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Do They Preach Water But Drink Wine? Examining “The Corruption Dragon” in Kenyan Journalism

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Abstract

This was a national survey conducted in 2012–2013 ($N = 504$) that examined the prevalence of corruption in journalism practice in Kenya. Findings show that a majority of respondents (74%) believe that corruption is rife in Kenyan media. Nearly 46% of Kenyan journalists learned the art of corruption through the source–journalist relationship, followed by the legacy inherited from older generations (20.3%). Cash money (40%) is the most common form of corruption—and politicians are the top bribe-givers to local journalists, followed by businesspeople. More than 77% of Kenyan journalists say corruption in the local media compromises objective journalism.

Professionalism goes hand in hand with high ethical standards. Ethics ensure that people practicing a particular profession are allowed to discern what is morally right from what is morally wrong without being policed to do so (Nwabueze, 2010). Therefore, similar to other professions, journalism around the world operates under parameters of ethical requirements and standards. Journalistic ethics is an important pillar in the journalism profession across nations. Similarly, journalistic ethics has remained a central strand in research on the professional norms of journalists around the world (e.g., Elahi, 2013; Hasty, 2005; Kasoma, 2009; McMane, 2012; Mwesige, 2004; Raeymaeckers et al., 2012).

However, journalistic ethics is a multifaceted topic with multiple dimensions and definitions in different social, cultural, and political settings. While multiple unethical behaviors characterize the practice of Kenyan journalism and African journalism by extension, corruption is viewed as one of the chief threats to journalistic ethics, with adverse repercussions on objective reporting. Therefore, it is not an understatement to say that nothing compromises journalistic independence in Kenyan and African journalism more than corruption and bribery.

A plethora of research has shown that the practice of journalism in most of African nations is primarily characterized by corruption in the form of cash-for-story, freebies, bribery, and extortion (e.g., Dirbaba, 2010; Ekeanyanwu & Obianingwe, 2009; Kasoma, 2007; Mpagze & White, 2010; Nwabueza, 2010; Ronning, 2005). Thus, in 2010, recognizing the importance of this issue, *African Communication Research* produced a special edition dedicated to the topic of bribery and corruption in African journalism.

Corruption in Kenya is widespread in institutions and culture alike. Transparency International (2013) ranks Kenya as 38th out of 176 of the most corrupt nations. This national survey of Kenyan journalists examines the prevalence of corruption in the local

One of the most comprehensive national survey of Kenyan journalists examines the prevalence of corruption in the local media and the implications of this vice on the practice of journalism in Kenya. Specifically, the present study investigates five important aspects of corruption among Kenyan journalists: (a) journalists' perception of how common corruption is in the local media, (b) the major sources of corruption orientation among Kenyan journalists, (c) the major bribe-givers to Kenyan journalists, (d) the major forms of corruption in Kenyan journalism, and (e) whether corruption among Kenyan journalists affects objective reporting.

The present study is significant because a closer look at how Kenyan journalists evaluate corruption among themselves will help to understand the extent of the vice among local media. This will help assess how much influence corruption might have on the work of Kenyan news people, and especially whether the vice compromises objective reporting, an important principle in the practice of journalism around the world. In theory, corruption is arguably among the strongest extramedia influences on Kenyan journalism.

It is important to note that despite the high prevalence of corruption in the Kenyan culture (see Transparency International, [2013](#), [2014](#)) to date, no research has been done to establish how common this unethical practice is in the local media. At the same time, although this topic has been explored in other African countries such as Ethiopia (Dirbaba, [2010](#)), Nigeria (Ekeanyanwu & Obianingwe, [2009](#)), Cameroon (Ndangam, [2006](#)), and Ghana (Kasoma, [2009](#)), to name a few, no research evidence exists

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research gap.

In addition, the findings from this research will be of much importance to media organizations, media managers, journalists, journalism scholars, the media industry in Kenya, and anticorruption bodies such as the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission of Kenya. For example, Kenyan media organizations could use the results to plan how to address the severity of the vice among their editorial staff. Similarly, media managers could use the findings to address the root causes of this ethical problem, and interrogate or mediate its effect on the norms of objectivity in journalism profession.

Moreover, Kenyan journalists could use the results to gain useful insights into how their indulgence in corruption taints the image of the journalism profession. This is important because the involvement of journalists in corruptive acts means that they are "less likely to be in the forefront of promoting social and political change and more likely to be advocates of the status quo" (Shafer, [1990](#), p. 16). Last, media scholars could use the results to evaluate how corruption in Kenyan journalism compares with other nations.

Corruption: Theoretical framework

Whether petty or grand, corruption has existed in human societies for ages. Today, corruption is seen as a universal phenomenon that cuts across all societal fabrics. Mbaku ([2007](#)) pointed out that the persistence of corruption over the years has forced scholars and policymakers to view it as an unavoidable part of human evolution. Historically, the word *corruption* has attracted various meanings in different civilizations. As a result, different scholars have commented on what corruption entails. Klitgaard ([1988](#)) said that corruption occurs when a person illicitly puts personal interests above those of the people he or she is committed to serve and who fails to adhere to the ideals to which he or she has supposedly subscribed.

Related to Klitgaard's definition is the argument that corruption is "deviant behavior associated with a particular motivation, namely that of private gain at public expense" (Friedrich, [1990](#), p. 15). However, Mbaku ([2007](#)) said that Friedrich's definition fails to answer two important questions: Why deviant behavior? And whose norms are used to determine whether behavior is deviant? Corruption is also equated with "partiality" (Kurer, [2005](#)), "unfairness" (You, [2006](#)), "absence of integrity" (Sampford, [2009](#)), and "immorality" (Anechiarico & Jacobs, [1996](#)). Uslaner ([2008](#)) describes the vice as "malfeasance."

Six sets of theories are associated with corruption: public choice theory, bad apple theories, organizational culture theories, clashing moral values theories, the ethos of public administration theories, and correlation theories. The public choice theory is

founded on human rationality at an individual level. Actions of corrupt officials are caused by a rational, conscious, and deliberate weighing process of an individual. Therefore, central to this theory is the individual corrupt official who tries to maximize utility (Graaf, 2007). In the journalism field, the corrupt official is an individual journalist making a rational and conscious decision.

The individual is depicted as a rationally calculating person who decides to become corrupt when expected advantages outweigh expected disadvantages (a combination of possible penalty and the chance of being caught; Graaf, 2007). Supporting this line of thinking, Rose-Ackerman (1978) claimed that public officials are corrupt for a simple reason: they perceive that the potential benefits of corruption exceed the potential costs. Public choice theories lead to a discourse on corruption control that maximizes its costs and minimizes the benefits (Frederickson, 1993).

Also focusing on a corrupt individual are the bad apples theories. This is the existence of people with morally questionable character, or "bad apples." According to Graaf (2007), there is a causal chain from bad character to corrupt acts, and the root cause of corruption is found in defective human character and predisposition toward criminal activity. In journalism, this could be a journalist's orientation to corrupt behaviors, such as newsroom coaching and socialization with fellow journalists. Graaf (2007) pointed out that people are assumed to act on the basis of moral values, where wrong values are the cause of corruption.

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(p. 200).

The organizational culture theories see corruption from a macro-level and not at an individual level. The assumption here is that a causal path from a particular culture leads to a certain mental state, resulting in a corrupt behavior (Graaf, 2007). Therefore, in journalism practice, the corrupt culture under which journalists operate influences their corrupt behavior. This is so because media organizations are part of an integrated society, which includes corrupt cultures. To control corruption, these theories emphasize the need to alter corrupt organizational cultures by focusing on an organization's leadership.

Societal values and norms are the focus of the clashing moral values theories. Here, societal values and norms influence the behavior of the individual officials, making them corrupt. In other words, morality has an opportunity to cause behavior and thereby lead to corruption (Graaf, 2007). Therefore, the prevailing bad values and norms are likely to influence journalists to become corrupt. To control corruption under these theories, ethics are central and there is a need to train people on professional ethics.

Related to organizational culture theories are the ethos of public administration theories. The major concern of these theories is the culture of public management and society in general. The wrong societal morality leads to corruption. Correlation theories focus on specific factors that are associated with corruption; that is, the correlation between certain factors and corruption. A good example is the income-corruption correlation. The lower the income of a country, the higher the occurrence of corruption (Graaf, 2007). But Huberts (1998b) cautioned that it is not clear whether or not the relationship between income and corruption is of a causal nature. These types of theories lead to a discourse on corruption control related to the respective correlations (Graaf, 2007).

Ethics in journalism practice

On the basis of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, corrupt journalism practices mean that journalists use their positions to gain personal advantage to such an extent that the public interest becomes secondary (Shafer, 1990). The involvement of journalists in corruption contradicts the watchdog role of journalists in society. Elahi (2013) pointed out that in exposing the corrupt conduct of public officers, the media create awareness about corruption. On the basis of the important role that journalists play in the fight against corruption in society, Elahi (2013) made an important observation:

But when journalists want to expose the corrupt practices of others, their own ethical standards ought to be high. Otherwise they may be seen as hypocrites who challenge corrupt practices and assume the moral high ground while

they themselves are tainted by unethical practices. (p. 190)

As such, ethical standards in journalism call for news people to be responsible, truthful, objective, and reasonable in gathering and producing news (De Beer & Froneman, 1994). Ward (2009) defined *journalism ethics* as “a species of applied ethics that examines what journalists and news organizations should do, given their role in society” (p. 295). Herrscher (2002) proposed seven ethical principles in journalism practice: truth, completeness, conflict of interest, independence, honesty, respect of privacy and honor, and treatment with fairness of minority groups in society.

In different nations, professional ethical requirements are enshrined in journalistic codes of ethics. According to Anderson and Leigh (1992), codes provide directions to news professionals. Literature on journalistic ethics coalesce around three broad groups. One group argues that codes do not play any significant role in ethical decision making; rather, they are symbolic and their function is limited to a public relations exercise for journalists (Fink, 1997; Parson & Smith, 1988). However, another group emphasizes the significance of codes of ethics for journalists (Anderson, 1987; Black, 1996). For example, studying *The Courier-Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky, Boeyink (1998) concluded that the paper’s ethical code of ethics were practical guidelines that determine journalistic behavior, but not a public relations tool. Yet, another group embraces the usefulness of codes, albeit with

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the use of a code of ethics in journalism practice cannot be gainsaid.

Corruption in journalism practice

Corruption in journalism manifests itself through many forms, namely accepting money, gifts, “freebies,” free tours, favors, and privileges; giving money to or accepting kickbacks from sources; threatening extortion; and writing/broadcasting, downplaying, or withholding information in favor of someone in ways that prioritize political or kinship over public interest (Elahi, 2013). The culture of “brown envelope” and “bribery” are the two forms of journalistic corruption that are prevalent in Africa. The two terms have different connotations in the African context, however. “Brown envelope” is applied in Africa to denote journalistic activity that involves the transfer of various types of rewards from sources to reporters (Skjerdal, 2010). On the other hand, bribery implies a sense of voluntariness and habitually involves negotiation between the source and the journalist (Agbanu, 2009). In different cultures around the world, cash-for-publicity has attracted various metaphors. In Russia, it is known as “zakazukha” or “jinsa,” while in China it is “hongbao” (Skjerdal, 2010). Cameroonian journalists refer to the practice as “gombo” (Ndangam, 2006), while it is called “mshiko” in Tanzania (Mpagze & White, 2010). Kenyan journalists call it “dawa,” a Swahili word for “medicine” (Ileri, 2012). In Ghana, it is called “soli” (Diedong, 2006). “Soli” is derived from “solidarity,” denoting that the source has some sort of sympathy with a desperate journalist and therefore wants to extend a helping hand that can strengthen the ties between the two parties (Hasty, 2005). Ronning (2005) said that journalists in Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon accept bribes in exchange for giving favorable coverage to politicians and companies. For example, corruption has evolved into a common way of practicing journalism in Cameroon (Ndangam, 2006). In Tanzania, 78% of journalists interviewed indicated that they have never taken a bribe but they have a negative perception of their occupation that is characterized by low ethical standards (Mpagze & White, 2010). Mpagze and White (2010) argued:

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 (p. 547).

The Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2009) study of 184 Nigerian journalists confirmed the pervasiveness of “brown envelopes” in the local media. The study reported that 61% of journalists habitually receive envelopes on reporting assignments. However, another study in Nigeria found that more than three quarters (78%) of journalists said acceptance of brown envelopes does not affect their objectivity in news reporting (Nwabueza, 2010). Only 7% agreed that taking freebies might make them less objective. Similarly, Mwesige’s (2004) research among Ugandan journalists revealed that 75% justified being paid by sources to facilitate the

primarily, interviewees (2007), research among Nigerian journalists revealed that news journalists being paid by sources to facilitate the information-gathering process. Ethiopian journalists not only work on those stories where a source is willing to pay, but they also go for the highest bidder (Dirbaba, 2010). Dirbaba (2010) named five major diffusion mechanisms of corrupt behaviors among Ethiopian journalists: legacy inherited from older generations, source induction, organizational resource constraints, collegial coaching, and collegial social interaction. A comparative study of 215 journalists in Ghana and Zambia found that 63% of respondents in the former admitted taking brown envelopes—compared with 28% in the latter (Kasoma, 2007). However, Kasoma (2007) noted that these findings are a “gross under-representation” of the phenomenon in the two countries (p. 115).

A 2011 nonrepresentative study of 96 Kenyan journalists found corruption to be common (Ireri, 2012). Specifically, 78.4% of the respondents perceived corruption as common among Kenyan journalists. In this regard, 44.3% of the journalists said corruption was “very widespread,” 34.1% “somewhat widespread,” and 18.2% perceived corruption “not very widespread.” Only 1.1% said the practice was “not widespread at all.” Helander (2010) added that in Kenya, “corruption ranges from petty sums in order to influence journalists to the more serious cases of large bribes for specific stories” (p. 534).

This review demonstrates how common corruption is in African journalism. But despite its perceived negative influence in the African media, there is presently no empirical account of how widespread corruption among Kenyan journalists is or how it affects

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consequently, the following research questions are asked.

1. (1) How common is corruption among Kenyan journalists?
2. (2a) Which are the major sources of corruption orientation among Kenyan journalists?
3. (2b) Who are the major bribe-givers to Kenyan journalists?
4. (3) What are the major forms of corruption among Kenyan journalists?
5. (4) Does corruption among Kenyan journalists affect objectivity in news reporting?

Method

National in scope, the present study used survey and in-depth interviews as the primary and secondary data collection methods, respectively. The study targeted journalists who work in public and private media organizations, on full-time, contract, and part-time basis. Those who participated in the survey included correspondents, reporters, editors, senior editors, subeditors, bureau chiefs, television and radio producers, radio presenters, television news anchors, television camera journalists, and photojournalists.

The survey

A total of 504 Kenyan journalists were surveyed to explore their perception of corruption in the local media. Before the survey was administered, a list of all media organizations in Kenya was compiled. The Media Council of Kenya provided lists for the print media organizations and for the international news agencies located in Nairobi. The Communications Commission of Kenya provided the broadcast media list. The combined lists identified 99 media organizations. These included 52 radio stations, 13 television stations, 11 international news agencies, eight magazines, six dailies, five weekly newspapers, one monthly newspaper, Kenya News Agency, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, and the Presidential Press Service.

Because there is no complete list of all Kenyan journalists, this researcher compiled the names of news people working for the 99 media organizations. This was done by contacting each media organization and asking for a complete list of journalists working for them. During this process, 62 organizations agreed to participate in the study, while 37 media houses declined to cooperate in this study. The 62 media organizations that cooperated were as follows: 31 radio stations (50%); six television stations (9.7%); six magazines (9.7%); six dailies (9.7%); five weekly newspapers (8.1%); four international news agencies (6.4%); one monthly newspaper (1.6%); Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (1.6%); Kenya News Agency (1.6%); and the Presidential Press Service (1.6%).

The 62 organizations were then asked to provide the names and e-mail addresses of all journalists who worked for them. The researcher sought the help of senior editorial managers and journalists in compiling the names of their news workers. The process of compiling the names started on June 20, 2012, and continued throughout the study period. Overall, 1,532 journalists were identified among the 62 Kenyan media organizations included in the study. This number reflects well the population of news people in Kenya, because all major and the most influential media organizations in the country participated in the study.

Using systematic random sampling, half of the names in each media entity were selected for inclusion in the survey sample. To avoid listing bias, the names were first randomized, and then every second name was selected from each of the 62 media organizations that agreed to participate. This sampling technique, which resulted in a final sample of 765 journalists, ensured that journalists from the 62 media houses would be represented proportionally in the final sample. The 765 journalists included in the sample were then contacted to participate in the survey. One of the most fundamental objectives in research is the generalizability of results. Therefore, the use of systematic random sampling (a probability sampling technique) ensured that this study's findings are generalizable to the entire Kenyan journalist population.

Data collection

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research technique that uses a standardized questionnaire to collect information about attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and backgrounds and lifestyle characteristics from a sample of respondents. Previous journalist studies have employed survey questionnaires successfully to examine corruption in journalism practice (e.g. Elahi, [2013](#); Ireri, [2012](#); Mwesige, 2014; Nwabueza, [2010](#); Weaver & Willnat, [2012](#)). The use of standardized questionnaires ensured uniformity in measuring the data gathered from the respondents. To ensure credibility in the answering of the online questionnaires, a courtesy e-mail was first sent to the respondents explaining the study and requesting their participation. This courtesy e-mail was followed a few minutes later by an e-mail that contained a link to the actual online questionnaire (hosted by Qualtrics). For the printed version, the researcher visited the media organizations, and waited for the questionnaires to be filled out. A pretest involving 13 Kenyan journalists was conducted before administering the survey. This pilot exercise was meant to ensure that the questionnaire was adequately designed. The journalists who participated in the pretest were subsequently excluded from the main survey. No incentives were offered to participants. The survey was approved by the university institutional review board.

The online survey ran between July 23, 2012, and February 26, 2013, resulting in 351 completed questionnaires. The data collection using the printed questionnaire ran between January 2, 2013, and February 22, 2013, and 153 questionnaires were completed. Overall, of the 765 journalists who were contacted to participate in the study, 504 completed either the online or the printed questionnaire, which represents a sound response rate of 66%. From the 503 journalists who reported their job titles (one refused), 34.4% were reporters ($n = 173$); 17.9% editors ($n = 90$); 11.1% correspondents ($n = 56$); 8.3% subeditors ($n = 42$); 7.5% radio presenters and producers ($n = 38$); 6.4% news anchors ($n = 32$); 4.4% bureau chiefs ($n = 22$); 1.8% photojournalists ($n = 9$); and 8.2% other titles ($n = 41$).

Journalists' perception of the prevalence of corruption in the Kenyan media was examined by asking respondents "how common" they thought corruption is among Kenyan journalists. This is an important question to examine because the forces of corruption are likely to exert pressure on the work of Kenyan journalists, hence influencing the final media content. Answers to this question were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not common at all*) to (*very common*). In this study, corruption carries two definitions: (a) the transfer of various types of rewards (e.g., brown envelopes, bribes, freebies, assets) from the source to the journalist with the intention of extending favorable coverage to the former, and (b) any kind of blackmail or coercion used by the journalist so as to receive illegitimate rewards (e.g., cash money, freebies, assets) from the source. Respondents also were asked to rank news sources in terms of likelihood to bribe journalists. For bribe givers, respondents were provided with six potential sources of bribery: businesspeople, civil society, corporate organizations, government officials, nongovernmental organizations, and politicians. They were then asked to rank the six sources from 1 to 6 depending on who they thought were the most likely to use bribes with journalists. This is an important question because by offering bribes to journalists, the news sources indirectly influence the media content, thus compromising journalistic independence in news production.

On the question of the origins of corruption orientation among Kenyan journalists, respondents were provided with seven options: (1) journalist-journalist interaction; (2) legacy inherited from older generations; (3) newsroom coaching; (4) social interaction in former college; (5) societal culture; (6) source-journalist relationship; and (7) "other." It is important to know the corruption initiation process among local journalists because the orientation platforms have a bearing in influencing news content.

For the types of corruption, they were asked to list up to three most prevalent forms of corruption among Kenyan journalists. This is an important question to examine because various forms of corruption do influence the media content. Journalists also were asked whether or not they thought "accepting freebies or presents" from news sources comprises objective reporting. Responses were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The universality of objectivity in journalism practice globally justifies why it is important to investigate this question among Kenyan news people.

In-depth interviews were used in the present study to collect more detailed information regarding the extent and the practice of corruption in Kenya. While the survey questionnaire included a wide range of items pertinent to corruption in Kenyan journalism, most of these questions were closed-ended and therefore not designed to catch the various dimensions of corruption among Kenyan journalists. Some issues required detailed explanations that only in-depth interviews could address. Consequently, in-depth

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easily answered with a survey questionnaire:

1. Why is corruption widespread among Kenyan journalists?
2. Who is to be blamed for corruption among Kenyan journalists?
3. How does corruption affect the standards of journalistic ethics in the country?
4. How can corruption be eradicated in Kenyan journalism?

While the first question probes the Kenyan journalists' attitudes toward corruption in the local media, the others shed more light on three important aspects surrounding the journalism practice in Kenya: attribution of blame (for the vice), ramifications on journalistic ethics, and the ways and means of eradicating the unethical practice.

The in-depth interviews were used to probe attitudes toward corruption due to the fact that corruption among journalists is a sensitive topic in Kenya and elsewhere. Consequently, the researcher used personal interviews to elicit replies to sensitive questions pertaining to the topic that would have gone unanswered in the survey. Five journalists were recruited for in-depth interviews on the basis of their strong views that corruption among Kenyan journalists was "very common." The five (three female, two male) journalists were interviewed in Nairobi between July 25, 2012, and August 6, 2012. Two of the journalists worked at daily newspapers, while the other three were selected from a television station, a magazine and a radio station. Findings from these interviews were used to illustrate salient points regarding corruption in the Kenyan media.

Results

Research Question 1 examined the prevalence of corruption in the Kenyan media. Overall, the findings indicate that although more than three quarters (77%) of journalists "strongly disapprove" of being paid to publish, kill or change a story to reflect the wishes of a source, corruption is perceived to be highly prevalent in the Kenyan media. As indicated in [Table 1](#), almost three quarters of the journalists believe that corruption is either "common" (50%) or "very common" (24%) in Kenya. Only 18% think the unethical practice is "not very common."

Table 1. Perception of corruption among Kenyan journalists.

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Research Question 2a focused on the origins of corruption orientation among Kenyan journalists. As [Table 2](#) shows, the source-journalist relationship (45.1%) emerged as the main source of corruption orientation, followed by the legacy inherited from older generations (20.3%), societal culture (16.8%), and the journalist-journalist relationship (10.8%). Respondents also were asked to rank news sources in terms of likelihood of bribing Kenyan journalists. This is addressed by Research Question 2b. As expected, the ranking placed Kenyan politicians at the top of bribe-givers to journalists (see [Table 3](#)). Ranked second were business people, followed by government officials, corporate organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the civil society.

Table 2. Top sources of orientation among Kenyan journalists.

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Table 3. Top bribe-givers to Kenyan journalists.

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Kenyan journalists were asked to identify the most common form of corruption in the Kenyan media, addressed by Research Question 3. The findings, as presented in [Table 4](#), indicate that the most common form of corruption is cash money (40%). Freebies (29.4%) are the second most common type of corruption, followed by free trips and holidays (10.6%), job offers (3.9%), and lunches and drinks (3.9%). The present study also examined whether Kenyan journalists believe that corruption affects objectivity in news reporting (Research Question 4). As expected, [Table 5](#) indicates that more than three quarters (77.4%) of Kenyan journalists believe that corruption negatively affects objectivity in news reporting. At the same time, more than 2 in 10 Kenyan journalists (21.4%) believe that corruption does not comprise journalistic objectivity.

Table 4. Different forms of corruption in Kenyan journalism.

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Table 5. Corruption compromises objective reporting.

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Discussion

Overall, findings from the present study capture two major realities. First, just like other Kenyan institutions, corruption is deeply entrenched in the local media. Second, the high prevalence of corruption in the Kenyan media does compromise the principle of objective reporting. Findings here confirm the prevalence of corruption documented in earlier research indicating that 74% of Kenyan journalists accept freebies from their sources—and a further 66% agree that the practice of accepting money or presents

from people and institutions they cover is common (Ileri, [2015a](#)). Similarly, 72% of Kenyan journalists know a fellow journalist who has taken a bribe to publish a story to reflect the wishes of the source (Ileri, [2015a](#)).

However, almost 8 of 10 journalists said that they strongly disapprove of being bribed by a source to publish or suppress a story (Ileri, [2015a](#)). This contradicts the perception that the Kenyan media is riddled with corruption. So, what do these two contrasting views encapsulate in the practice of journalism in Kenya? That is, journalists are saying corruption is pervasive in the Kenyan media, but at the same time deny their involvement in the practice. One possibility is that even though Kenyan journalists engage in corruption, they are aware that the practice is against journalistic ethics. It could also be a case of social desirability, a likely occurrence in survey research where respondents tend to answer questions in a manner that is viewed favorably by others. In doing so, survey subjects either overreport good behavior or underreport undesirable behavior. Therefore, in the present study, Kenyan journalists might have underreported their illicit activities, such as accepting cash-for-story, or practicing extortion. It is interesting to note that this condition is also reflected in Tanzania, where journalists report high corruption in the media, but at the same time deny taking bribes to publish or kill stories (Mpagze & White, [2010](#)).

However, despite the two contrasting results, Kenyan journalists have remained steadfast in the fight against corruption in the

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pressure on government officials to account for their corrupt acts and omissions, public education initiatives, and investigative journalism (Jarso, [2010](#)). For example, while unraveling massive scandals in the government, the Kenyan media also have generated sufficient pressure to force high-profile public officials to resign (Mulunda & Gaitho, [2010](#)). The zeal of Kenyan journalists to report corruption in public offices, and at the same time engage in corrupt activities, raises the question of job morality. This is an important point because if Kenyan journalists want to unearth corruption, their own ethical standards should be above reproach. Therefore, in this case, Kenyan journalists could be seen as hypocrites who challenge corrupt activities and assume the moral high ground, while they wallow in a miasma of unethical journalistic behaviors. In theory, their engagement in corruption could be seen through the prism of the bad apple theory and clashing moral value theories. The two theories of corruption are concerned with morality, values and norms of an individual. In a nutshell, it is fair to conclude that Kenyan journalists preach water, but take wine instead.

Yet, the high corruption in the Kenyan media also reflects the broader dynamics of Kenya's culture of corruption as well as the global nature of corruption itself. Kenya is one of the most corrupt nations in the world, where "hardly a day passes without the media highlighting corruption in the government" (Jarso, [2010](#), p. 35). This vice continues to immensely affect various aspects of the nation's life. For example, health care continually deteriorates as vital infrastructures fail (Karongo, [2010](#)), and millions of innocent children are denied access to education as public funds are embezzled with reckless abandon (Standard, 2010). Therefore, Kenyan journalists operate in an environment where corruption is a daily norm. What this means is that the Kenyan journalists have to contend with forces of corruption just like other actors in various institutions in Kenya. Rachlin ([1988](#)) suggested that this is so because journalistic institutions are integrated within society and therefore are required to be responsive to the same social forces that press on all institutions. Similarly, Hallin and Mancini ([2004](#)) argued that media systems are shaped by the wider context of political history, structure, and culture. The culture of corruption in which Kenyan journalists operate relates to organizational culture theories. This is where a specific group culture leads to a certain mental state, resulting in corrupt acts. Accounts from the in-depth interviews conducted during this study repeatedly emphasized this claim. According to one, "corruption in the Kenyan media reflects society. It is a culture so entrenched in our society ... and as such, journalists have taken it as a way of doing things ... and journalists are part of this culture" (Ileri, [2015a](#)).

Corruption among Kenyan journalists takes different forms, ranging from cash money payouts, freebies, and paid trips, to extortion, to mention a few examples. One of the journalists interviewed said, "Corruption is now going beyond money to material things. Like in 2007 election, some journalists were given expensive vehicles like Mercedes Benz; some were bought homes just to influence how they covered the election" (Ileri, [2015a](#)).

With all this said, the question of who is to blame for the high corruption rates in Kenyan journalism must be answered. First, the majority of Kenyan journalists are poorly paid (Ileri, [2015b](#)). One of the reasons why they engage in corruption is to supplement

their low incomes. For example, 16.6% of Kenyan journalists earn less than \$375 a month, and the majority of them (22.4%) earn between \$375 and \$625. This study also shows glaring disparities between the top and the low earners, with the former taking home a monthly salary of more than \$4,375 and the latter less than \$375 (Ileri, 2015b). So pervasive has corruption become in the Kenyan media that a national approach has been developed to eradicate the vice. The National Anti-Corruption Plan (2011) proposed a raft of measures to deal with corruption in the Kenyan media, including improved remuneration for journalists, enforcement of a journalistic code of ethics, educating editorial staff on anticorruption issues, training journalists in anticorruption matters, and providing journalists with adequate resources (Kenya Integrity Forum, 2011). The poor remuneration has far-reaching ramifications on the practice of journalism in the country. To supplement their earnings, many Kenyan journalists also are forced to have a second job within or outside the media industry. In interviews conducted in Nairobi, journalists discussed how poor pay was responsible for the high prevalence of corruption in the Kenyan media. One interviewee said, "one reason why corruption is common has to do with poor remuneration. Most of media houses do not pay well. So to supplement the poor pay, we journalists look for other alternative sources of income" (Ileri, 2015b, p. 15). Similarly, another journalist blamed it on poor pay:

Poor remuneration is to blame because as a journalist you have a name in society. You have the pressure from society

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journalists try to go for the next available alternative. (Ileri, 2015a, p.159)

However, it should be noted that the correlation between poor remuneration and corruption among Kenyan journalists is not an isolated case. The literature on development studies shows that corruption among civil servants is associated with poor pay (see Mbaku, 2007; Narasaiah, 2005; Pillay, 2014; Sunday, 2015), which also relates to correlation theories of corruption. This leads to the second point that corruption in the Kenyan media also reflects the nature of the vice globally. For example, empirical data attests to the existence of widespread corruption in developing nations (Gould, 1983). The United Nations Convention Against Corruption has developed measures to prevent and combat the plight of corruption across struggling nations more efficiently and effectively (United Nations, 2004). The convention is cognizant of the fact that corruption is no longer a local matter, but a transnational phenomenon that affects all societies and economies, making international cooperation to prevent and control it essential. To combat the vice, the convention suggested a multidisciplinary approach.

On the other hand, senior editors are also blamed for perpetuating corruption in the Kenyan media. Regarding this view, a reporter said:

I remember an instance where a friend of mine who worked in another media house was assigned to cover a political function. So, after the rally ... the politician told him he had already cleared with his editor back in office. Such cases are very common during campaign times. (Ileri, 2015a, p.159)

Yet, another journalist said this about editor involvement in corruption:

Senior editors send you where they know there is money so that they can get a share. That means if you came back without giving your editor some money, chances are that in future assignments you might be moved to another beat—or the editor will opt for those writers who will bring them their cut, or in the worst case scenario they go themselves. (Ileri, 2015a, p.160)

When it comes to the sources of bribe, Kenyan politicians were ranked as the top bribe-givers to journalists. The politicians are the major bribe givers because they are potential news sources and thus develop close-knit relationships with journalists. Gans (1979) explained that the relation between source and journalist "resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources" (p. 116). In view of this, politicians and journalists often engage in what Cook (1998) termed a "negotiation of newsworthiness" (p. 90). Perhaps it is during this "negotiation of newsworthiness" when Kenyan politicians bribe

journalists to influence news coverage in their favor. This might also explain the reason why the source-journalist relationship was found to be the origin of corruption orientation among Kenyan journalists.

The implication, of course, is that corruption among Kenyan journalists compromises the principle of objective reporting. Ireri (2015a) found that a majority of Kenyan journalists (77.4%) admit that corruption in the media undermines objective coverage of issues. It means that Kenyan news consumers are presented with news content that is not objectively reported. Hence, the Kenyan media often carry views of political elites who can afford bribes at the expense of impartial reporting, where all voices would be given similar consideration in news coverage. Reinforcing the perception that corruption undermines objective reporting, one Kenyan journalist said, "corruption compromises objectivity because you cannot write a story from an impartial point of view. It weakens the watchdog role of journalists in society. They lose that moral authority to talk about corruption." Another interviewee added, "through corruption we entrench interests of politicians and business people and those involved in corruption to hide the truth, so that at the end of the day readers and listeners are the losers."

Conclusion

The present research explored the topic of corruption and bribery in the practice of journalism in Kenya. This was realized through a qualitative approach. The study was conducted in 2012 and 2013. More specifically, the study examined five aspects of corruption among Kenyan journalists: (a) the prevalence of corruption in the Kenyan media, (b) the leading bribe-givers to journalists, (c) the major sources of corruption orientation among journalists, (d) the major forms of corruption in the local media, and (e) whether corruption compromises objectivity in news reporting. This research provides useful insights into the place of corruption in Kenyan journalism. Based on the findings, it is evident that corruption is deeply entrenched in the Kenyan media. Therefore, moving forward, media managers should devise ways to deal with corruption within their organizations if journalistic moral integrity in correcting evils in society is to remain intact. Likewise, media managers should reconsider the journalist-news source relationship because, based on the findings, the association creates a fertile breeding ground for corruption among Kenyan journalists. This has major ramifications, such as compromising objective reporting, negating the role of journalists in society to serve all citizens equally, and questioning the spirit of Kenyan journalists to fight corruption in the country. Another issue the Kenyan media managers have to grapple with is how to protect the sanctity of objectivity in journalism practice in the country. It is also clear that improving the remuneration of Kenyan journalists would play a major part in minimizing the vice.

Though the findings from present research provide useful insights concerning corruption in Kenyan journalism, this study faces a limitation that future research should address. The present study does not capture what types of journalists are the most corrupt in Kenya. Future research might explore degrees of corruption practices among different types of journalists, such as television journalists, radio journalists, daily newspaper journalists, or magazine journalists. Doing so would not only identify the most corrupt types of journalists in Kenya, but will also help researchers to dig deeper to know why particular types of journalists are more or less corrupt. Importantly, and from a theoretical standpoint, future research on media ethics in Kenya should be tied to corruption theories. Doing so would contribute to the development of corruption theories in relation to journalistic ethics.

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