



Investigative Journalism And The Problematic Nature Of Accuracy And News Scoops

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine one of the most significant journalistic genres due to its crucial role in tracking events and conveying reality in an objective and balanced manner. By adhering to a systematic methodology and verifying information, investigative journalism seeks to expose corruption and inform public opinion. This study focuses on the ethical considerations of investigative journalism, particularly the distinction between accuracy and exclusivity, as well as the ethical dilemmas surrounding the use of certain methods to access sources of information—such as using false identities, hidden cameras, and other techniques employed to uncover the truth. The findings indicate that investigative journalism is both an open and high-risk platform, requiring journalists to uphold ethical standards, engage in self-accountability, and critically assess ethical questions throughout their investigative processes. This is particularly important given that the public relies on the media as the "fourth estate" to reveal what happens behind the scenes.

Keywords: Investigative journalism, journalistic investigation, social responsibility.

Introduction:

Investigative journalism emerged alongside the evolution of journalism as a discipline, gradually shifting its focus toward highlighting and scrutinizing specific societal issues—particularly instances of corruption and misconduct. As a result, investigative journalists have often been labeled as "corruption seekers." Their work relies on in-depth journalistic inquiries based on official documents and subject to expert review. Investigative journalism has played a pivotal role in numerous reforms, particularly in Western societies.

Journalistic investigation is one of the most esteemed and impactful functions of the press, often referred to as the "fourth estate." Compared to the general flow of news and information disseminated by the media, investigative journalism goes beyond the surface of publicly available content to uncover hidden truths. It aims to provide insightful and valuable information that ultimately contributes to raising public awareness.

Unlike conventional reporting, which primarily conveys officially disclosed or readily available information, investigative journalism ventures into concealed or restricted areas of knowledge. Not all truths are pleasant, and some are deliberately obscured by authorities to prevent public scrutiny. Investigative journalism, however, challenges this dynamic by uncovering and exposing these

realities. Whether related to politics, economics, or various aspects of social life, investigative reporting significantly contributes to societal development and improvement.

Research indicates a direct correlation between the existence of a free press and the prevalence of investigative journalism on the one hand, and the reduction or absence of corruption on the other. The ten most corrupt nations are typically those with little to no press freedom, whereas countries with minimal corruption tend to have a thriving free press where investigative journalists perform their duties effectively.

Public trust in journalism grows when people perceive it as a tool for exposing corruption and systemic failures. The greater their confidence in its role, the more support they provide to maintain its oversight function. Conversely, when the press relinquishes its watchdog role and becomes complacent—merely echoing government narratives—public disillusionment sets in, leading to declining credibility and disengagement.

One of the prevailing assertions among officials is that the press and the government share a common cause. While this statement may appear agreeable, it is often misleading. A truly independent press cannot be entirely aligned with the government. The relationship between investigative journalists and official sources may at times require close engagement, but this should not translate into subordination or dependency. Maintaining professional proximity to sources should never compromise journalistic integrity. The journalist's ultimate duty is to serve the truth, uphold their responsibility to readers, and prioritize the public interest.

Algeria, a country undergoing profound economic, social, political, and cultural transformations, is in dire need of robust investigative journalism. With ongoing discussions about political renewal, anti-corruption measures, and shifts in governance practices, the role of investigative journalism becomes increasingly vital. The media must undertake in-depth investigative work to uncover hidden realities and expose major financial, economic, environmental, and social issues. Such investigative efforts are imperative for advancing reform, fostering transparency, and guiding the country's political and economic elites toward greater accountability.

This raises a fundamental question: To what extent does investigative journalism exist in Algeria? And how can journalists ensure accuracy and ethical integrity while pursuing exclusivity in reporting?

1. Concept Definition

A. Investigative Journalism

1. Linguistic Definition of Investigation

The term "investigation" in Arabic originates from the root meaning "to trace" or "to pursue," implying a thorough examination of details. The prefix "**Ist**" in Arabic denotes a request or pursuit of

something, indicating that "**Istiqsā**" (investigation) refers to an in-depth search, following leads, and uncovering hidden or distant aspects of a matter¹.

2. Conceptual Definition of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism has been defined in various ways, reflecting its depth and methodological rigor. One widely accepted definition states:

"Investigative journalism involves uncovering hidden matters of public interest, whether intentionally concealed by individuals in positions of power or obscured within a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that make them difficult to discern. This process requires accessing both confidential and publicly available sources of information and documents."²

David Kaplan defines investigative journalism as:

"A structured approach to intuition that demands deep inquiry and firsthand research by the journalist. Beyond traditional reporting, investigative journalism employs a scientific method, where journalists formulate hypotheses, test their validity, verify facts, unearth hidden truths, and uphold social justice and accountability. It also relies extensively on publicly available data and recorded information."³

To fully grasp the essence of investigative journalism, Kaplan also clarifies what does not qualify as investigative reporting. He categorizes four key aspects that differentiate investigative journalism from other journalistic practices:

- Investigative journalism is not leak-based journalism: Receiving a file from an influential official source, rewriting it, and publishing it on the same day does not fall under investigative journalism.
- Investigative journalism is not specialized journalism: It requires in-depth research, whereas specialized journalists use investigative techniques.
- Investigative journalism is not merely critical journalism: Investigative reports take weeks, months, or even years to complete. While they may contain elements of criticism, simply writing an article that requires extensive research and critique does not constitute investigative journalism.
- Investigative journalism is not crime and corruption reporting: Covering topics such as education, abuse of power, financial misconduct, or remarkable business stories does not equate to investigative journalism. A journalist specializing in crime and corruption reporting is not necessarily practicing investigative journalism.

¹ Al-Hasan, A. (2009). *The role of investigative journalism in combating financial and administrative corruption and organized crime* (p. 6). Independent School of Journalism Publications.

² Hunter, M. (2009). *ARIJ guide to Arab investigative journalism* (G. Masoud, Trans.). Supported by UNESCO-Paris. Jordan. (p. 17).

³ Al-Sharafi, M. S. (2015). *The reality of investigative journalism in Palestinian newspapers* (Master's thesis, Faculty of Journalism, Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine). (p. 55).

Based on these definitions, an operational definition of investigative journalism can be formulated: Investigative journalism involves in-depth coverage of issues of public interest, uncovering information previously undisclosed, and presenting it to the public through scientific research methods. Its ultimate goal is to improve individuals' lives and serve the public good⁴.

B. Investigative Reporting

Linguistic Definition: The term “investigation” in both Arabic and English encompasses at least two levels of meaning: a general or lexical meaning and a terminological meaning associated with modern journalism. It has become a prominent form of editorial content, as the Arabic term is a direct translation of the English word investigation.

There is no significant gap between the legal and journalistic meanings of the term. In Arabic, "to investigate" means to verify and authenticate something, while "to ascertain" means to confirm its validity. The term "truth" refers to something established with certainty. These fundamental principles are essential in investigative reporting, which aims to seek the truth and establish verifiable facts concerning issues of public concern⁵.

Terminologically:

Journalistic investigation is based on a news item, idea, problem, or issue that the journalist identifies within their community. The journalist then collects relevant data, information, and opinions and integrates them to arrive at a solution they consider suitable for addressing the problem, issue, or idea presented in the investigation⁶.

A journalistic investigation explains, interprets, and examines the social, economic, political, or intellectual factors underlying the news, issue, problem, idea, or phenomenon it explores⁷. The investigation's subject should be of significance to the widest possible audience and should either present a novel idea or offer a new approach if it addresses a previously covered topic⁸.

In the field of journalism, there are two main types of investigations. The first is referred to as journalistic investigation or reportage, which is the most common type in Arab journalism. The second is investigative reporting, defined as a deliberate media effort—through words, images, or both—aimed at uncovering an illegal act or activity that certain entities have an interest in concealing or suppressing.

Journalistic Investigation or Reportage: The first concept, which is widely prevalent in Arab journalism, is reportage, often also termed investigation. A fundamental premise of this form of investigative reporting is the presence of an illegal incident, practice, or act—one that contradicts societal interests or is, at the very least, deemed unacceptable by the majority. Journalism, as part of

⁴ Mohammad Saber Al-Sharafi, previously cited reference, pp. 55–57.

⁵ Nabil Haddad, *On Journalistic Writing: Features, Skills, Forms, and Issues*, Al-Kindi Publishing House, Jordan, 1st ed., 2002, p. 195.

⁶ Farouk Abu Zaid. (1990). *The Art of Journalistic Writing* (4th ed.). Alam Al-Kutub. p. 93.

⁷ Hamza, A. L. (1957). *Introduction to the Art of Journalistic Editing* (1st ed.). Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi. p. 247.

⁸ Ibrahim, I. (1998). *The art of journalistic editing: Theory and practice* (1st ed.). Dar Al-Fajr.

its social responsibility, must expose such practices, as safeguarding citizens' rights and defending their interests is an ethical and national duty.

A second essential criterion for investigative reporting is the existence of a party with a vested interest in keeping such misconduct hidden, often resisting any attempts at exposure. Revealing the truth inevitably leads to holding those responsible for wrongdoing accountable. In this way, journalism solidifies its role as the fourth estate, guarding public interests and exposing those who infringe upon citizens' rights. For instance, news reports on the spread of measles across various southern Algerian provinces, coupled with reports suggesting that expired vaccines were administered, could serve as the foundation for a comprehensive investigative report addressing the key question: Who is responsible for this?

A third and final criterion for investigative reporting is that the story must be the result of diligent journalistic inquiry and field investigation conducted by a reporter. In other words, it must be a structured journalistic effort, involving intentional research and thorough investigative work. Only when all three conditions are met does the report qualify as a true investigative piece in the scientific and professional sense.

It is noteworthy that what is commonly labeled as journalistic investigation in Arab media often lacks these three essential criteria. Frequently, the term is used to describe reports that do not necessarily expose illegal practices but rather summarize and analyze previously published news items, making them closer to journalistic reports than to actual investigative journalism⁹.

Investigative Reporting

Dr. Al-Sharif argues that this type of journalism is not independent of regular journalistic activities; rather, it complements them. It is essentially an extension of the same tools and skills that journalists use in their daily work. However, investigative journalism requires more time, deeper inquiry, and a more comprehensive examination of a news story. It also demands a greater understanding of the hidden aspects of a subject and the skill to overcome obstacles that may arise when uncovering the full dimensions of a story, both during the investigative process and after its publication.

Since daily journalism is often a rapid response to events, involving a continuous race to cover immediate news, an investigative journalist must possess the ability to reflect, work methodically, and operate discreetly—away from the pressures of daily publication deadlines. These deadlines often compel journalists to present stories in a superficial or rushed manner.

One of the key characteristics of investigative journalism is its role in uncovering what individuals or entities attempt to conceal. The defining feature here is that someone is trying to hide the truth, while investigative journalism seeks to reveal it. This type of journalism is built on three fundamental principles.

⁹ Nabil Haddad, previously cited reference, p. 201.

First, an investigative news story must be based on the journalist's independent effort, stemming from their own research and inquiry. Second, the subject of investigation should be of direct concern to readers, viewers, or the broader audience. It must address real societal issues and concerns rather than being merely entertainment-focused or philosophical in nature.

The third principle is the presence of an individual or entity attempting to conceal information, alongside a journalist striving to uncover the hidden truth. Notably, investigative journalism places strong emphasis on the journalist's autonomy in gathering information.

It is important to highlight that merely receiving pre-prepared reports or files does not qualify as investigative journalism. A journalist must exert personal effort in conducting research and defining the scope of the investigation without external influence. The primary goal of investigative journalism is to foster public awareness, ultimately leading to the resolution of societal imbalances or the cessation of rights violations. Rather than directly instigating change, the journalist aims to cultivate awareness that, in turn, prompts action against corruption and injustice¹⁰.

It can be stated that investigative journalism fulfills the fundamental functions of the media. First, investigative reporting disseminates facts and new information to readers. Second, it serves the journalistic function of interpreting the news by analyzing events and explaining their social, economic, and political implications. Third, investigative journalism fulfills the role of guidance and advocacy by addressing societal issues and exploring potential solutions.

Social life itself provides the investigative journalist with subjects to write about. Topics are often derived from significant news articles published in newspapers and magazines or from conversations and journalistic essays. Additionally, personal observation, combined with the journalist's social experiences, frequently serves as a crucial source for investigative reporting. Moreover, documents, reports, and important studies that the journalist comes across can also be valuable sources¹¹.

C. The Social Responsibility of Investigative Journalism

Responsibility may refer to a specific duty that an individual must fulfill, such as a journalist's responsibility for their role. It can also pertain to the obligation of one individual toward another, such as the editor-in-chief's responsibility for journalists within a media organization. Furthermore, responsibility encompasses the capacity to make decisions and act independently without external oversight¹².

In response to the excesses of journalism under the libertarian theory—which emerged in the media landscape of the United States and Western Europe—concerns grew over sensationalism and the misuse of press freedom. Consequently, the concept of "freedom with responsibility" gained

¹⁰ Nabil Al-Sharif, *Investigative Journalism*, Al-Ufuq Center, Jordan, 1st ed., 1997, p. 9.

¹¹ Farouk Abu Zaid, previously cited reference, p. 94.

¹² Mohamed Hossam El-Din, *The Social Responsibility of Journalism*, Egyptian Lebanese House, Egypt, 1st ed., 2003, p. 121.

prominence, leading to the establishment of regulations and ethical standards that positioned public opinion as a watchdog over journalistic conduct¹³.

Advocates of this theory argue that freedom is both a right and a duty, as well as a responsibility. Within this framework, the media must facilitate open and free discussions on all matters of public interest. Furthermore, the media bear the responsibility of enlightening the public with facts and figures, enabling informed and balanced judgments on public affairs. Additionally, the press is tasked with monitoring the actions of governments, corporations, and public institutions to safeguard the interests of individuals and communities¹⁴.

The media, according to the social responsibility theory, is free from all forms of coercion, though it is not entirely devoid of pressure. It operates with the freedom necessary to fulfill its objectives, which align with the needs of society¹⁵.

Denis Elliott classifies media responsibility into three categories:

1. The journalist's responsibility toward the general public: This is realized through providing information while ensuring no harm is inflicted on others.
2. The journalist's responsibility toward the local community: This extends from the first category and involves publishing content that aligns with public expectations, informing people about matters that serve their present and future interests, and delivering this message in a manner that maintains public trust in journalism and media.
3. The journalist's responsibility toward themselves: This requires fulfilling their media role with maximum accuracy, honesty, and objectivity in pursuit of societal well-being.

There are professional traditions that journalists must uphold to ensure responsibility in their reporting. These traditions distinguish high-quality investigative journalism from poor reporting and include accuracy, objectivity, honesty, and integrity.

- **Honesty** is the most fundamental of these values, serving as the foundation of investigative journalism. A journalist's honesty must extend beyond interactions with sources and audiences to include personal integrity. There are three levels of honesty required from journalists :
 - **Honesty in actions:** representing the outward dimension of journalistic practice.
 - **Honesty in words:** ensuring that journalists report only the truth.
 - **Intrinsic honesty:** involving sincerity in purpose, reflecting deep conviction and commitment to the profession. Without this, a journalist may engage in flattery, insincerity, or opportunism.
- **Accuracy** demands that every statement, name, date, source quotation, and visual representation in an investigative report be correct. Clarity is equally essential to avoid

¹³ Abdel Latif Hamza, *Media: Its History and Doctrines*, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 1965, p. 120.

¹⁴ Mohamed Sayed Mohamed, *Media Responsibility in Islam*, National Book Institution, Algeria, 1986, p. 216.

¹⁵ Ramadan Abdel-Meguid, *The Concept of Social Responsibility in Media*, *Notebooks of Politics and Law Journal*, Issue 9, June 2013, p. 367.

ambiguity. Accuracy encompasses not only factual correctness but also the truthful portrayal of the broader context by synthesizing all details cohesively.

Accuracy complements truthfulness in journalism. However, several factors can lead to inaccuracy, as identified by Newson:

- Pressures from newspaper deadlines that force journalists to rush their work.
- Insufficient background knowledge among reporters on investigative topics.
- The pursuit of exclusivity and fame.
- A lack of diligence in verifying investigative information from multiple sources¹⁶.

2. Ethics of Investigative Journalism

Journalism is a powerful tool in the hands of journalists, capable of inflicting significant harm on individuals by tarnishing their reputations, inciting public opinion, and even influencing government authorities. The potential damage increases with the reach and impact of the media outlet.

Kurt Ludtke, a former editor at the Detroit Free Press, once remarked that journalists, despite their critical informational role, are often seen as error-seekers driven by personal whims, whose fairness and honesty cannot always be guaranteed. While these accusations may be severe and subject to debate, they are not entirely unfounded, particularly when voiced by an experienced journalist.

Similarly, Mike O'Neill, editor of the New York Daily News, criticized journalism's adversarial stance toward the government, stating: "The tendency of the Fourth Estate has leaned more towards restraining authority than embracing a reasonable increase in responsibility. The government is no longer viewed with the healthy skepticism it deserves but rather treated as an adversary. Government officials are often portrayed as targets for attack, with journalists frequently engaging in exposés that publicly shame them and their families. Have journalists become so cynical and hardened by their exposure to deceit that they no longer consider the emotional toll on officials and their families when they are torn apart in newspapers and on television screens?"

Renowned Egyptian journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal also acknowledged this issue, writing in one of his columns: "Unfortunately, we—members of the press—wield immense power to hold people accountable, yet we prevent them from holding us accountable. We have the privilege of critiquing others while denying them the same right over us, as we control what gets published and what reaches the readers' eyes."¹⁷

A. Credibility in Investigative Journalism

Fabrication of Lies

¹⁶ Mohamed Hossam El-Din, previously cited reference, p. 121.

¹⁷ Majid Ragheb Al-Halou. (2006). *Media and Law*. First Edition. Dar Al-Ma'arif, Alexandria, Egypt, p. 118.

Some journalists do not hesitate to fabricate events and sensational stories to generate public outcry and benefit financially or professionally. Ensuring the accuracy of news before publication is a fundamental journalistic principle across all societies. However, the prevalence of false news in Arabic newspapers has led to the phrase "kalam jarayed" (newspaper talk) becoming synonymous with lies, nonsense, or at best, dubious information.

Many journalists have admitted to fabricating stories. American journalist Ben Hecht, in his autobiography, confessed that the stories he published in the Chicago Daily Journal were entirely fictional, designed to secure exclusives. When his deception was exposed, he was suspended for a week without pay. He then vowed to become an honest journalist.

A 2004 American study revealed that lying had become widespread in U.S. newspapers to the extent that readers rarely bothered to challenge inaccuracies, believing that editors deliberately published falsehoods. This problem extends even to major newspapers. The New York Times uncovered that one of its prominent journalists had fabricated news and invented interviews for years. He would claim to have conducted interviews in distant locations he had never visited, relying instead on analyzing photographs to craft descriptions. His deception was only exposed when the families of American soldiers killed or wounded in the 2003 Iraq invasion denied ever speaking to him, challenging quotes falsely attributed to them in the newspaper¹⁸.

Rumors and War

Even democratic governments do not hesitate to use the media as a weapon of war alongside traditional material weaponry. They engage in spreading fabrications and falsehoods that support their policies and influence public opinion in their favor. Lies have been used to justify wars for centuries. For instance, American officials claimed that Iraq had attempted to purchase nuclear materials in violation of United Nations resolutions. To substantiate this claim, the U.S. Secretary of State presented a document that was later revealed to be an obvious forgery, as it was written on Nigerien government letterheads that had ceased to exist years before the alleged date of the document.

On September 7, 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that Iraq was only six months away from producing a nuclear bomb in 1998. He attributed this claim to a report supposedly issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, when it was confirmed that no such report had ever been published, the official spokesperson later claimed that the President had actually meant 1991. When this too was proven false, they then attempted to attribute the information to The Times (UK) and The New York Times (USA), even though neither newspaper had published anything of the sort.

When U.S. and British forces invaded Iraq in March 2003, their media outlets justified the invasion by asserting that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. However, this claim was never corroborated by United Nations inspectors, who had spent months searching for such weapons in Iraq. Ultimately, no weapons were found, even though such arsenals were known to exist in Israel

¹⁸ Majid Ragheb Al-Halou, *Op. cit.*, p. 119.

without international scrutiny. The invasion was also framed as a mission to liberate Iraqis from oppressive rulers, with expectations that the Iraqi people would welcome the invaders with flowers and banners. Instead, they were met with armed resistance¹⁹.

Fabrication and Distortion in War Reporting

The dangers of war and the risks associated with journalists reporting from battlefields often lead to the distortion of facts. Some journalists resort to fabricating stories or relying on unverified rumors rather than risking their lives by reporting firsthand from conflict zones. However, this does not overshadow the courage of other journalists who place themselves in the heart of battle, interacting directly with combatants to provide their media outlets with firsthand accounts of events. These journalists often face greater dangers than soldiers themselves, as they are unarmed and rely solely on their pens, voice recorders, and cameras as tools of their profession.

Selective Reporting of News

Journalists play a crucial role in selecting the news that reaches the public. The audience has little influence over which events are reported or how they are framed. As Kurt Luedtke, former managing editor of the Detroit Free Press, stated to American publishers:

"There is no such thing as the public's right to know. You created that notion without ever defining what exactly the public has a right to know. The public knows only what you choose for them to know—nothing more, nothing less. And if the public indeed has a right to know, then it should also have a say in what you choose to label as news."

In the modern era, journalists are no longer merely conveyors of news from its sources to the public. Their role has significantly evolved to the extent that they have been described as "arbiters of truth." A well-known American newspaper that covered the Vietnam War in the late 1960s stated: "We had generals who would pull us aside and say, 'Be aware that everything we told you today about military achievements was incorrect.' Suddenly, our role was not just to prepare investigative reports but also to determine what was true and what was false." Thus, journalists have become the judges of truth in an increasingly complex world, where unquestionable facts are scarce and objectivity is no longer easily attainable. Additionally, journalists now undertake diplomatic functions, leading some to refer to them as the "new diplomats." They engage in negotiations with hostages and captors, transmit messages to heads of state, and communicate with the public²⁰.

First: Manipulation of Facts Through Editing

Journalists may conduct extensive and in-depth interviews with key individuals, yet only broadcast a selectively edited version that reduces hours of discussion to mere minutes or even seconds. These edited clips are often chosen in a way that portrays the interviewee as trivial, deceitful, or untrustworthy. Through selective editing, certain statements are taken out of context, while the

¹⁹ Hassan Ragab, "The Technology of Lies in the Gulf War," article published in *Al-Akhbar* (Egyptian newspaper), March 30, 2003.

²⁰ Majid Ragheb Al-Halou, previously cited source, p. 119.

remainder of the interview is concealed from the audience. This deceptive form of montage results in a presentation that lacks objectivity and integrity, ultimately producing an emotionally charged statement designed to provoke public sentiment. Such manipulative techniques are often used to steer public opinion in favor of or against a particular issue.

Second: Personal Commentary by Journalists

Journalists may go beyond objective reporting by incorporating personal commentary into their coverage. They may interpret events, assess their significance, or speculate on the perspectives of those affected. In some cases, they might even report details of an event without proper verification, only for the inaccuracies to be exposed later. This tendency is particularly evident in unexpected incidents that demand immediate coverage, such as the assassination of presidents or prominent figures.

Moreover, the competitive nature of journalism and media organizations often pressures journalists to rush news coverage and publish investigative reports prematurely. This urgency can lead to the dissemination of inaccurate or biased information, making reports less objective and more influenced by personal opinions or media propaganda.

Third: Sensationalism in Journalism

Investigative journalism should adhere to ethical constraints. However, in practice, these principles are frequently disregarded. News and images are often published with the primary goal of generating sensationalism, increasing readership, or attracting audiences. Such reporting may result in deception, distortion of facts, and the deliberate propagation of falsehoods to serve specific interests at the expense of others.

Many media professionals have overlooked the relationship between freedom and social responsibility. Media freedom must be exercised within its proper boundaries; when exceeded, it can infringe upon rights and freedoms. In times of crisis, media outlets, particularly digital platforms, often resort to fear-mongering and sensationalism, exploiting public anxiety to maximize engagement.

Fourth: The Rise of Commercialism

The majority of media outlets worldwide have become commercial enterprises that sell words, ideas, and news, with the primary goal of generating profit. A newspaper loses public trust if readers sense that its sole objective is financial gain. The American press has played a significant role in exposing major scandals, such as Watergate, the Monica Lewinsky affair, and the Iraq War.

Some American journalism experts recommend separating the commercial aspect from editorial work and adhering to professional integrity, which requires journalists to uphold ethical principles—even if it means bearing the consequences rather than seeking rewards²¹.

Fifth: Avoiding Media Bribery

It is not uncommon for journalists to receive bribes from interested parties, particularly in exchange for favorable investigative reports that promote business ventures for the sake of publicity and reputation, often at the expense of objectivity and the public interest.

3. The Social Responsibility of Investigative Journalism: "Truth Before Exclusivity"

Balancing speed and accuracy is no easy task, especially when dealing with complex and challenging issues. While speed is often necessary, it should never come at the expense of accuracy. Timeliness is crucial because it determines a journalist's ability to break news ahead of competitors, but accuracy is even more important, as it reflects integrity and credibility.

This does not mean that achieving both speed and accuracy, or balancing exclusivity with truth, is impossible—it is simply difficult in most cases. Accuracy requires careful and deliberate action rather than haste. A journalist who rushes to be the first to report a story may encounter serious consequences, sometimes leading to regret. Many misunderstandings arise from hurried communication, where words may be unclear, let alone the meanings and implications behind them.

The relationship between journalistic exclusivity and truth, or between speed and accuracy, is a prime example of this challenge. Every journalist aspires to break an exclusive story that advances their career. In pursuit of this goal, they investigate, search, and uncover hidden facts, hoping to reveal a public issue before anyone else does. Such exclusivity could be a career-defining moment that elevates their reputation and professional standing.

The concept of journalistic exclusivity has fundamental principles and rules. Not every news item obtained by a reporter before others qualifies as an exclusive, nor does publishing an interview in one newspaper before another necessarily constitute a scoop. With the increasing confusion of concepts, journalistic exclusivity has become an ambiguous term frequently misused. It is common to hear claims of a major journalistic scoop from amateur or inexperienced journalists who believe that gathering information behind the scenes or having exclusive coverage of an event constitutes a scoop. This misunderstanding highlights the frequent misuse of the term, as true journalistic exclusivity is far more precise. It does not occur daily, nor does it revolve around minor details or secondary issues. Rather, it involves revealing vital matters previously unknown to the public—disclosures that prompt a reconsideration of significant affairs.

Beyond uncovering valuable information, a journalistic scoop is only legitimate if it adheres to professional ethics, foremost among them being accuracy and truthfulness. A genuine scoop represents the highest form of journalistic integrity. It cannot be fabricated or falsified; rather, the

²¹ Majid Ragheb Al-Halou, previously cited source, pp. 125–126.

sources must be transparent, and the details must be confirmed beyond doubt. The information presented must be irrefutable, backed by solid documentation.

In the era of advanced media and communication technologies, balancing truthfulness with exclusivity has become increasingly challenging. While these technological advancements have significantly benefited journalism by accelerating information dissemination and broadening audience reach, they have also contributed to ethical violations on an unprecedented scale. The rapid exchange of information has enabled journalists to engage wider readerships using innovative tools, yet the expansion of media platforms and the vast availability of information have also facilitated the fabrication of events, deliberate distortion, and exaggeration of real occurrences. In the midst of this overwhelming media landscape and digital noise, some journalists falsely claim exclusivity over stories that have either been manipulated or sensationalized.

Whether excessive reliance on exclusivity is due to unprofessional journalistic practices or an attempt to captivate audiences, the primary casualty of fabricated scoops is journalistic integrity itself. The frequent discussion of journalistic codes of ethics serves as further evidence of the severe ethical breaches in the profession. The root cause lies in the inability of certain journalists to differentiate between opinion and fact. They often draw dangerous conclusions from incomplete or fragmented information, leading to legal consequences and unjust harm to innocent individuals, whose reputations and credibility are damaged simply because sensationalist journalism seeks to provoke public reaction.

Just as scrutiny is directed toward the three branches of government, similar concerns are raised about the "fourth estate." Among these concerns is the misuse of terms like "exclusive" and "scoop," particularly following the liberalization of the audiovisual sector in Algeria and the intensification of competition among private television channels. Nevertheless, despite the widespread misuse of journalistic exclusivity, there remain commendable examples of true scoops that uphold credibility, combining speed, accuracy, and ethical responsibility. Since finding a collective solution to this issue is a long-term endeavor, the most viable approach in the meantime is an individual one—practicing selective consumption of news. The best way to navigate the overwhelming influx of newspapers and online platforms claiming exclusivity, credibility, and objectivity is for each individual to construct their own reliable news source. This entails critically selecting news from various outlets until identifying the most trustworthy source, which may not necessarily be the one that is the fastest in breaking news²².

4. The Reality of Investigative Journalism in Algeria

It is essential to emphasize that investigative journalism is a core aspect of a free press. If the press is restricted, subordinate, or lacks independence, it becomes naturally incapable of publishing investigative reports or exposing wrongdoing. It is inconceivable for a government-affiliated newspaper to uncover misconduct within the governmental apparatus.

²² Ibrahim Arafat: "Journalistic Integrity Before Exclusivity," cited from the Arab Union for Electronic Journalism website. See the website [Accessed on: 18/03/2018]. <http://www.maghress.com/tazacity/2785>

Investigative journalism plays a crucial and central role in promoting transparency, which is often lacking in many parts of the world. However, in the Arab world, and particularly in Algeria, this type of journalism faces numerous challenges and obstacles. One of the most significant issues is the lack of security protection for journalists at every stage of their work. The most basic threat faced by investigative journalists is direct or indirect intimidation, with no legal safeguards in place to protect them. The pursuit of truth is highly costly and fraught with serious consequences, as powerful entities with vested interests will not remain passive in the face of journalists' relentless efforts to uncover facts and verify information. In many cases, investigative journalism turns into an unpredictable and high-risk endeavor.

Moreover, other practical challenges hinder investigative journalism, including time constraints and the lack of financial resources necessary for travel and in-depth reporting. These logistical difficulties often prevent journalists from fully engaging in long-term investigative projects.

In addition to these obstacles, the Arab world faces even more profound challenges, primarily the lack of awareness regarding the demanding nature of investigative journalism. Most media institutions in the region do not prioritize or specialize in this field, as it often contradicts the editorial policies of many newspapers. Many of these publications lack a clear media strategy, and a significant number are officially state-controlled.

Thus, advocating for press freedom in Algeria, free from governmental constraints and affiliations, is integral to fostering investigative journalism. Lifting these restrictions would enable the press to fulfill its expected role in exposing corruption, highlighting violations, and safeguarding public interests.

In the Arab world, investigative journalism cannot thrive unless there is a fundamental transformation in media laws. Current press and publication regulations are often restrictive, placing emphasis on punitive measures rather than protecting journalists' right to access information and reinforcing their role as watchdogs. If a newspaper exposes corruption involving an official, the first reaction is often outrage from the official's social or political network, which may exert pressure to penalize the journalist and the media outlet involved²³.

Like other Arab nations, Algeria struggles with a democratic deficit and is engaged in a constant struggle for survival. In such a context, democracy is often sidelined. Investigative journalism, despite its critical importance, does not flourish in restrictive environments. However, it remains an essential tool for fostering democracy, combating corruption, and addressing social issues in a way that serves the public interest. The future of investigative journalism depends on the success of democratic governance, freedom of expression, and a shift in journalistic culture toward a more responsible and socially engaged approach²⁴.

Recommendations

²³ Nabil Al-Sharif, *Investigative Journalism: Between Reality and Aspiration*. See: Nabil Al-Sharif, *Investigative Journalism*, Al-Ufuq Center, Jordan, 1st ed., 1997, p. 82.

²⁴ Nahla Mohamed Ahmed Jabr, *The Future of Investigative Journalism in the Arab World*, p. 102.

The key factors that contribute to the success of investigative journalism can also serve as mechanisms for advancing democracy. To enhance and develop this form of journalism in Algeria, the following measures should be considered:

- Enacting press laws that specifically protect investigative journalists, ensuring their right to access information, and providing them with legal safeguards when dealing with public institutions.
- Facilitating access to information by establishing agreements between security agencies and the press to ensure information exchange.
- Upholding the highest standards of integrity, honesty, and professionalism, with a commitment to journalistic ethics, including accuracy and impartiality.
- Recognizing and supporting the role of investigative journalism as the "fourth estate" and reinforcing its position as a key pillar of democratic governance.
- Conducting academic studies and research on journalistic ethics, integrating investigative journalism training into media studies curricula at universities and journalism institutes.
- Evaluating and reassessing the state of investigative journalism in the Arab world in terms of professional standards and ethical commitment.

By implementing these recommendations, Algeria and the wider Arab world can create a more enabling environment for investigative journalism, allowing it to function as an essential mechanism for accountability, transparency, and the protection of public interests.

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