Mass Communication and Society

Assessing Global Inequality of Bribery for News Coverage: A Cross-National Study

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Bribery for news coverage has a negative impact on the credibility of media; it also restricts the free flow of information and violates the public's right to know. Further, research showed that there exists considerable inequality among countries in terms of the extent to which bribery for news coverage exists in media system. This study provides the first quantitative cross-national assessment of a set of predictors of the likelihood that bribery for news coverage exists in a country's media system and tested competing arguments derived from the literature. Data of this study are drawn from 66 nation states. The analysis shows that 5 groups of political, economic, cultural, educational, and technological variables have direct or indirect impacts on a country's media bribery level. The interactions between these variables are also analyzed. The study concludes by discussing how analyses of the nature of the international media bribery problem contribute to finding multiple approaches to solutions to this problem.

The modern society is heavily saturated by media. Media have performed a variety of social functions (Donohue, 1973). Many of these functions are essential to the long-term development of economy, civil society, and democracy and to the solution of some urgent social affairs (Berry, 2008;

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Doerfel & Taylor, 2004; Habermas, 1991; Kumar, 2006). Given the important role that media play in a society, media product is often considered one form of valuable social resource (Paek & Pan, 2004). Active social actors such as politicians, corporations, and other interest groups often attempt to project their influence on the media content (Entman, 2004). Ideally, journalism practitioners should remain unbiased and independent and should openly indicate any source of influence on the media content to avoid misleading the audiences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). However, sometimes journalism practitioners may receive benefits to purposefully produce biased or misleading media content. This phenomenon can be called bribery for news coverage, which is also known as media non-transparency (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003).

Bribery for news coverage refers to the journalism practice of "any form of payment for media coverage or any influence on editorial decisions that is not clearly indicated in the finished product or the media" (Tsetsura, 2005, p. 3). As Carey (1996) noted, journalism is a set of practices that "are justified in terms of the social consequences they engender, namely, the constitution of a democratic social order" (p. 9). Bribery for news coverage violates widely recognized journalism values and weakens the credibility of media (Plaisance & Deppa, 2009). Further, when bribery for news coverage wildly exists in a country, the absence of accurate and reliable information may hamper the long-term prosperity of the local economy because modern markets rely heavily on the free flow of information (Rodan, 2000). The lack of trustworthy news coverage also adversely affects the accountability of the government and impedes the development of civil society because it deprives the citizens' right to know (Kumar, 2006).

The negative impact of bribery for news coverage has attracted some scholars' attention. Kruckeberg and Tsetsura (2003) developed a composite index to demonstrate the likelihood of whether "cash for news coverage" widely exists in a particular country. Intuitively, this question seems most relevant to the personal integrity of journalists. If this is the case, there should not be significant differences among countries' level of media bribery. However, considerable differences exist among the 66 countries that Kruckeberg and Tsetsura surveyed. Journalism practice in countries such as Finland and Denmark tend to be far less challenged by the bribery problem than in transitional countries, such as countries of the former communist bloc in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and East Asia. Based on this index, several studies have been conducted (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2004; Tsetsura, 2005), and findings have generally supported the validity of this index.

The tendency that journalism practice tends to involve less bribery issues in countries with certain characteristics than in others suggests that

socioeconomic conditions beyond journalists' personal characteristics may exert considerable influence on countries' media bribery level. The cash-for-news phenomenon should be studied not only as a journalism ethical issue but also as a social problem with potential sociological, economic, and cultural causes. Further, given the fact that the media bribery problem widely exists in the developing world as revealed by the index, and may further impede the building of transparent media systems that could facilitate economic growth and nation building (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004), there is an urgent need to draw attention to this phenomenon. A better understanding of the nature of the media bribery problem will have implications for policy making, international assistance for media development, and self-regulation of journalism associations.

Previous research on media bribery has offered a set of propositions to explain the causes of international inequality in terms of media bribery levels (Berry, 2008), but little research to date has comprehensively examined the competing arguments at the cross-national level. Further, the impact of Internet availability on countries' media bribery level has rarely been discussed in the literature. To fill the existing gap, this article considers the impact of countries' political, economic, cultural, educational, and technological contexts on the level of media bribery. Relevant literature is reviewed, and important arguments about potential predictors of a country's level of media bribery are summarized. In the field of communication research, scholars have advocated for more macrolevel and cross-national studies (Brossard, Shanahan, & McComas, 2004). This study draws data from 66 countries and provides a broader and deeper understanding of the mechanisms that influence the different levels of media bribery among nations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bribery for news coverage is also studied as a media nontransparency problem (Tsetsura, 2005) or "envelope journalism" (Romano, 2000). This phenomenon reflects the level of corruption within the media system. In this research, to avoid the potential confusion that could be caused by the relatively broad term "media nontransparency," "bribery for news coverage" is utilized. Bribery for news coverage is different than objective (e.g., mistakes of names or address) or subjective (e.g., journalists' misunderstanding of the sources cited in coverage) reporting errors (Maier, 2005) and focuses on the fact that journalists or media institutions receive benefits (including money or other forms of benefits) to cover (in certain ways) or to not cover certain news, and therefore purposefully mislead the audiences to benefit the

bribers. Bribery of news mostly occurs between the bribers (public relations practitioners, governmental officials, advertisers and other interested parties) and gatekeepers of media (e.g., journalists, editors, producers, and other media managers; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003).

The phenomenon of journalism practitioners receiving benefits for news coverage exists in many countries (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Tsetsura, 2005). The levels to which such practices are present differ considerably from country to country. Although media bribery is directly caused by the unethical practices of journalism practitioners, in any given nation, it has causes and implications beyond the media industry (Tsetsura, 2005).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) noted that a deep understanding of media should be based on knowledge of the broader political and economic context in which the media system roots. Hence, the media bribery issue may not only be a question of journalists' integrity or professional standards; it may also reflect influence from the political, economic, cultural, educational, and technological context of a country (Berry, 2008; Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009).

Most previous bribery for news coverage studies employ surveys or interviews of journalists or public relations practitioners and thus provide a valuable insiders' point of view. However, several shortcomings exist in these studies. First, most previous studies focus on a single country. Although this approach helps to arrive at a deeper understanding of the particular situation of a country, it has limited power to demonstrate the overall picture (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Questions such as what factors significantly contribute to the inequality of media bribery levels among countries and through what mechanism these factors exert influence remain unanswered. Second, previous studies rely heavily on self-reports of journalists or public relations practitioners and direct attention mostly toward the media industry. However, Kruckeberg and Tsetsura's (2003) index suggests that external factors beyond the media industry may have profound influence, and the improvement of countries' media bribery levels requires broader cooperation among social institutions. Recognizing the shortcomings of previous research, this study proposes to examine the potential predictors of a country's media bribery level from a macro and cross-national approach.

Based on a review of literature, this study proposes that variables of five categories: political, economic, cultural, educational (public education, and journalism education), and technological context (research suggests that the Internet as an alternative and competing channel of information might also have an impact on countries' level of media bribery) may influence a country's media bribery level. The following section presents the aforementioned variables in detail; hypotheses and research questions are also proposed.

Political Context Versus Bribery for News Coverage

Democracy. According to Thomas Jefferson, well-informed citizens are capable of governing themselves (Tucker, 2008).A well-developed media system is essential to the function of democracy. In countries where democracy is well institutionalized, journalism practice tends to be better protected by laws and regulations (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). For example, in the United States, freedom of press and speech are protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Further, democracy allows for the competition of ideas and free expression of different parties' requests. When compared with authoritarian regimes, democratic governments are more accountable to citizens' requests. With well-established institutional and legal systems to protect their civil rights, citizens in democratic countries enjoy more autonomy and are more active in social affairs (Wickrama & Mulford, 1996). The overall environment in advanced democratic countries may facilitate the free flow of information and ensure journalists' autonomy.

H1: A country's level of democracy has a positive effect on reducing a country's media bribery level.

Postcommunist. The potential effect of a country's postcommunist regime background on its level of media bribery has been highlighted in many media bribery studies (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). Media in many postcommunist regimes are developed from what Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) called Soviet-totalitarian media. Soviet-totalitarian media are characterized by selective dissemination of information or aspects of information. In this type of media, party interests overwhelm journalism values. Political consideration and ideological propaganda severely bias information (Nerone, 1995). A survey study conducted by an organization named Freedom House continued to observe insufficient commitment by some postcommunist governments to promote transparent journalism practice (Schnetzer, 2003).

Since the early 1990s, the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe and reforms that took place in other communist countries have profoundly changed the social and political systems of these countries. As social reformation progressed, mass media were pushed into the market for a variety of reasons, and media to a large extent transformed from governmental organs to for-profit organizations (Zhao, 1998). For example, in China, since the early 1990s, "marketing is of increasing concern to China's news media as growth in number of available news outlets has made commercial survival imperative" (Luther & Zhou, 2005, p. 858). Governmental subsidies were

greatly reduced, and less direct regulations were placed on the media. Although Chinese media still would not openly challenge the state, more diverse voices are now permitted. In Russia, by 2004, there were more than 500 nongovernmental TV stations. Even government-owned media are funded by advertisers. Content that caters to audiences has gradually replaced propaganda programs (Hetsroni, 2004).

Journalism practitioners in postcommunist countries have found themselves increasingly enjoyed greater autonomy. There are, however, dark sides to the freedom. First, because media now largely rely on advertisers for survival and profits, the penetration of commercial power into media has become more common (Zhao, 1998). Although media in developed Western countries also face market pressure, Western media are equipped with well-developed journalism traditions and are regulated by more efficient legal systems. Journalism traditions in some Western countries such as the United Kingdom were developed over 100 years (Habermas, 1991). In postcommunist countries, media only began to enjoy autonomy since the 1990s; therefore, journalism practitioners in these countries may not have been institutionalized with well-established journalism traditions (Gross, 2003). Further, legal regulation and self-regulation of journalism practice in these countries are also at an early stage of development (Tsetsura, 2005).

Second, due to the traditions of the Soviet-totalitarian media systems, in postcommunist regimes, political elites can still exert considerable influence over media content. As noted by Gross (2003), "even media divorced from political parties have a questionable link to the political elites" (p. 82). Such connections may exist at the interpersonal level (e.g., between journalist and political elites) or the interorganizational level (e.g., between media and government departments; Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009). In Eastern Europe, it is widely observed that media owners and political elites have tight connections (Sparks, 1992). In Romania, for example, it is very hard to distinguish media owners, source of subsidizes, and who influences media content (Gross, 2003). The intricate web of connection and interaction between elites and news media makes the elites' control or influence over news coverage for political or economic purposes relatively difficult to resist on the part of journalism practitioners.

In sum, without well-established journalism values and professional standards, or efficient laws or institutions to effectively prevent unethical practice, it is possible that media in postcommunist countries tend to be heavily influenced by political and commercial forces.

H2: Countries with postcommunist regime background show higher level of media bribery than other countries.

Economic Development Versus Bribery for News Coverage

The relationship between economic development and bribery for news coverage is complicated. On one hand, the development of a market economy naturally requires transparent media (Rodan, 2000). This is because the efficient operation of market needs considerable amount of information to decrease investment risk and transaction costs. Rodan (2000) argued that "advanced market systems release pressures for a free flow of information, including a liberalized media, and a more general undermining of authoritarian rule" (p. 219). Further, economic prosperity will diversify advertisers in a country. As media depend less on a handful of advertisers, the level of influence advertisers have over media may decrease. On the other hand, economic development may also produce and bring in large companies to a country. Some scholars worried that the strong power of some large corporations is hard to resist (Jensen, 2005). Contracts with large corporations can significantly increase media's revenue, especially for local and small-size media organizations. Many media are now operating as profit-seeking organizations. Without strong constraints, media may be motivated to trade news coverage for advertising contracts. Because the relationship between economic development and media bribery is unclear, the following research question is formed to guide the analysis.

> RQ1: What is the relationship between a country's level of economic development and the country's media bribery level?

Cultural Context Versus Bribery for News Coverage

Culture can be understood as a set of value, beliefs, norms, and practices that inform, guide, and motivate people's behavior and shape people's worldview (Castells, 2009). Studies have found that cultural factors also play an important role in influencing journalism practice (Brossard et al., 2004). Countries' cultural differences may be relevant to the formation of different media bribery levels because cultural norms shape people's view of moral standards. Practices that are unacceptable in one culture may be tolerable in another. Some cultural norms may even facilitate media bribery practice. For example, a study conducted by Tsetsura and Zuo (2009) found that in China, the widespread existence of Guanxi, namely, a network of personal relationships, leads some journalists to consider receiving gifts from their interviewees an acceptable and normal social interaction.

According to Huntington (1996), different culture types can be grouped according to "common objective" factors such as religion, history, customs, institutions, and language, and by the "subjective self-identification of

people'' (p. 43). Among these criteria, Huntington argued that shared religion is the most important indicator of a culture type and is the ''central defining characteristic,'' hence, ''the major civilizations in human history have been closely identified with the world's great religions'' (pp. 42, 47). Based on these criteria, Huntington (1996) suggested that different cultures can be divided into nine types: African, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, Latin American, Orthodox, Sinic, and Western culture. Studies that are based on Huntington's cultural typology have demonstrated that culture influences nations' foreign policies (Schafferer, 2005) and countries' patterns of association with international organizations (Beckfield, 2003). Media research has found that religion and cultural identification profoundly influence audiences' media use (Croucher, Oommen, Borton, Anarbaeva, & Turner, 2010). It is not clear if culture also exerts influence on the acceptance level of media bribery. Further, the relationship between cultural types and media bribery has rarely been tested. To fill the gap, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: Does cultural type significantly influence a country's media bribery level?

Education Level Versus Bribery for News Coverage

Education for the general public.   The general public's educational level may influence media bribery level for the following reasons. First, educated audiences tend to be more critical consumers of media content. Educated citizens tend to demand a wider range of available information and news sources and have higher demands on the quality of media content. The increase in citizens' educational level may also contribute to the public's higher level of political awareness (Wickrama & Mulford, 1996) and lead them to actively respond to media coverage. For example, letters to editors is one important channel of audience feedback, and sometimes carries they criticism that can promote changes in the newsroom (Hogan, 2006). Reader, Stempel, and Daniel (2004) surveyed 1,017 U.S. adults and found that better educated citizens are more likely to write letters to editors. Further, educated citizens are essential to the formation of a functioning public sphere. According to Habermas (1991), the public sphere was recognized as a place where the politically and socially disadvantaged could seek refuge and appeal to the judgment of the public. It is relatively difficult to manipulate information in a society that has an active public sphere (Habermas, 1991). Overall, the literature suggests that education for the general public may have a positive influence on reducing countries' media bribery level, and the following hypothesis is posited to test this relationship.

H3: Citizens' educational level positively associates with countries' lower media bribery level.

Journalism education. Since the 1990s, journalism education has grown worldwide at both undergraduate and graduate levels (Hanna & Sanders, 2007). This situation may partly be due to the fact that qualified journalism practitioners generally need professional training. Journalism programs play an important role in socializing journalism practitioners. In general, journalism education aims at promoting and improving the standards of journalism and equips journalists with knowledge and skills that will serve their professional practice (Teel, 2007). Besides skills training, many journalism programs also educate and motivate future journalists to be responsible to society. Among other courses, journalism ethics is an emphasized course in many journalism schools (Dates, 2006). It is important to mention that in different societies, social responsibility may have different definitions and meanings, and the specific content of journalism codes can vary considerably (Himelboim & Limor, in press). Former media bribery studies emphasized the importance of journalism codes (Tsetsura, 2005). However, for journalism practitioners to be informed of journalism codes and to fully understand the meaning and value of these codes, formal journalism education may be imperative. In sum, the availability of journalism programs should have a positive effect on reducing media bribery levels because formal journalism education may produce practitioners with higher professional standards. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The availability of journalism programs positively associates with countries' lower media bribery level.

Internet Availability Versus Bribery for News Coverage

The Internet is an alternative communication channel that has not been completely commercialized or regulated by corporations or governments. Therefore, it is more difficult to manipulate online information flows. For example, a big advertiser may be able to bribe a handful of media to cover news in favor of the advertiser. It is difficult, however, for the advertiser to bribe numerous bloggers, discussants on forums, and activism groups. For example, Rohlinger and Brown (2009) studied how the Internet-based group MoveOn.org utilized the Internet to challenge state authority and mainstream information in the hostile political context after 9/11. This study reports that the Internet provided a space for grassroots groups to challenge dominant points of view, and it allowed activists to mobilize social movements that further confront authorities in the real world.

Further, the wide access to the Internet may increase the likelihood of the exposure of unethical journalism practice. Information holes often exist between information seekers and information holders in social networks (Bach & Stark, 2004). When controversial issues happen, traditional power holders—the governments or corporations, for instance—may purposefully manipulate media coverage to exclude the public's participation. Victims of biased news may utilize the Internet to break the information to the public and therefore overturn the effect of bribery for news coverage. In sum, there may be a negative relationship between a country's Internet availability level and its media bribery level, as is posited in the following hypothesis:

H5: Internet availability positively associates with countries' lower media bribery level.

In summary, bribery for news coverage may not simply depend on journalists' personal integrity. Five groups of potential predictors of a country's media bribery level are identified in the literature. It is possible that some predictors' impact is affected by other predictors. Therefore, in the following section, besides testing the effect of each group of variables, different regression models were used to assess what variables' effects hold consistent across situations and what variables' effects can be affected by the presence of other variables.

METHODOLOGY

Samples

Samples of this study are 66 countries included in the International Index of Bribery for News Coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). This sample contains countries from five different regions of the world, and hence is relatively representative of the international trends (see Table 1). The International Index of Bribery for News Coverage is the only index that measures international media bribery level, and it has only been conducted in 2003. Therefore, all of the data used in this analysis are also from 2003.

Data and Measurement

Index of bribery for news coverage. This index is the dependent variable in this analysis. This index is a composite index that provides scores on 66 countries' range in level of media bribery. Due to the fact that it is extremely difficult to directly measure media bribery practices, this index is based on eight variables: longtime tradition of self-determination by

TABLE 1
Sample Countries Included in This Analysis

Africa	Asia	America	Europe	Southwest Asia–North Africa
Kenya	Australia	Argentina	Austria	Bahrain
Nigeria	Bangladesh	Brazil	Bulgaria	Cyprus
South Africa	China	Canada	Belgium[a]	Egypt
	Hong Kong, China	Chile	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Israel
	India	Mexico	Croatia	Jordan
	Indonesia	Puerto Rican	Czech	Kuwait
	Japan	United States	Denmark	Mauritius
	South Korea	Venezuela	Estonia	Saudi Arabia
	Malaysia		Finland	Turkey
	New Zealand		France	UAE
	Pakistan		Germany	
	Singapore		Greece	
	Taiwan		Hungary	
	Thailand		Iceland	
	Vietnam		Ireland	
			Italy	
			Latvia	
			Lithuania	
			Netherlands	
			Norway	
			Portugal	
			Poland	
			Spain	
			Slovakia	
			Slovenia	
			Sweden	
			Switzerland	
			Russia	
			Ukraine	
			United Kingdom	

Note. $N = 66$.
[a]Belgium includes Luxembourg.

citizens; perception of comprehensive corruption laws with effective enforcement; accountability of government to citizens at all levels; high adult literary; high liberal and professional education of practicing journalists; well-established, publicized, and enforceable journalism codes of professional ethics; free press, free speech, and free flow of information; and high media competition (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). The eight variables were derived from reliable sources and were characterized by their criterion-related validity, meaning that these variables form a measure that allows

researchers to predict a score on other measure or to predict a particular behavior of interest (Stacks & Hocking, 1999). The validity of the index has been tested by case studies conducted in individual countries, and findings generally supported this index (Braun, 2007; Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2004; Tsetsura, 2005). A higher ranking on the index means media in this country are less likely to be challenged by the media bribery problem.

Political context. Countries' democracy level and countries' postcommunist regime background are variables used to measure political context. Countries' overall democracy scores in 2003 from Marshall and Jaggers's (2008) Polity IV data were used in this study. Polity IV is composite index of democracy with a scale from -10 to 10. This index takes into consideration three essential elements of democracy: whether citizens can freely and effectively express their preference about alternative policies and leaders, whether there exist constraints on the executive power, and whether citizens enjoy civil liberties in daily life and political participation (for details, please review Data Users Manual of Marshall & Jaggers, 2008, pp. 12–14). Whether a country is a postcommunist regime is a dummy coded variable with yes $= 1$ and no $= 0$.

Economic context. The level of economic development of individual countries is measured by the 66 countries' gross national product (GNP) per capita in 2003. Data were extracted from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2009). The data are reported in constant 2003 U.S. dollars.

Cultural context. In this study, cultural context is measured with nine dummy coded variables: African, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, Latin American, Orthodox, Sinic, and Western culture. The nine cultural types were adopted from Huntington (1996). Huntington provided a map that groups countries according to their civilization types (pp. 26–27). This study follows this map and a classification list that Henderson and Tucker (2001) have elaborated from the map (p. 335).

Educational context. Educational context includes two variables: educational level of the general public and the availability of journalism programs. The spread of education is expected to reduce media bribery level. Because critical audiences generally require relatively higher education, this study adopts countries' secondary school enrollment in 2003 to measure education for the general public. Data were extracted from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2009). The availability of journalism

programs is computed by dividing the number of journalism programs of an individual country by its population. This variable is designed to measure the availability of journalism education resources and controls the potential inflation effect of some countries' large population size. To date, the most comprehensive data on the number of journalism programs in each country can be found on the World Journalism Education Council website. World Journalism Education Council made an extensive effort to identify organizations that offer journalism and mass communication education in a variety of countries (Self, 2007). The population data are extracted from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2009).

Technological context. Technological context assesses the availability of the Internet as an alternative media to the general public. Data of Internet users per 100 residents in 2003 of the 66 countries were extracted from the International Telecommunications Union's World Telecommunication Indicators Database. Internet users per 100 residents is a variable that can demonstrate the availability of the Internet in a particular country and is immune to the inflation of large population (definitions of world telecommunication/ICT indicators; International Telecommunications Union, 2009).

Analysis

To determine the impact of the aforementioned predictors on a country's level of media bribery, the following ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was proposed:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_{ip}X_{ip} + \beta_{ic}X_{ic} + \beta_{ie}X_{ie} + \beta_{in}X_{in} + \varepsilon_i$$
$$\text{(where i=1, 2, ... N, N=66)} \tag{1}$$

where i denotes countries and N denotes the number of countries. Y is the observed level of a country's level of media bribery, the β_s are matrices of parameter estimates, α is the intercept term, X_{ip} is a matrix of political context variables, X_{ic} is a matrix of economic indicators, X_{ie} is a matrix of education level indicators, and X_{in} is a matrix of new media availability indicators. ϵ_i denotes random effect error term.

RESULTS

Among the 66 countries analyzed in this study, the mean value for countries' level of media bribery is 3.20 ($SD = 1.02$). The mean value for countries'

democracy level is 6.25 ($SD = 6.00$). In this sample, 21.2% of countries are postcommunist regimes, and 78.8% countries do not have this background. Among the 66 countries, the mean value of GNP per capita is 20551.02 ($SD = 18777.09$) U.S. dollars, with Norway, Switzerland, and Denmark being the most affluent countries, and Bangladesh, Kenya, and Vietnam have the lowest GNP per capita. To reduce the skewness of the data, GDP was logged before the analysis. Western and Orthodox culture represent the largest percentages of the 66 countries in the sample, with 31.8% and 22.7%, respectively. The Islamic culture represents 12.1% of the sample, followed by Sinic culture, with 10.6%. The sample also includes 9.1% countries of Latin American culture, 6.1% countries of African culture, and 4.5% countries of Buddhist culture. Japan is the only country representing Japanese culture, and India is the only country representing Hindu culture.

Among the 66 countries, the mean value for secondary school enrollment is 82.32% ($SD = 14.02$), with Switzerland, Sweden, France, and Japan having the highest secondary school enrollment rate (99% each) and Pakistan the lowest (32%). The mean value for the number of journalism programs per 1 million residents is 1.23 ($SD = 1.69$), with Switzerland having the highest value and Vietnam having the lowest value. The mean value of Internet users per 100 residents is 32.22 ($SD = 22.15$) with Switzerland having the highest value (72.50 users per 100 residents) and Bangladesh having the lowest value (0.20 users per 100 residents).

To test the hypotheses and research questions, the analysis was divided into two parts. In the first part, the effect of each group of independent variables was tested separately with standard multiple regression (Model 1–5). This method gave the five blocks of independent variables maximum opportunities to explain variation in levels of media bribery and, therefore, avoided the issue that when all blocks of independent variables entered the equation simultaneously, some significant variables may appear unimportant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). However, it was unclear how each block of variables would behave with the presence of other blocks of variables. Hence, in the second part, through Model 6 to 9, each block of variables was entered based on Model 1. This method allowed the assessment of interaction effect among variables. Because in each model, standard multiple regression was utilized to enter variables, the sequence of entrance did not affect the evaluation of variables. Each variable was assessed based on its unique contribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Model 1 tested the effect of countries' political context (see Table 2 for details). For Model 1, and all subsequent models, each cell reported the standardized coefficient, with the standard error in parentheses. The standardized coefficient allows the comparison of the strength of relationships

TABLE 2
Standardized Coefficients from Ordinary Least Squares Regressions of the Media Bribery Index on Political, Economic, Cultural, Educational and Technological Context Variables

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Political context					
Democracy level	.669*** (.016)	—	—	—	—
Postcommunist regime	−.168*** (.226)	—	—	—	—
Economic context					
Log GNP per capita	—	.821*** (.135)	—	—	—
Cultural context					
Western	—	—	—[a]	—	—
Latin American	—	—	−.378*** (.254)	—	—
African	—	—	−.446*** (.299)	—	—
Islamic	—	—	−.721*** (.228)	—	—
Sinic	—	—	−.615*** (.239)	—	—
Hindu	—	—	−.255*** (.562)	—	—
Orthodox	—	—	−.518*** (.185)	—	—
Buddhist	—	—	−.486*** (.339)	—	—
Japanese	—	—	−.104 (.562)	—	—
Educational context					
Secondary school enrollment	—	—	—	.568*** (.007)	—
Journalism programs per 1 million residents	—	—	—	.218* (.059)	—
Technological context					
Internet users per 100 residents	—	—	—	—	.848*** (.003)
Constant	2.56 (.148)	−2.715 (.552)	4.362 (.120)	−.129 (.607)	1.937 (.123)
R^2	.494	.673	.746	.438	.719

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. GNP = gross national product.

[a] Western culture is the reference group.

*p < .05 (two-tailed test). ***p < .001 (two-tailed test).

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across IVs. H1 predicted that higher democracy level had a positive effect on reducing media bribery level. H2 predicted that the postcommunist regime background negatively associated with lower media bribery level. A standard multiple regression was performed. H1 and H2 are both supported. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(2, 60) = 29.286$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .494$, and adjusted $R^2 = .477$. Together, these two political context variables accounted for 49.4% of the variance of a country's level of media bribery. Democracy level had a positive and significant effect on reducing a country's level of media bribery, standardized coefficient = .669, $t(64) = 7.26$, $p < .001$. The postcommunist regime background was significantly and negatively associated with lower level of media bribery, standardized coefficient = $-$ .168, $t(64) = 7.26$, $p < .001$.

Model 2 tested the effect of countries' economic context (see Table 2 for details). RQ1 required assessing the relationship between economic development and countries' level of media bribery. An OLS regression was performed. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(1, 58) = 117.569$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .673$, and adjusted $R^2 = .668$. The logged GNP per capita accounted for 67.3% of the variance of countries' level of media bribery. Economic development positively and significantly contributed to reducing a country's level of media bribery, standardized coefficient = .821, $t(56) = 710.843$, $p < .001$.

Model 3 tested the effect of countries' cultural context (see Table 2 for details). RQ2 required testing the relationship between cultural context and media bribery level. A standard multiple regression was performed. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(9, 56) = 20.935$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .746$, and adjusted $R^2 = .710$. Because culture types were entered into the equation as dummy variables, Western culture was chosen by SPSS as the reference group. The coefficients for other dummy variable represented the estimated difference in intercepts between that group and the reference group (Pedhazur, 1997). The analysis showed that when compared with the Western culture, except the Japanese culture, other culture contexts were significantly more likely than the Western culture to experience bribery for news coverage.

Model 4 tested the effect of educational context (see Table 2 for details). H3 and H4 predicted that citizens' level of education and the availability of journalism programs contribute to reducing the level of media bribery. A standard multiple regression was performed. H3 and H4 were both supported. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(2, 53) = 20.693$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .438$, and adjusted $R^2 = .417$. These educational context variables accounted for 43.8% of the variance of a country's level of media bribery. Secondary school enrollment positively and significantly associates with a country's level of media bribery, standardized

coefficient $= .568$, $t(64) = 5.294$, $p < .001$. The availability of journalism programs also significantly reduced a country's level of media bribery, standardized coefficient $= .218$, $t(64) = 2.030$, $p < .05$.

Model 5 tested the effect of countries' technological context (see Table 2 for details). H5 predicted that Internet availability had a significant influence over reducing the media bribery level. H5 was supported. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(1, 62) = 158.295$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .719$, and adjusted $R^2 = .714$. A country's Internet availability had a positive and significant influence over reducing a country's level of media bribery, standardized coefficient $= .848$, $t(64) = 12.582$, $p < .001$.

Except the Japanese culture, all variables achieved statistical significance. However, it was unclear whether variables that exhibited significant effects could remain influential when other variables were in the equation. The following series of standard multiple regression tests were performed to address this issue.

Model 6 entered the two political context variables and the economic context variable simultaneously into the equation (see Table 3 for details). When compared with Model 1, the test showed that the presence of the logged GNP per capita reduced the significance of the postcommunist regime variable, and rendered it insignificant. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(3, 55) = 77.06$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .808$, and adjusted $R^2 = .797$. This finding suggested that the effect of the postcommunist regime had an indirect effect on media bribery and its effect on the dependent variable was largely a function of a country's economic condition and democracy level.

Model 7 kept the significant variables from Model 6 and simultaneously entered the nine cultural variables into the equation. The postcommunist regime variable was dropped from this analysis because its p value is above .10 (not even weakly significant). This step helped reduce the number of independent variables, increased the degrees of freedom, and kept the variables with the most explanatory power (Pedhazur, 1997). Culture types were entered into the equation as dummy variables. The presence of dummy variables did not affect the interpretation of other variables in the same equation (Pedhazur, 1997). R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(10, 48) = 33.97$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .876$, and adjusted $R^2 = .850$. Democracy and economic condition still exhibited strong influence on the dependent variable in this equation. The coefficients indicated that, compared to Western culture, other culture types have a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing the phenomenon of cash-for-news.

Model 8 kept the significant variables from Model 7 and simultaneously entered the educational variables into the equation. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(11, 42) = 29.519$, $p < .001$, with

TABLE 3
Standardized Coefficients From Ordinary Least Squares Regressions of the Media Bribery
Index on Political, Economic, Cultural, Educational, and Technological Context Variables

Independent Variables	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Political context				
Democracy level	.401*** (.012)	.305** (.017)	.315** (.019)	.248* (.017)
Postcommunist regime	−.058 (.147)	–	–	–
Economic context				
Log GNP per capita	.631*** (.120)	.389*** (.171)	.366** (.201)	.181 (.204)
Cultural context				
Western	–	–[a]	–	–
Latin American	–	−.195** (.231)	−.229** (.232)	-.108 (.427)
African	–	−.213** (.300)	−.261** (.303)	−.166 (.264)
Islamic	–	−.275** (.281)	−.321** (.288)	−.247* (.261)
Sinic	–	−.280*** (.270)	−.187** (.303)	−.204** (.250)
Hindu	–	−.116 (.492)	–	–
Orthodox	–	−.299*** (.170)	−.310*** (.174)	−.228** (.152)
Buddhist	–	−.250** (.339)	−.276** (.340)	−.202* (.293)
Japanese	–	−.106* (.412)	−.089 (.394)	–
Educational context				
Secondary school enrollment	–	–	−.097 (.007)	–
Journalism programs per 1 million residents	–	–	.143* (.032)	.114 (.033)
Technological context				
Internet users per 100 residents	–	–	–	.363* (.006)
Constant	−1.803 (.467)	.594 (.732)	1.198 (.784)	1.241 (.708)
R^2	.808	.876	.885	.893

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. GNP = gross national product.
[a]Western culture is the reference group.
*$p < .05$ (two-tailed test). **$p < .01$ (two-tailed test). ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed test).

$R^2 = .885$, and adjusted $R^2 = .855$. Democracy and economic condition still exhibited strong influence on the dependent variable. When compared with Western culture, other culture types still were more likely to experience bribery for news coverage. When compared with Model 4, secondary school enrollment did not exhibit a significant effect in this equation, but journalism education still moderately significantly affected the dependent variable. Further, the presence of educational variables enhanced the explanatory power of culture variables. This finding suggested that the effect of secondary education is closely associated with culture types. Meanwhile, journalism education in general was effective in terms of preventing unethical journalism practice.

Model 9 kept the significant variables from Model 8, and also simultaneously entered the Internet availability into the equation. *R* for

regression was significantly different from zero, $F(11, 47) = 39.735$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .903$, and adjusted $R^2 = .880$. The test showed that entering Internet availability reduced the significance of the logged GNP per capita, culture type variables, and the journalism program availability. This finding suggested that Internet availability may mediate the effect of the aforementioned variables.

To summarize, the regression analysis uncovered a rich array of direct and indirect effects. When entered separately, the five blocks of variables all significantly influenced the dependent variable. With the presence of multiple groups of variables, the effect of democracy level, cultural context remained substantial and significant across conditions. The effect of postcommunist regime was mediated by democracy and economic context. The effect of economic context tended to be significant in most models but was strongly mediated by Internet availability. This may due to the strong correlation between these two variables ($r = .881$, $p < .001$). With the presence of culture context, as shown in Model 8, the effect of secondary school enrollment was no longer significant, but journalism program availability still exhibited a moderately significant impact on a country's media bribery level. Internet availability also demonstrated an interesting effect in the analysis. As shown in Model 9, the presence of the Internet availability reduced the importance of other variables, and remained significant with the presence of all other significant variables.

DISCUSSION

This study pooled data from 66 countries and incorporated multiple blocks of variables including political, economic, cultural, educational, and technological contexts and therefore provided a broad picture of the influence of macrolevel factors on the international media bribery level. Findings from the analysis revealed the underlying connection between structural factors and one type of unethical journalism practice. The long-term solution to this cash-for-news issue may require broader cooperation from different institutions of societies. More specifically, five important findings emerged from the study that deserve further discussion.

The Significant Effect of Democracy and the Ambiguous Role of Postcommunist Background

First, the findings revealed the strong and positive relationship between countries' democracy level and the media bribery phenomenon. This finding makes intuitive sense and is consistent with the literature (Hallin & Mancini,

2004), and it suggests that ethical journalism practice and democracy could reinforce each other.

Consistent with findings of previous media bribery research (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009), when only the two political context variables entered the equation, postcommunist regime strongly associated with higher media bribery level. However, as the literature suggested, the current media bribery problem in former communist countries has profound political and economic causes. Further analysis showed that the association of postcommunist background with higher media bribery level can be mediated by the development of democracy and economy. This finding implies an encouraging message that the progress in terms of the institutionalization of democracy and economic development in former communist countries may help reduce the widespread existence of unethical journalism practice. Future studies could compare if there exist less bribery for news coverage in postcommunist countries with better institutionalized democracy and more prosperous economy than in postcommunist countries having less success with democracy and economic development.

The Overall Positive Effect of Economic Development

Second, although it is unclear in the literature whether the economic development helps reduce media bribery, the analysis suggested that, in general, a more prosperous economic condition exhibited a positive effect on reducing media bribery level. This effect may be due to the fact that the development of market economy by nature requires and facilitates the free flow of information. At a certain level, economic development may introduce large corporations that have a strong influence over media. But in the long run, a prosperous economy may also produce more competition, and therefore reduce advertisers' control over news media.

The Profound Influence of Culture

Third, cultural influence is relatively less studied in previous media bribery literature. However, this analysis revealed a profound influence of culture. The significant influence of culture remains consistent across models. Further, when compared with the Western culture, all the other nine culture types are more likely to experience media bribery. Since Huntington's (1996) culture typology largely is based on religion, this finding suggests that different religious systems may contain doctrines that either encourage or discourage the bribery for news coverage. It is possible that in different cultural contexts, certain journalism models are more acceptable than others. For example, the social responsibility model is widely accepted by

countries with Western culture (Nerone, 1995), In contrast, in countries with typical Sinic culture (e.g., China), news coverage is more likely to be influenced by interpersonal relationships and gift-giving (Yang & Veil, 2010). Himelboim and Limor (in press) pointed out that in the Western journalism literature, the differences in cultures and traditions among countries, especially with regard to Asian countries, are often ignored. This finding proposes a new angle to study journalism practice in different cultural contexts. Future research could reveal more detailed information about the connections between cultures and journalism models and provide suggestions to improve journalism practice based on specific cultural context.

The Salient Effect of Journalism Education

Fourth, the finding suggests that journalism program availability has a more significant impact on media bribery level than secondary school enrollment. This finding has twofold implications. First, this finding revealed an encouraging message for journalism educators. Second, this finding suggests that for countries in which the phenomenon of media bribery is highly likely to exist, more direct investment in their journalism programs might significantly reduce the media bribery level. This finding also provides feasible suggestions for policymakers and international assistance institutions that aim at improving developing countries' transparent information system.

The Important Role of the Internet Availability

The role of Internet availability in promoting ethical journalism practice has rarely been studied. The study uncovered the significant impact of Internet availability on the media bribery level. Nevertheless, exactly how the Internet availability affects the media bribery level is unclear. More intensive research should be conducted in this area. The Internet is now penetrating different areas and nation states. The positive and significant effect of the Internet might provide an alternative solution to some countries' media bribery problems.

To sum up, it is important to discuss the media bribery problem beyond the framework of journalism ethics. This study confirms that sociopolitical, historical, and contextual factors profoundly influence journalism practice. This shift of analytic framework also reveals more practical solutions to the media bribery problem, especially for developing countries. To improve journalism practice, advocacy for democracy and economic development may provide fundamental impetus. Journalism programs and the wide adaptation of the Internet have the potential to reduce journalism corruption. For governments and organizations that intend to combat the media bribery

problem, a deep understanding of how each category of variables functions may provide guideline for both long-term and short-term strategies.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically, this research challenged the intuitive view that bribery for news coverage is mostly an issue of journalists' integrity and uncovered the profound socioeconomic causes of the problem. Methodologically, multiple macrolevel factors were incorporated in the research, and the analysis showed that media bribery level is affected by the unequal development of countries' democracy, economics, education, technological availability, and countries' cultural context. This study showed that a fundamental change of the current situation requires extensive time and effort. Meanwhile, findings also revealed that there are multiple approaches to the solution of the media bribery issue.

This research does have shortcomings. Limited by the available data, the media bribery phenomenon is treated as a dependent variable, which is assumed to reflect the influence from social structure. But as Hallin and Mancini (2004) argued, features of media may also have an impact on other social institutions. The dynamic interactive effect between social structure and media bribery is omitted in this research. Future study may further investigate the interaction effect with data collected from multiple time points or at a larger scale.

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