accuracy. Furthermore, corruption-induced bias undermines professional norms and discourages investigative journalism, since journalists fear exposing wrongdoings that might implicate their benefactors (Transparency International, 2019).

Bribery also leads to self-censorship and suppression of critical stories. According to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2021), a number of journalists who accept gifts or payments from political or business players end up not reporting negatively about them, even in cases of misconduct. The result of this self-censoring is again selective coverage in favor of strong voices, while those of ordinary citizens are stifled. Over time, such biased reporting serves to create a culture of silence and compliance within the media, thereby weakening journalism's ability to serve its watchdog function and reduce pluralism of views in public debate (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021).

Another significant effect of bribery is the loss of professional credibility among journalists and their institutions. The audience that perceives corrupt practices in the media becomes skeptical about news content, both in terms of its accuracy and motive. Afrobarometer (2019) found that a growing number of African citizens believe journalists are "part of the corruption problem" rather than a solution to it. Loss of credibility can lead to lower readership, reduced viewership, and withdrawal of advertising revenue, creating a vicious cycle where financial weakness further fuels the temptation to accept bribes (Afrobarometer, 2019).

Ethically, bribery undermines internal accountability and professionalism within media organizations. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2021) places on record that many African countries have newsroom cultures that lack strong enforcement mechanisms of ethical conduct or punish errant behavior. As unethical behavior goes unpunished, it quickly becomes the standard, and junior reporters are taught to see bribery as a valid addition to their small salaries rather than a contravention of professional ethics. This impunity erodes the credibility of journalism as a profession and decreases public respect for journalists as a conveyor of truth (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021).

Finally, bribery contributes to weakening democracy and good governance. When media houses and journalists become complicit in corruption, the flow of reliable information is disrupted, and the public cannot make informed decisions. Transparency International (2019) emphasizes that free and independent media are crucial for transparency and accountability, but corruption within the press undermines both. By distorting information and shielding corrupt officials, the bribed journalists indirectly sustain systemic corruption and slow social progress. To put it differently, fighting bribery in journalism is an ethical duty but also a requirement for strengthening democratic governance and civic trust (Transparency International, 2019).

(f) Global Perspectives on Combating Media Bribery and Promoting Ethical Journalism

The media industry has increasingly recognized worldwide that bribery damages not only individual credibility but also the democratic role of journalism as a watchdog. In combating bribery, efforts have focused on strengthening ethical frameworks, transparency mechanisms, and professional accountability. Transparency International (2019) says that the global media sector is facing corruption pressures emanating from other industries, including political interference, economic dependence, and weak oversight structures. However, the most successful media systems, such as those of Northern Europe and parts of North America, have developed robust systems with independent regulatory bodies and media ombudsmen that protect editorial freedom and ensure public accountability. This shows that fighting media bribery is not only a matter of having strong laws but also of sustained institutional support for ethical journalism (Transparency International, 2019).

Globally, professional codes of ethics are the backbone of anti-bribery efforts in journalism. The Society of Professional Journalists stresses "seek truth and report it," "act independently," and "be accountable and transparent," each of which aims at minimizing potential unethical influence. These codes encourage the journalist to decline gifts, favors, and/or any type of payment that could compromise fairness or create a conflict of interest. In addition to these codes, media organizations throughout countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia operate internal ethics committees which provide guidance and impose disciplinary actions if ethical violations have been committed. These international models of ethical self-regulation demonstrate that integrity must be built into newsroom culture-not just imposed by the law (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014).

Ethics education and training have become vital tools in global strategies to reduce bribery and promote professionalism. Retief (2002) argues that ethics in journalism cannot be instinctive but must be learned through continuous education that exposes practitioners to moral reasoning, conflict management, and the implications of unethical conduct. Training programs across journalism schools in Europe, the United States, and Asia integrate simulated ethical dilemmas, case studies, and codes of conduct into their curricula with the aim of preparing future journalists for navigating such complex real-world pressures. This ensures that young journalists enter the workforce with a notion of the possible long-term repercussions of bribery on both professional reputation and public trust (Retief, 2002).

In the global south, there has been a prioritization of capacity-building and institutional reforms as mechanisms to counter corruption in the media. According to Berger (2007), the formation of independent media councils, journalists' unions, and whistleblower protection structures have enhanced the internal resistance against bribery in countries like South Africa and India. These institutions avail opportunities for reporting unethical practices and uphold collective accountability among media practitioners. Secondly, international partnerships, such as the UNESCO Media Development Indicators and the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer, provide a clear benchmark on ethical progress while enabling reforms that conform to global standards of transparency and integrity (Berger 2007).

Another critical approach to fighting bribery worldwide is by promoting media financing transparency. According to Transparency International (2019), financial opacity in media houses creates fertile ground for corruption through the concealment of funding sources that might compromise editorial decisions. In that respect, open disclosure of ownership, sources of funding, and advertising clients is advocated for in global initiatives. Transparency regarding financial interests decreases the potential for undue influence, entrenching the public's trust in the neutrality of media outlets. Those countries that have embraced transparent reporting requirements for the ownership of media and relationships regarding advertising have shown greater resistance to bribery and political manipulation (Transparency International, 2019).

Finally, global media ethics movements make it clear that the promotion of ethical journalism is not only about enforcement but also about creating a culture of integrity. According to Berger (2007), journalism flourishes where ethical principles form part of professional identity rather than when it is enforced through punishment. International best practices, such as those seen within SPJ (2014) and other similar organizations, stress mentorship, peer review, and public accountability as sustainable paths toward integrity. The continuous reinforcement of these norms through professional associations, education, and international collaboration offers a holistic approach toward eradicating bribery and restoring credibility to global journalism. In short, global perspectives on fighting media bribery culminate into three aspects that are competence regulation, education, and transparency (Berger, 2007).

3. Statement of the Problem

As the world shrinking into a global village, the role of media in advancing transparency and fighting corruption becomes increasingly crucial. However, most local journalists in Rwanda earn very low wages and work under precarious conditions. These render them devoid of professional independence and ethical standards to practice their work with any level of integrity. In this regard, the Rwanda Media Barometer report asserts that “absence or degradation of economically stable working conditions can hinder both objectivity and independence of media practitioners.” The report continues to note that many private media organizations are financially constrained, largely due to a limited advertising market, which often compels journalists to engage in unethical practices such as sensationalism and defamation in order to sustain livelihoods (Rwanda Media Barometer report, 2016).

In this perspective, "brown envelope journalism," where cash or gifts are given to journalists for favorable coverage of events, has become the persistent challenge of the day. According to scholars, "brown envelope syndrome" is a complex systemic condition that undermines independence in journalism, whose remedial action needs to be taken at both individual and institutional levels Afrobarometer. (2019). At the same time, recent reports have shown that such practices not only undermine public trust in Rwanda's media but also reduce the ability of the press to hold power to account, therefore weakening their potential in the nation's fight against corruption as a whole (The New Times Media Report, 2022).

4. Methodology of Data Collection

(a) Study area

The study was carried out at the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes (ARJ), headquartered in Remera opposite Amahoro Stadium and next to Sports View Hotel, Plot 5856, Kigali, Rwanda. The ARJ is a professional organization that brings together journalists from public and private media in Rwanda. It was established in 1995 and currently has a membership of 1,031 journalists, with 250 being female and 781 males. The study therefore focused on to examining the root causes of bribery among Rwandan Journalists. A case of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes Perspectives (2022). Membership in the association provides a central platform from which to understand the chief professional conduct and ethical challenges within the Rwandan media landscape. While it plays a crucial role in professional development, the ARJ also faces challenges related to economic constraints, limited oversight mechanisms, and pressures from commercial and political interests that may contribute to unethical practices such as bribery (Association Rwandaise des Journalistes report, 2022).

(b) Research design

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), research design is a plan that guides the process of answering research questions. This study employed a descriptive design of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the root causes of bribery among Rwandan journalists, focusing on members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes (2022). The design will, therefore, enable the researcher to capture patterns, motivations, and consequences of bribery both in measurable data and contextual insights within the professional media environment in Rwanda.

(c) Study population

According to Grinnell (1990), it is the totality of persons or objects with which a study is concerned, forming a set of cases from which a sample is drawn and to which the researcher intends to generalize. In this study, the population consisted of 1,031 journalists, all members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes, composed of 250 female and 781 male journalists. These were both senior and junior members based in Kigali and directly engaged in media practice; as such, they were appropriate for investigating the root causes of bribery among Rwandan journalists.

Table 1: Study population

Female journalists as members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.	**Male journalists who members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.**	**Total**
250	**781**	**1,031**

Source: Researcher, July 2025.

(d) Sample size

During a questionnaire survey, Taro Yamen's formula for drawing sample (Nwankwo, 2006) was used to determine the representative sample from the whole of 1031 respondents who are journalists and members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes as a case study (2019-2022), 10% was used as the standard error or the level of precision. The formula used to determine the sample is written as following:

Generally, deciding on a sample is not given to arbitrariness but by strict adherence to laid down principles (Nwankwo, 2006).

n = N / (1 + N (e) 2)

Where;

n = sample size,

N = sampled population and

e = error tolerance.

In this case, the research proceeded with an error of 10% and confidence coefficient of 80%. The estimated sample population will be N = 1031. Therefore, the sample population (n) was;

n = 1031/ (1 + 1031 (0.1)2)

n = 1031/ (1 + 1031 (0.01)

n = 1031/ (1 + 10.31)

n = 1031/11.31

n = 91.15

n = 91.

As shown in the above calculations, the study sampled a minimum of 91 respondents as the sample size from the total population. The respondents were categorized as: Senior Journalists and Journalists of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes in Kigali.

(e) Sampling technique

Convenience sampling was used in the study. From a total population of 1,031 journalists who are members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes, at least 91 respondents were selected to take part in the survey, comprising both senior and junior journalists based in Kigali. This method ensured that participants who were accessible and willing to provide information on root causes of bribery were included in the study.

Data collection instruments

The researcher applied data collection tools in order to obtain information from the respondents and other concerned parties. Documentation and interviews were employed as the primary instruments for collecting data for this study.

5. Findings and Solutions

5.1. Findings related to specific objectives

5.1.1. The root causes of bribery for Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes. The results indicated that different factors contribute to bribery in the journalism profession in Rwanda. Of all the respondents, 27 participants (29.68%) mentioned poor payment among media outlets for journalists as a key cause of bribery. This indicates that because of the poor payments, many journalists are looking for other sources where they can earn extra money, including unethical means of receiving bribes. Another major contributing factor identified by 23 respondents was the low level of professional ethics and standards among Rwandan journalists, 25.28%. This indicates that weak adherence to ethical codes and limited professional training exacerbate vulnerability to corruption. Also the study, pointed out by 17 respondents (18.68%), includes monopoly ownership by owners who control the media at their whim. This limits editorial independence and often puts pressure on the journalists to compromise their integrity. Another 14 respondents, 15.38% in total, named poor legal frameworks for prosecuting corrupt journalists. This indicates no effective legal mechanisms to punish unethical conduct by journalists. Finally, 10 respondents (10.98%) attributed the problem to the high rates of illiterate media managers who manage media houses and mismanage the same leading to poor organizational governance and oversight. Based on these findings, this study concludes that poor payments for journalists among the media outlets in Rwanda constitute the main root cause of bribery among Rwandan journalists.

Table.2. The Root Causes of Bribery for Rwandan Journalists who are Members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Root Causes of Bribery for Rwandan Journalists a.	Poor payments for journalists among media outlets.	27	29.68%	29.68%
	Low level of professional ethics and standards among journalists.	23	25.28%	25.28%
	Monopoly of media owners who control the media outlets.	17	18.68%	18.68%
	Low legal framework that prosecutes corrupt journalists.	14	15.38%	15.38%
	High rates of illiterate media managers.	10	10.98%	10.98%
Total		**91**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

5.1.2. The main forms of bribery practiced among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.

The second objective of the study sought to establish the major forms of bribery practiced among Rwandan journalists who are members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes (ARJ). The findings revealed that bribery in journalism takes different forms, according to responses reported by respondents. A total of 25 of the participants (27.47%) stated that among forms of bribery, journalists or media receive gifts or freebies from sources in exchange for running stories. This was indicated as the most frequent form of bribery, where journalists are influenced through non-monetary incentives to provide friendly coverage. Coupled with the above, 22 respondents (24.19%) reported that journalists or media receive "brown envelopes" containing money from sources to influence the angle or tone of stories. This proves that direct financial inducements remain a major unethical practice in the media industry. Further, 18 respondents (19.78%) reported that journalists or media are offered advertisements by companies or organizations as a form of bribery for good publicity. This is indicative of using commercial leverage to twist editorial content. Another 14 respondents (15.38%) mentioned cartel journalism, where journalists associate and have associations that are aimed at protecting mutual interests, normally leading to collective manipulation of information for personal or group benefit. And lastly, 12 respondents (13.18%) mentioned the presence of sycophancy journalism, which is practiced by journalists when doing stories involving character assassinations or flattery, saving the interest of individuals or groups. From this, the study concludes that the most pervasive form of bribery among Rwandan journalists is receiving gifts or freebies from sources in exchange for media coverage.

Table.3. The main forms of bribery practiced among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Forms of Bribery practiced among Rwandan journalists a.	Journalists or media receive gifts as freebies from the source.	25	27.47%	27.47%
	Journalists or media receive brown envelopes.	22	24.19%	24.19%
	Advertisements from companies or organizations as favor.	18	19.78%	19.78%
	Cartel journalism associations.	14	15.38%	15.38%
	Sycophancy journalism.	12	13.18%	13.18%
Total		**91**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

5.1.3. The consequences of bribery among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes.

The third objective of the study aimed to assess the consequences of bribery among Rwandan journalists who are members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes (ARJ). The findings revealed that bribery has several negative effects on journalistic integrity and the overall media landscape in Rwanda. Out of the total respondents, 22 participants (24.17%) indicated that bribery leads journalists to write and publish public relations stories instead of objective news. This finding suggests that bribery compromises the independence of journalists and transforms news coverage into promotional content. In addition, 20 respondents (21.97%) stated that bribery promotes self-censorship among journalists from different media outlets. This occurs when journalists avoid reporting certain issues to protect their relationships with bribing sources or to maintain personal benefits. Furthermore, 18 respondents (19.78%) observed that bribery kills the practice of investigative journalism among media practitioners. This reflects how corruption discourages journalists from pursuing in-depth stories that might expose wrongdoing. Another 17 respondents (18.69%) revealed that bribery among journalists promotes nepotism within media outlets. This creates favoritism in hiring, promotions, and story selection, undermining fairness and professionalism. Lastly, 14 respondents (15.39%) mentioned that bribery among media practitioners destroys good governance and democracy in the country. By distorting information and silencing critical voices, media corruption weakens democratic accountability and public trust. In conclusion, the study established that bribery significantly undermines journalistic integrity and the democratic role of the media in Rwanda. The most evident consequence is that journalists are compelled to write and publish public relations stories, thereby compromising objectivity, transparency, and the watchdog function of the press.

Table.4. The consequences of bribery among Rwandan journalists who are members of Association Rwandaise des Journalistes

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Consequences of bribery among Rwandan journalists a.	Bribery makes journalists write and publish public relations stories.	22	24.17%	24.17%
	Bribery promotes self-censorship among journalists.	20	21.97%	21.97%
	Bribery kills the practice of investigative journalism.	18	19.78%	19.78%
	Bribery among journalists promotes the practice of nepotism.	17	18.69%	18.69%
	Bribery practiced among media destroys good governance.	14	15.39%	15.39%
Total		**91**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

(b) Solutions

After going through different books, journals, and reports used during the literature review, and observing the findings of this study as presented above, the researcher formulated some appropriate recommendations in order to tackle the root causes of bribery among Rwandan journalists.

The proposed recommendations are as follows:

To the government media regulator in Rwanda:

- The government of Rwanda through RURA should ensure that the media owners pay well journalists in different media outlets. This will enable the journalists to do their duties without being compromised with bribed from the source.
- The government of Rwanda through RURA should work closely the media owners in the country. This will strengthen on how the media owners follow the legal media framework and implement them effectively.

To the media owners in Rwanda:

- The media owners should ensure that they employ professional and qualified media managers and journalists among different media outlets in the country. This will empower media outlets to have dedicated journalists who are not corrupt.

- The media owners should be strict on media managers and journalists who are caught up in scandals of corruption. This will reduce on the level of corruption among journalists from different media outlets.

To the Researchers

- Future research on bribery and corruption in Rwanda's media should extend beyond journalists to include media owners, editors, and freelancers who shape newsroom practices. Scholars should also focus on developing anti-bribery training modules and media ethics programs for integration into journalism.
- Future studies should adopt digital data collection methods, including online surveys and virtual focus groups, to broaden respondent representation across media outlets. Such approaches would enhance the reliability of findings and facilitate comparative analysis between traditional and online media journalists.

6. Conclusion

Bribery remains one of the most pressing challenges undermining the integrity and professionalism of journalists in Rwanda. This study aims to examine the root causes, main forms, and consequences of bribery among members of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes (ARJ). The findings revealed that amongst others, poor remuneration for journalists, low level of education amongst journalists, weak professional ethics, and limited enforcement of anti-corruption laws are the primary drivers of bribery within the media industry. The study also established that journalists commonly receive gifts, money ("brown envelopes"), and advertising offers in exchange for favorable coverage. Such practices distort the ethical foundations of journalism and transform the media into a tool for personal or institutional interests. The consequences are far-reaching reduced investigative journalism, self-censorship, nepotism, and the erosion of good governance and democracy in Rwanda. In conclusion, addressing bribery in the journalism sector requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving media houses, government agencies, academic institutions, and professional associations. Strengthening journalists' economic welfare, enforcing ethical standards, and enhancing legal accountability mechanisms will be essential to restoring credibility and professionalism in the Rwandan media. By implementing these measures, Rwanda can nurture a more independent, transparent, and socially responsible journalism sector that supports national development and democratic governance.

7. Future Scope

This study opens multiple avenues for future research on media ethics and professionalism in Rwanda, including:

(1) The Analysis of Influence of Education Level on Ethical Conduct and Bribery Tendencies Among Rwandan Journalists

(2) Evaluating the Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Policies in Combating Bribery in Rwanda's Media Sector

(3) An evaluation of the impact of digital journalism and online news platforms on bribery tendencies and ethical decision-making among journalists.

(4) A comparative study on the prevalence of bribery between state-owned and private media outlets in Rwanda.

References

Africa Media Review Vol 5, No. 2 (2010), *Africa Council for Communication Education*.

Afrobarometer. (2019). Highlights from the Ghana Afrobarometer Round 8 Survey. Corruption and Public Service Delivery, Pages 1-37.

ARFEM, REFO, & ARJ. (2011). *Code of Ethics Governing Journalists, Other Media Professionals and the Media in Rwanda*. Kigali, Rwanda.

Berger, G. (2007). *Media legislation in Africa: A comparative legal survey*. UNESCO.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, (2021). *African media barometer: An analysis of trends in AMBs for 28 countries over 11 years (2011–2021)*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Gordon, A. D., Kittross, J. M., Merrill, J. C., Babcock, W., & Dorsher, M. (2011). *Overview: Theoretical Foundations for Media Ethics (John C. Merrill).* In Controversies in Media Ethics (3rd Ed., p. 30). Routledge.

Government of Rwanda. (2013). *Law n°02/2013 of 08/02/2013 regulating media (p. 22). Kigali, Rwanda*: Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA).

Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques (2nd Ed.*). New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.

Retief, J. (2002). *Media Ethics: An Introduction to Responsible Journalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

RGB. (2016). *Rwanda Media Barometer*. Kigali: RGB.

Ristow, B. (2010). *Cash for coverage:* Bribery of journalists around the world.

Skjerdal, T. (2010). Research on brown envelope journalism in the African media. African Communication Research, 3(3), 367–406.

Society of Professional Journalist (SPJ). (2014). Code of Ethics. Nashville, Tenn.: SPJ's National Convention. Retrieved from https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp.

The New Times Media Report (2022). *Bribery is the leading form of corruption in the media industry*, a new report by Transparency International Rwanda (TIR) shows.

Transparency International Rwanda (2015). *Perception and experience of Media practitioners and stakeholders.* Be corruption free to free others from corruption.

Transparency International Rwanda. (2022). *Rwanda Bribery Index 2022*. Transparency International Rwanda.

Transparency International. (2019). *Global corruption barometer Africa 2019: Citizen's views and experiences of corruption.* Transparency International.

Tsetsura, K. (2011). Communication Management Strategies of Public Bodies and Law Enforcement Agencies to Win Public Trust. Hongkong. Retrieved from https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/30545703/the-exploratory-study-of-media-transparency-and-cash-for-news-