

Impact of 'brown envelope journalism' on news coverage in Ghana

Richmond Acheampong

Dept. of Languages and Communication Studies, University of
Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana

Abstract - The study looked at how 'Brown Envelope Journalism' affects news coverage in Ghana. It also determined whether journalists in Ghana have the necessary ethics training to fend off the allure of brown envelopes and how the presence of brown envelope journalism impacts the public's confidence in Ghana's media. A questionnaire with 17 data-collection items was distributed randomly to 300 journalists in the Sunyani Municipality in Ghana's Bono Region. The majority of journalists (i.e., 83%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' causes the underreporting of some important issues or the overemphasis of others, while 17% of them, the minority respondents, said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' does not cause the underreporting of important issues or the overemphasis of others. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among other things that to eradicate 'Brown Envelope Journalism' from Ghana's media landscape, Ghanaian media organizations should pay their journalists well.

Keywords: brown envelope; brown journalism; news coverage; Ghana's journalism

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of journalism, the integrity of news reporting remains a cornerstone of a functioning democracy. Journalists are entrusted with the vital task of providing the public with accurate and unbiased information, enabling citizens to make informed decisions and hold their governments accountable. However, in many parts of the world, including Ghana, the phenomenon known as 'Brown Envelope Journalism' has cast a shadow over the profession, raising questions about the ethical standards and credibility of news coverage. Ghana, renowned for its vibrant media landscape and commitment to press freedom, has not been immune to the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism'. Nearly everybody acknowledges that brown envelope journalism is a significant and highly dangerous problem for journalism, but journalists' associations have not taken sufficient action to address it, according to the Centre for International Media Assistance's Report to the Centre for International Media Assistance (2010).

According to Skjerdal (2010a), 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is the practice of journalism that entails sources giving reporters various forms of compensation (p. 369). He claims that three characteristics characterize envelope journalism: "the practice on the personal level, confidentiality and informal contract". As money is "not transferred on an institutional level as in various types of organizational corruption," the practice at the personal level implies that the recipient of the tiny brown envelope uses it for himself (p. 370). Brown envelope journalism, according to Omanga (2015) is when newsmakers or sources provide presents to particular journalists in order to influence local decision-making in exchange for positive or uncritical media coverage.

Brown envelope journalism's genesis continues to elude scholars. According to Kasoma (2000), Western journalism's introduction to brown envelope reporting began in the 18th century. The phenomenon is now well-known and goes by several names in different nations. Brown envelope journalism may have developed in the UK in the 1990s, according to Forbes (2005). Brown envelopes, according to Bartlett (1999), were a key component in the so-called "cash-for-questions affair," in which lobbyists allegedly paid two members of the British parliament on behalf of powerful businessman Mohamed Al-Fayed to place particular questions on the agenda for the House of Commons. Forbes added that the money was in brown envelopes and that *The Guardian*, which broke the story in October 1994, had said as much. As a result, the phrase "brown envelopes" came to represent news sources paying journalists. Sanders (2003) asserted that brown envelope journalism cases are rarely reported in Western nations; nonetheless, research indicates that brown envelope journalism did exist in the 17th and 18th centuries. In addition, according to Kruckeberg and Tsetsura (2003; Tsetsura and Grynko, 2009.), Eastern Europe and Latin America were thought to be more affected by the negative effects of editorial content than North Western Europe.

Fakude (2016), head of research relations at the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, claims that there have been numerous instances of 'brown envelope journalism' in Africa, where journalists were paid to either ignore or distort stories about certain politicians. As truth-seekers and truth-presenters, journalists must be transparent and truthful with their audiences, according to Kovach and Rosenthal (2001). However, Kaufman (2010) asserts that whether journalists receive payment for news as a result of low pay, greed or other motivations, they do so in order to serve governments, public figures, businesses or private individuals who want to control what is published about them and are willing to pay for it. Moreover, journalists who accept cash or gifts from news sources are typically restrained from saying anything negative about them. In other countries, notably the US, journalists may struggle to balance preserving access to reliable sources with objectivity in their reporting.

Acheampong and Babangida (2016) found that 75% of respondents confessed that when they received brown envelopes, they would alter the coverage of an event to the benefit or detriment of a third party. Furthermore, Plaisance and Deppa (2009) asserted that accepting bribes in exchange for news coverage violates accepted journalistic standards and damages media credibility. In addition, Rodan (2000) discovered that since modern markets strongly rely on the free flow of information, the absence of accurate and trustworthy information may impede the long-term growth of the local economy in a nation where news coverage is subject to widespread bribery. Again, Kumar (2006) found that the denial of the public's right to information by the absence of reliable news coverage has negative effects on the government's ability to account for its actions and stunts the growth of civil society.

What is more, Spence (2008) made the case that accepting bribes in exchange for news coverage compromises the objectivity and integrity of media reporting, leading to a widespread practice of fabricating or buying news.

'Brown Envelope Journalism' has, according to Amankwa et al (2017), become inseparably entwined into Ghana's media culture. According to Acheampong and Babangida (2016), the majority of journalists (i.e., 76.5%) hinted they reported the truth after accepting brown envelopes, whereas 23.5% of them stated they did not.

Thabo (2012) said that whenever a chance for brown envelope journalism in the form of money or freebies presents itself, the trustworthiness of a journalist is called into doubt. Credibility is one of the fundamental principles that a journalist should uphold, and it is included in the Kenyan Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the trustworthy mainstream media can provide citizens with reliable news articles. Othieno (2012) argued that this is true since anyone can report anything in the digital age, where citizen journalism is promoted, even if it is unreliable. The mainstream media has it down when it comes to telling truth from lies (Smith, 2008). The majority of people frequently assume that news sources, in this case television, are telling the truth. According to Thabo (2012), the issue arises when a journalist manipulates the story and loses credibility after accepting payola. Moreover, the

television news report is impacted by this and runs the risk of misleading the audience, who will think the story is sufficiently believable.

Matteson (2021, see Matteson & McGue, 2020; c.f. Acheampong, 2024) contends that integrity is a crucial component of human growth. Everyone in society is supposed to be a man or woman of high integrity, including journalists. People admire guys with integrity, according to Okoth (2007), and journalists are no exception. When the source asks you to shape a story in his favor, you are put to the test in terms of your honesty. According to Mainye (2015; c.f. Ofordi & Salisu, 2024), the majority of news sources, particularly in the political class, think that journalists are underpaid and do not lead as fulfilling lives as they may wish. As a result, they lose integrity. A journalist with great moral character could occasionally feel pressured to engage in 'brown envelope journalism' by accepting money, gifts, or trips to sway a television report. Kristin (2018; cf. Hassan et al., 2024)) argued that when a journalist opens the brown package, his ethics are called into question because it has an impact on the entire television story.

This study aimed to delve into the intricate web of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' and its multifaceted impact on news coverage in Ghana. By examining the various dimensions of this issue, the researcher sought to shed light on the extent to which it has infiltrated the media landscape, the factors perpetuating it, and the consequences it has on the quality of news reporting. Furthermore, it explored the role of media organizations, journalists, and regulatory bodies in mitigating this practice and upholding the ethical standards of journalism.

2. METHOD

The simple random sampling technique was used to sample 300 journalists in the Sunyani Municipality in the Bono Region of Ghana for data. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, which contained 17 questions, to help the researcher understand the impact of brown envelope journalism on news coverage in Ghana. The simple random sampling technique was employed because it gave the researcher a sample that was extremely representative of the population under study and because it allowed the researcher to extrapolate generalizations about the population from the sample.

Excel was used to analyze the data collected. Each journalist's response was recorded and given a research identity, and the information was shown using tables and graphs

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section A: Awareness of Brown Envelope Journalism

Have you ever heard of "Brown Envelope Journalism?"

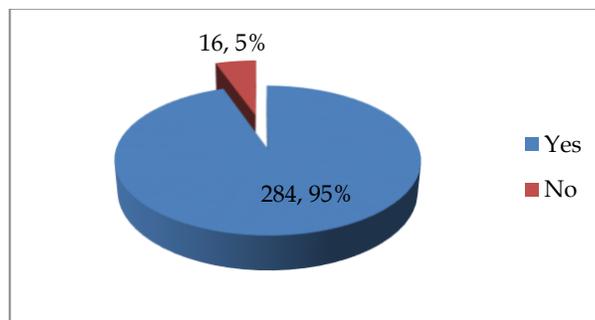


Figure 1 Respondents' awareness of Brown Envelope Journalism

How would you define Brown Envelope Journalism in your own words?

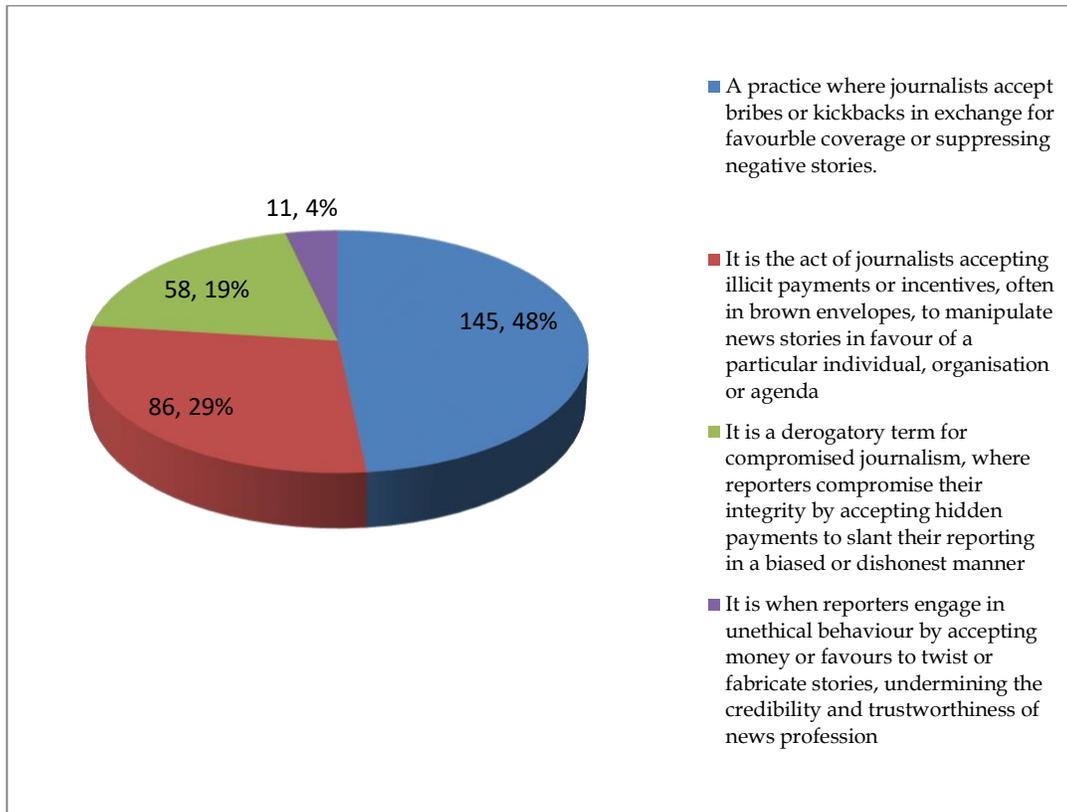


Figure 2 Respondents' definition of Brown Envelope Journalism

Do you believe that Brown Envelope Journalism is prevalent in Ghana?

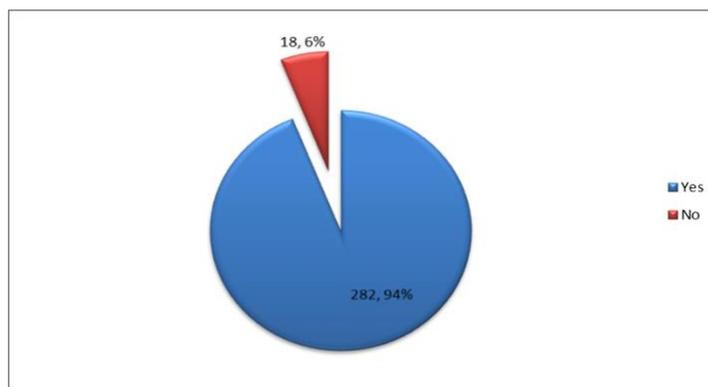


Figure 3 Prevalence of Brown Envelope Journalism Ghana

Section B: Perceptions of Brown Envelope Journalism

How does Brown Envelope Journalism affect the credibility of news outlets in Ghana?

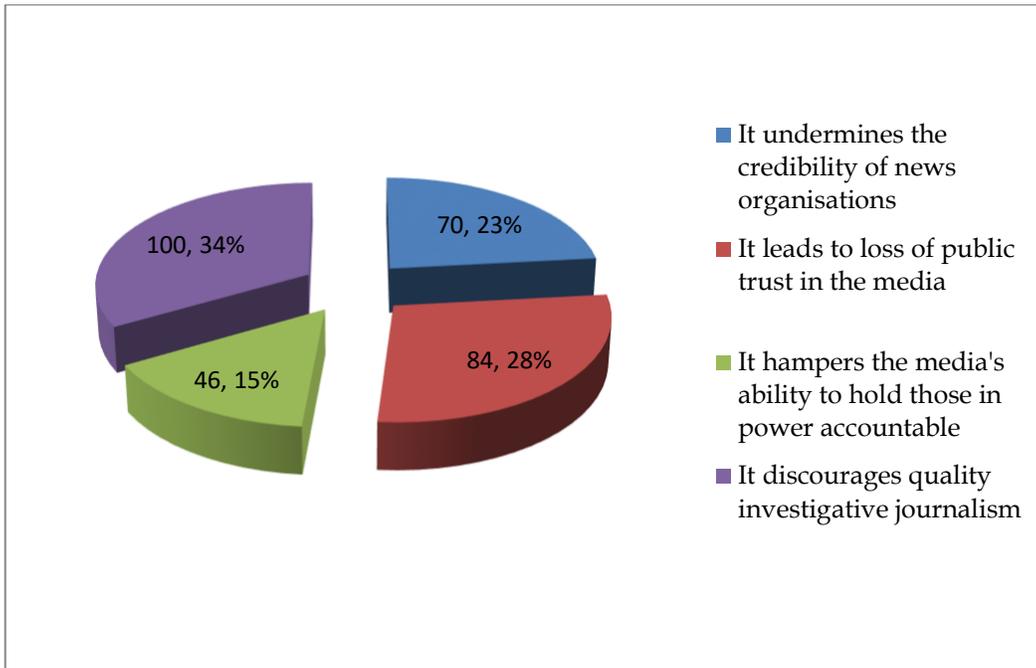


Figure 4 Impact of Brown Envelope Journalism on credibility of news organisations

Do you think that Brown Envelope Journalism influences the accuracy of news reporting?

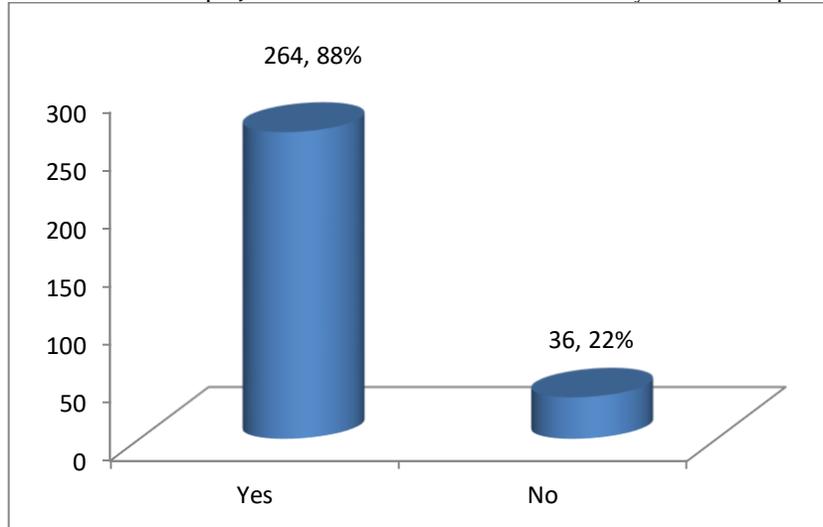


Figure 5 Influence of Brown Envelope Journalism on the accuracy of news reporting

How does Brown Envelope Journalism influence the accuracy of news reporting?

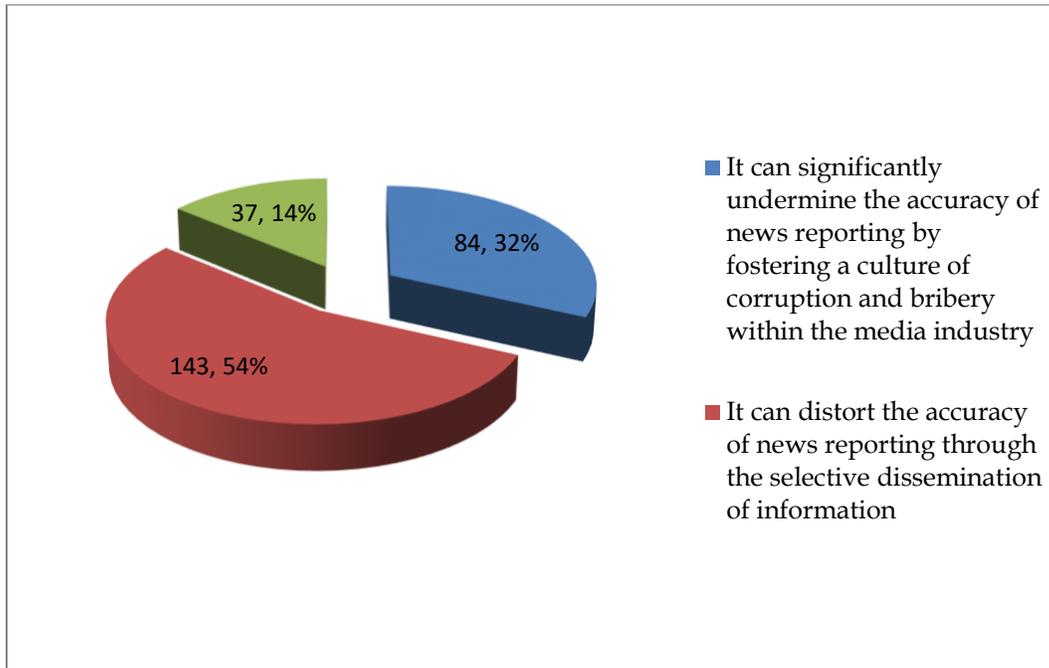


Figure 6 How Brown Envelope Journalism influence the accuracy of news reporting

Have you ever personally encountered or been aware of instances of Brown Envelope Journalism in your work or among your colleagues?

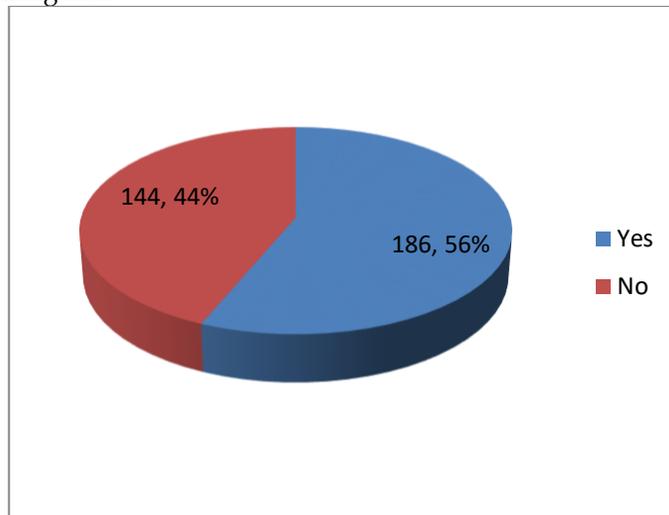


Figure 7 Personal encounter with Brown Envelope Journalism or awareness of instances of Brown Envelope Journalism in their work or among their colleagues

Section C: Impact of Brown Envelope Journalism on News Coverage

To What Extent Do You Believe Brown Envelope Journalism Influences the Selection of News Stories to cover?

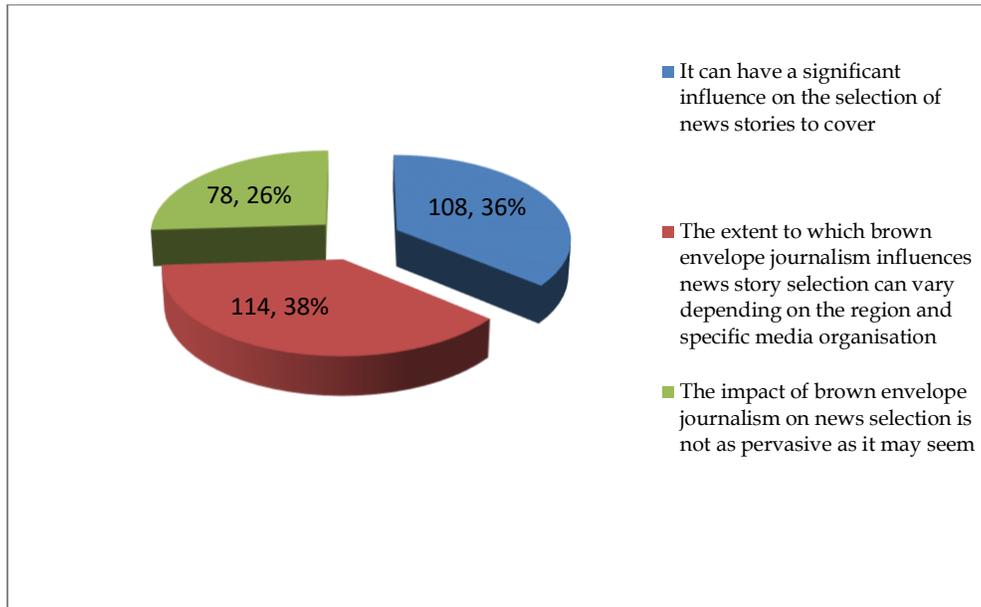


Figure 8 The extent to which respondents believe Brown Envelope Journalism influences the selection of news stories to cover?

How does brown envelope journalism impact the tone or bias in news reporting?

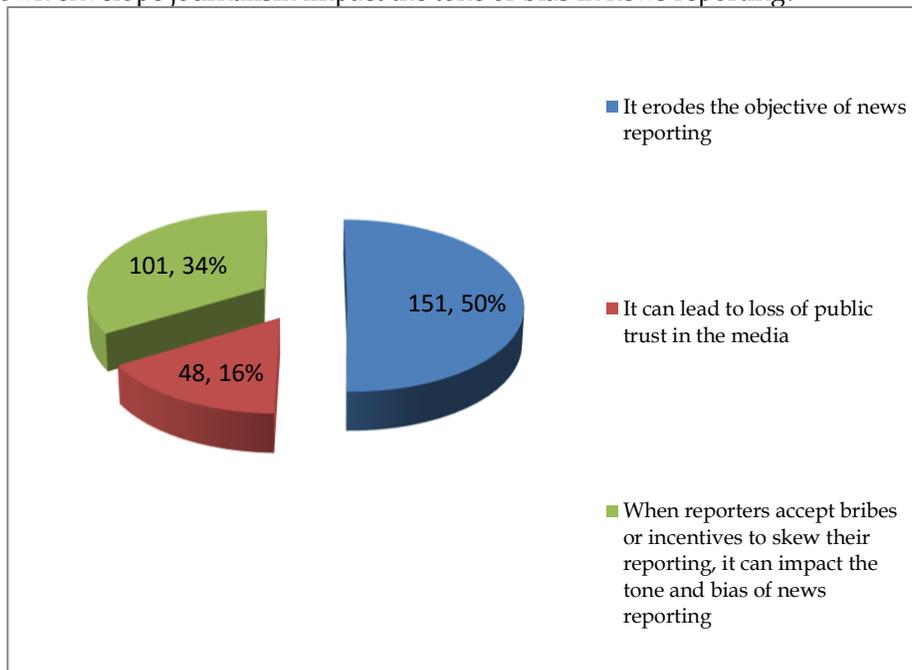


Figure 9 Impact of Brown Envelope journalism on tone or bias in news reporting

Do you think brown envelope journalism leads to the underreporting of certain critical issues or the overemphasis of others?

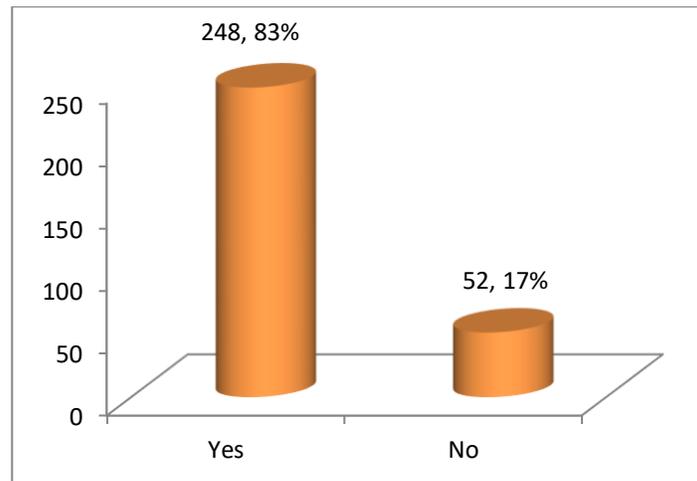


Figure 10 Brown Envelope Journalism leading to the underreporting of certain critical issues or the overemphasis of others

Section D: Ethical Considerations

Do You Think Journalists in Ghana Are Adequately Trained In Ethics To Resist The Lure Of Brown Envelopes?

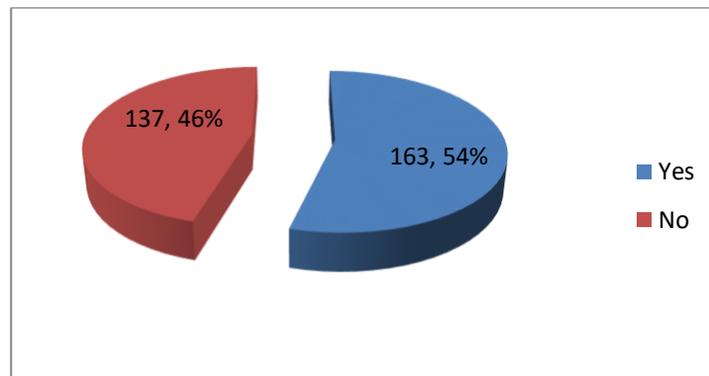


Figure 11 Adequate training of Ghanaian journalists in ethics to resist the lure of Brown Envelopes

What ethical guidelines or practices do you think can help mitigate the influence of Brown Envelope Journalism in newsrooms?

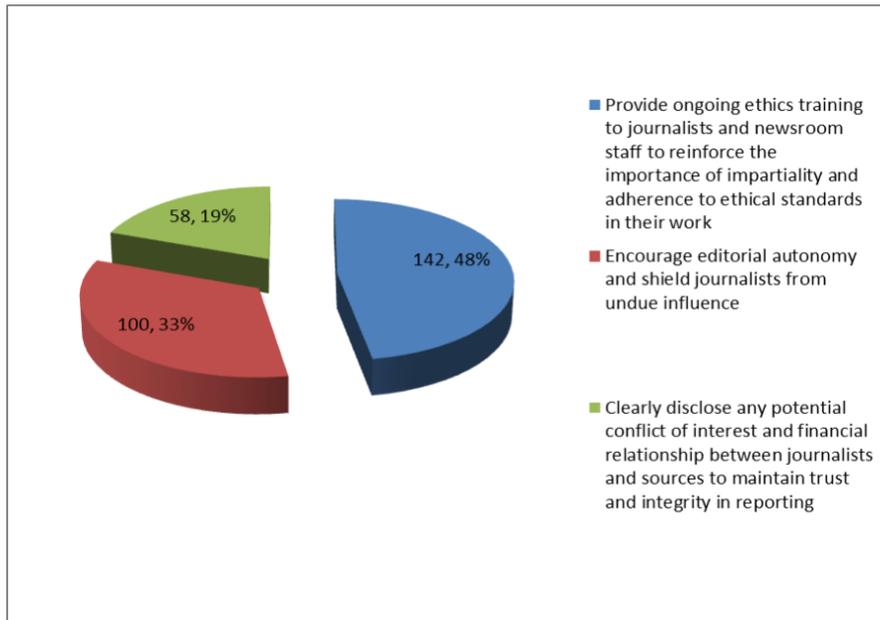


Figure 12 Ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of Brown Envelope Journalism in newsrooms

Section E. Reader Trust And Public Perception

How do you think the prevalence of Brown Envelope Journalism affects the trust that the public has in the media in Ghana?

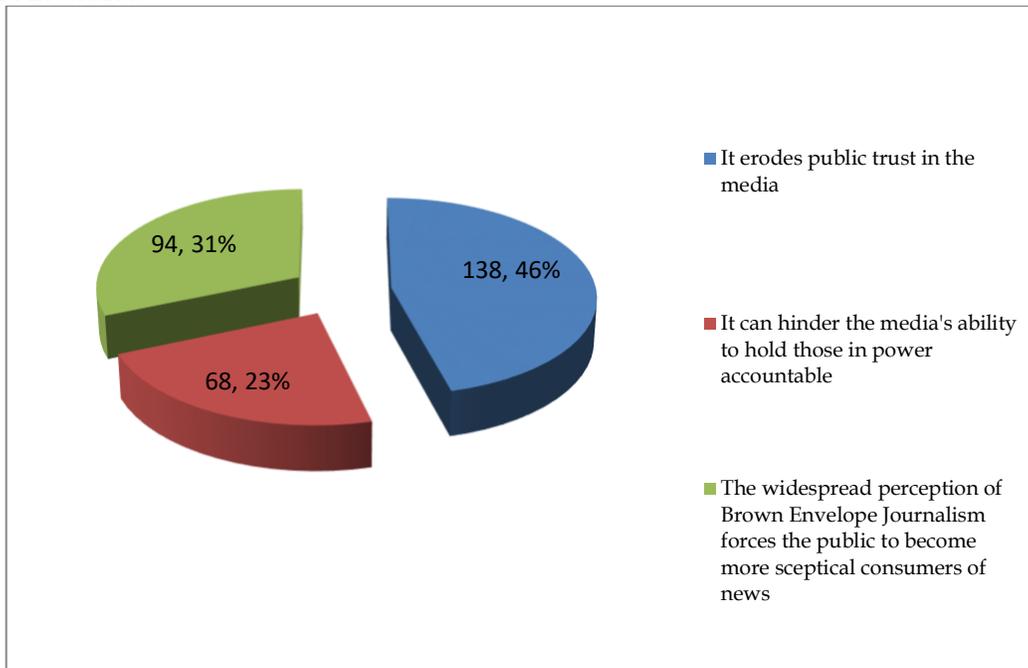


Figure 13 Prevalence of Brown Envelope Journalism and the public's trust in Ghanaian media T

Have you encountered instances where the public has expressed scepticism or mistrust of news coverage due to perceptions of Brown Envelope Journalism?

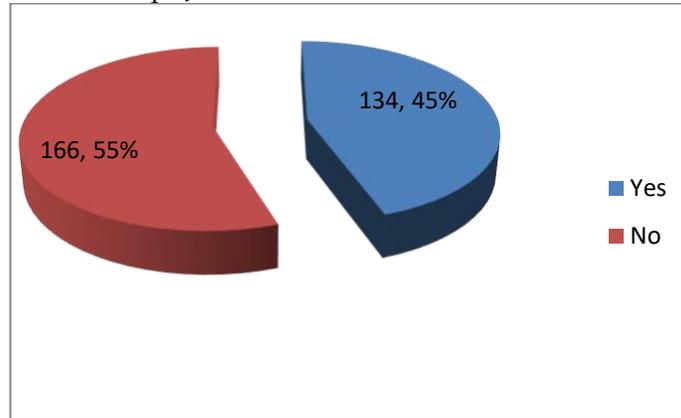


Figure 14 Public expression of scepticism or mistrust of news coverage because perceptions of 'Brown Envelope Journalism'

Section F: Media Organizations' Role

Do You Believe Media Organizations in Ghana Have Effective Mechanisms In Place To Discourage And Detect Brown Envelope Journalism?

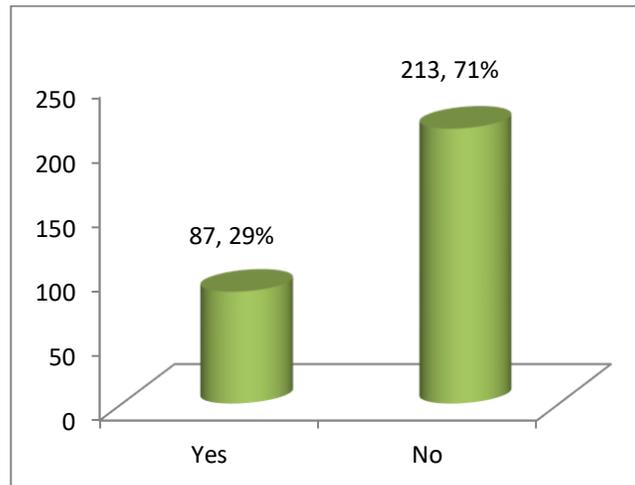


Figure 15 Media organisations' effective mechanisms to discourage and detect Brown Envelope Journalism

Should there be stricter regulations or industry standards to combat this issue?

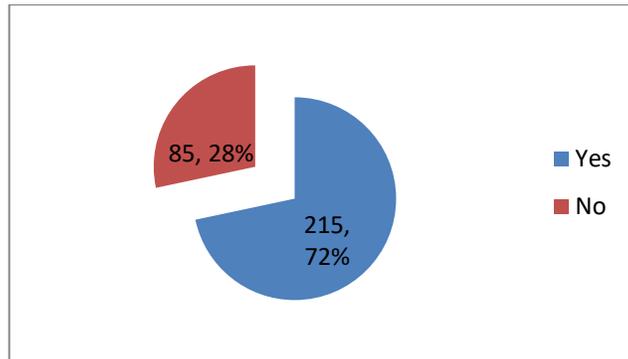


Figure 16 Stricter regulations or industry standards to combat Brown Envelope Journalism

Section G: Potential Solutions to Brown Envelope Journalism

What Measures or Strategies Do You Believe Can Be Implemented to Reduce the Impact Of Brown Envelope Journalism In Ghana's Media Landscape?

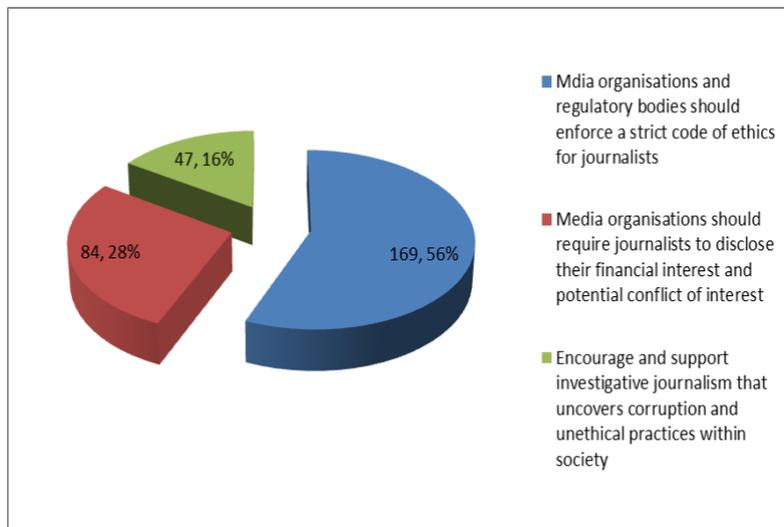


Figure 17 Measures to reduce the impact of Brown Envelope Journalism in Ghana's media landscape

First, it was revealed that 284 journalists, representing 95% of the respondents said they have heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before and 16 of them, representing 5% of the respondents said they have never heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before.

Secondly, it was found that 145 journalists, representing 48% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a practice where journalists accept bribes or kickbacks in exchange for favourable coverage or suppressing negative stories; 86 of them, representing 29% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is the act of journalists accepting illicit payments or incentives, often in brown envelopes, to manipulate news stories in favour of a particular individual, organization or agenda.

Thirdly, the study established that 58 journalists, representing 19% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a derogatory term for compromise journalism, where reporters compromise their integrity by accepting hidden payments to slant their reporting in a biased or dishonest manner, and 11 of

them, representing 4% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is when reporters engage in unethical behaviour by accepting money or favours to twist or fabricate stories, undermining the credibility and trustworthiness of news profession.

Also, it was realized that 282 journalists, representing 94% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is prevalent in Ghana, and 18 of them, representing 6% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is not prevalent in Ghana.

Furthermore, it was recorded that 100 journalists, representing 34% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' undermines the credibility of news organizations; 84 of them, representing 78% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' leads to loss of public trust in the media; 70 of them, representing 23% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' hampers the media's ability to hold those in power accountable and 46 of them, representing 15% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' discourages quality investigative journalism.

In addition, it came to light that 264 of the journalists, representing 88% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' influences the accuracy of news reporting, and 36 of them, representing 22% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' influences the accuracy of news reporting.

Moreover, it was found that 143 journalists, representing 54% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can distort the accuracy of news reporting through the selective dissemination of information; 84 of them, representing 32% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can significantly undermine the accuracy of news reporting by fostering a culture of corruption and bribery within the media industry and 37 of them, representing 14% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can have a chilling effect on investigative reporting and the pursuit of truth.

Besides, the study brought to the fore that 186 journalists, representing 56% of the respondents said they have had personal encounter with 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before or are aware of instances of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in their work or among their colleagues, and 144 of them, representing 44% of the respondents said they have not had personal encounter with Brown Envelope Journalism before or are aware of instances of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in their work or among their colleagues.

Again, it was revealed that 114 journalists, representing 38% of the respondents said the extent to which 'Brown Envelope Journalism' influences news story selection can vary depending on the region and specific media organization; 108 of them, representing 36% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can have a significant influence on the selection of news stories to cover and 78 of them, representing 26% of the respondents said the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' on news selection is not as pervasive as it may seem.

It was also found that 151 journalists, representing 50% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' erodes the objective of news reporting; 101 of them, representing 34% of the respondents said when reporters accept bribes or incentives to skew their reporting, it can impact the tone and bias of news reporting and 48 of them, representing 16% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can lead to loss of public trust in the media.

Next, the study showed that 248 journalists, representing 83% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' leads to the underreporting of certain critical issues or the overemphasis of others, and 52 of them, representing 17% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' does not lead to the underreporting of certain critical issues or the overemphasis of others.

In addition, it was established that 163 journalists, representing 54% of the respondents' said journalists in Ghana are adequately trained in ethics to resist the lure of Brown Envelopes, and 137 of them, representing 46% of the respondents said journalists in Ghana are not adequately trained in ethics to resist the lure of Brown Envelopes.

Also, the study showed that 142 journalists, representing 48% of the respondents said provision of ongoing ethics training to journalists and newsroom staff to reinforce the importance of impartiality and adherence to ethical standards in their work are the ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in news room; 58 of them, representing 19% of the

respondents said clearly disclosing any potential conflict of interest and financial relationship between journalists and sources to maintain trust and integrity in reporting are the ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in newsroom and 100 of them, representing 33% of the respondents said encouraging editorial autonomy and shielding journalists from undue influence are the ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in newsroom.

It was as well envisaged that 138 journalists, representing 46% of the respondents said the prevalence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' erodes public trust in the media; 68 of them, representing 23% of the respondents said the prevalence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can hinder the media's ability to hold those in power accountable and 94 of them, representing 31% of the respondents said the widespread perception of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' forces the public to become more sceptical consumers of news.

Again, it was shown that 134 journalists, representing 45% of the respondents said they have encountered before instances where the public has expressed scepticism or mistrust of news coverage because of perceptions of 'Brown Envelope Journalism', and 166 of them, representing 55% of the respondents said they have not encountered before instances where the public has expressed scepticism or mistrust of news coverage because of perceptions of 'Brown Envelope Journalism'.

What is more, the study brought to the fore that 87 journalists, representing 29% of the respondents said media organisations in Ghana need effective mechanisms to discourage and detect 'Brown Envelope Journalism', and 213 of them, representing 71% of the respondents said media organisations in Ghana do not need effective mechanisms to discourage and detect 'Brown Envelope Journalism'.

Next, it came to light that 215 journalists, representing 72% of the respondents said there should be stricter regulations or industry standards to combat 'Brown Envelope Journalism', and 85 of them, representing 28% of the respondents said there should not be stricter regulations or industry standards to combat 'Brown Envelope Journalism'.

Finally, it was established that 169 journalists, representing 56% of the respondents said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media organisations and regulatory bodies should enforce a strict code of ethics for journalists; 84 of them, representing 28% of the respondents said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media, media organisations should require journalists to disclose their financial interest and potential conflict of interest and 47 of them, representing 16% of the respondents said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media, media organisations should encourage and support investigative journalism that uncovers corruption and unethical practices within society.

First and foremost, the revelation that 95% journalists said they have heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before, while 5% of them said they have not heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before, it indicates that a significant majority of journalists, approximately 95%, are familiar with the term 'Brown Envelope Journalism,' while a small minority, around 5%, are not familiar with it. 'Brown Envelope Journalism' undermines the fundamental principles of journalism, such as objectivity, impartiality and truthfulness.

The fact that 95% of the surveyed journalists have heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' suggests that this term and the issue it represents are well-known within the journalism community. It may also indicate an awareness of the ethical challenges and potential harm associated with this practice, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to address and combat such unethical behaviour in journalism.

Secondly, the findings that 48% journalists said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a practice where journalists accept bribes or kickbacks in exchange for favourable coverage or suppressing negative stories, and 29% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is the act of journalists accepting illicit payments or incentives, often in brown envelopes, to manipulate news stories in favour of a particular individual, organization or agenda are troubling because they suggest that a substantial number of journalists believe unethical practices may be prevalent within their profession. The integrity of journalism is crucial for

informing the public and maintaining trust in the media. It is essential for media organizations to address these concerns, implement ethical guidelines, and promote transparency to uphold the principles of responsible journalism.

It is worth noting that perceptions among journalists may not necessarily reflect the actual prevalence of such practices in the industry. However, these statistics do highlight the importance of addressing these concerns to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of journalism as a whole.

Thirdly, the findings that 19% of journalists said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a derogatory term for compromise journalism, where reporters compromise their integrity by accepting hidden payments to slant their reporting in a biased or dishonest manner whereas 4% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is when reporters engage in unethical behaviour by accepting money or favours to twist or fabricate stories, undermining the credibility and trustworthiness of news profession can be looked at from two perspectives: the first one, suggests that a significant portion of journalists view 'Brown Envelope Journalism' as a negative term. They perceive it as compromising journalistic integrity by accepting undisclosed payments in exchange for biased or dishonest reporting. This interpretation emphasizes the detrimental impact on journalistic credibility and honesty.

The second perspective is similar to the first, focusing on unethical behaviour within journalism. However, it specifies that 'Brown Envelope Journalism' involves not just compromise or bias but the active twisting or fabrication of stories. The emphasis remains on the erosion of credibility and trustworthiness in the news profession due to such unethical actions.

Overall, both perspectives converge on the idea that 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a negative term associated with unethical behaviour in journalism. The differences lie in the extent of the unethical actions, with the second perspective emphasizing more severe distortions of the truth. These perspectives highlight the importance of upholding journalistic integrity and transparency to maintain public trust in the news profession.

Furthermore, the findings that 94% of journalists said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is prevalent in Ghana, and 6% of the respondents said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is not prevalent in Ghana implies a widespread perception that journalists in the country often engage in compromising behaviours, such as accepting undisclosed payments, which can impact the credibility and objectivity of their reporting. However, a minority of 6% disagrees with this perception, indicating a differing perspective on the extent of this problem within the Ghanaian journalism landscape.

Moreover, the statistic that 78% of journalists believe 'Brown Envelope Journalism' erodes public trust in the media underscores the importance of ethical reporting practices in maintaining credibility and public confidence in journalism. It highlights the need for transparency, integrity, and accountability within the field to ensure the media's vital role in informing and educating the public.

Besides, the finding that 88% of journalists believe 'Brown Envelope Journalism' impacts the accuracy of news reporting emphasizes the detrimental effects of unethical practices on the integrity and truthfulness of journalism. This underscores the urgency for combating such practices to uphold accuracy, reliability, and trust in the media's role as a source of credible information.

Again, the finding that 54% of journalists acknowledge the potential distortion of news accuracy through selective information dissemination in 'Brown Envelope Journalism' underscores the need to address biased reporting and its impact on public perception. This highlights the importance of promoting unbiased reporting and balanced presentation of information to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of journalism.

Also, the acknowledgment by 54% of journalists that journalists in Ghana are not sufficiently trained in ethics to resist the allure of 'Brown Envelopes' reveals a critical need for enhanced ethical education and professional development within the journalism community. Strengthening ethical training can play a vital role in upholding journalistic integrity and reducing the influence of unethical practices on media reporting.

What is more, the finding that 48% of journalists see ongoing ethics training as a key strategy to mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' highlights the crucial role of continuous education in reinforcing impartiality and ethical standards. Ongoing training can empower journalists to resist unethical pressures and promote a culture of integrity within newsrooms, ultimately enhancing credibility and public trust in the media.

Next, the revelation that 56% of respondents have experienced or witnessed 'Brown Envelope Journalism' highlights the prevalence and concerning influence of unethical practices within the journalism landscape. This underscores the urgent need for systemic changes, ethical education, and strong measures to combat such practices and uphold the integrity and credibility of journalism.

The finding that 38% of journalists believe the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can vary based on region and media organization underscores the complex and nuanced nature of this unethical practice. Addressing and combating this issue requires tailored strategies that consider regional dynamics and organizational contexts to effectively mitigate its influence on news story selection and maintain journalistic integrity.

The statistic that 50% of journalists acknowledge that 'Brown Envelope Journalism' undermines the objective of news reporting underscores the threat this practice poses to the core principles of journalism, such as objectivity, truthfulness, and transparency. It emphasizes the critical need to eradicate unethical influences to preserve the integrity and credibility of news reporting.

The finding that 55% of journalists haven't encountered instances of public scepticism or mistrust due to 'Brown Envelope Journalism' perceptions may suggest a potential disconnect between journalists and public perception. It's essential for journalists to remain vigilant and address any erosion of trust, even if not overtly reported, by proactively combating unethical practices and fostering transparency to uphold public confidence in the media.

The statistic that 71% of journalists believe media organizations in Ghana lack effective mechanisms to discourage and detect 'Brown Envelope Journalism' highlights a critical gap in addressing this unethical practice. Establishing robust internal controls and clear guidelines within media organizations is essential to combatting such behaviour and upholding journalistic integrity. Closing this gap is vital to maintaining public trust in the media.

The revelation that 72% of journalists advocate for stricter regulations or industry standards to combat 'Brown Envelope Journalism' underscores the necessity for a structured approach to curb unethical practices. Implementing clear guidelines and enforcing regulations within the industry can play a pivotal role in reducing the prevalence of such practices, promoting ethical conduct, and preserving the integrity of journalism.

Finally, the finding that 56% journalists said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media organizations and regulatory bodies should enforce a strict code of ethics for journalists suggests that enforcing a strict code of ethics for journalists is a crucial step in mitigating the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in Ghana's media landscape. It can promote transparency, integrity, and accountability among journalists, ensuring that reporting is based on truth and public interest rather than unethical financial influences. Regulatory bodies and media organizations should collaborate to establish and enforce these guidelines effectively

4. CONCLUSION

The study looked at how 'Brown Envelope Journalism' affects news coverage in Ghana. It further determined whether journalists in Ghana have the necessary ethics training to fend off the allure of brown envelopes and how the presence of brown envelope journalism impacts the public's confidence in Ghana's media. It came to light that most of the journalists (i.e., 95%) said they have heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before, while just a few of them (i.e., 5%) said they have never heard of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before.

It was also revealed that most of the journalists (i.e., 48%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a practice where journalists accept bribes or kickbacks in exchange for favourable coverage or suppressing negative stories; 29% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is the act of journalists accepting illicit payments or incentives, often in brown envelopes, to manipulate news stories in favour of a particular individual, organization or agenda.

Furthermore, it was realized that 19% of the journalists said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is a derogatory term for compromise journalism, where reporters compromise their integrity by accepting hidden payments to slant their reporting in a biased or dishonest manner, and 4% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is when reporters engage in unethical behaviour by accepting money or favours to twist or fabricate stories, undermining the credibility and trustworthiness of news profession.

In addition, the study established that most of the journalists (i.e., 94%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is prevalent in Ghana, while a few of them (6%) of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' is not prevalent in Ghana.

Moreover, it was found that 34% of the journalists said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' undermines the credibility of news organizations; 78% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' leads to loss of public trust in the media; 23% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' hampers the media's ability to hold those in power accountable and 15% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' discourages quality investigative journalism.

Besides, it was brought to the fore that most of the journalists (i.e., 88%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' influences the accuracy of news reporting, and 22% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' influences the accuracy of news reporting.

Again, it was envisaged that most of the journalists (i.e., 54%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can distort the accuracy of news reporting through the selective dissemination of information; 32% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can significantly undermine the accuracy of news reporting by fostering a culture of corruption and bribery within the media industry and 14% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can have a chilling effect on investigative reporting and the pursuit of truth.

It was as well shown that most of the journalists (i.e., 56%) said they have had personal encounter with 'Brown Envelope Journalism' before or are aware of instances of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in their work or among their colleagues. However, it came to light that 44% of the journalists said they have not had personal encounter with Brown Envelope Journalism before or are aware of instances of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in their work or among their colleagues.

What is more, the study revealed that most of the journalists (i.e., 38%) said the extent to which 'Brown Envelope Journalism' influences news story selection can vary depending on the region and specific media organization; 36% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can have a significant influence on the selection of news stories to cover and 26% of them said the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' on news selection is not as pervasive as it may seem.

It was found that most of the journalists (i.e., 50%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' erodes the objective of news reporting; 34% of them said when reporters accept bribes or incentives to skew their reporting, it can impact the tone and bias of news reporting and 16% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can lead to loss of public trust in the media.

It was also revealed that most of the journalists (i.e., 83%) said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' leads to the underreporting of certain critical issues or the overemphasis of others, and 17% of them said 'Brown Envelope Journalism' does not lead to the underreporting of certain critical issues or the overemphasis of others.

The study as well brought to the fore that most of the journalists (i.e., 54%) said journalists in Ghana are adequately trained in ethics to resist the lure of Brown Envelopes whereas 46% of them said journalists in Ghana are not adequately trained in ethics to resist the lure of Brown Envelopes.

Also, it was shown that most of the journalists (i. e, 48%) said provision of ongoing ethics training to journalists and newsroom staff to reinforce the importance of impartiality and adherence to ethical

standards in their work are the ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in newsroom, and 19% of them said clearly disclosing any potential conflict of interest and financial relationship between journalists and sources to maintain trust and integrity in reporting are the ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in newsroom.

It was as well found that 33% of the journalists said encouraging editorial autonomy and shielding journalists from undue influence are the ethical guidelines or practices that can help mitigate the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in newsroom.

Similarly, it was realized that most of the journalists (i.e., 46%) said the prevalence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' erodes public trust in the media; 23% of them said the prevalence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' can hinder the media's ability to hold those in power accountable and 31% of them said the widespread perception of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' forces the public to become more sceptical consumers of news.

The study also recorded that most of the journalists (i.e., 55%) of the journalists said they have not encountered before instances where the public has expressed scepticism or mistrust of news coverage because of perceptions of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' whereas 45% of them as the minority respondents, said they have encountered before instances where the public has expressed scepticism or mistrust of news coverage because of perceptions of 'Brown Envelope Journalism'.

Again, it was found that a few of the journalists (i.e., 29%) said media organizations in Ghana need effective mechanisms to discourage and detect 'Brown Envelope Journalism', and 71% of them said media organizations in Ghana do not need effective mechanisms to discourage and detect 'Brown Envelope Journalism'.

Next, it was shown that most of the journalists (i.e., 72%) said there should be stricter regulations or industry standards to combat 'Brown Envelope Journalism', and 28% of them said there should not be stricter regulations or industry standards to combat 'Brown Envelope Journalism'.

Finally, it was found that most of the journalists (i.e. 56%) said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media organizations and regulatory bodies should enforce a strict code of ethics for journalists; 28% of them said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media, media organizations should require journalists to disclose their financial interest and potential conflict of interest and 16% of them said in order to reduce the impact of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in the Ghana's media landscape media, media organizations should encourage and support investigative journalism that uncovers corruption and unethical practices within society.

Recommendations

All Ghanaians should join forces with civil society groups to combat the abhorrent practice of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' in Ghana's media environment.

To eradicate 'Brown Envelope Journalism' from Ghana's media landscape, Ghanaian media organizations should pay their journalists well.

The National Media Commission (NMC) should monitor and penalize news organizations that have a history of stuffing brown envelopes with cash for journalists.

In order to address the underwhelming pay for journalists, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) should collaborate with the National Labour Commission (NLC) and other pertinent authorities.

More research is required to identify why Ghanaian media outlets are reluctant to compensate their journalists fairly.

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