



Factors Affecting Investigative Journalism in Pakistan:

Exploring Journalists' Perceptions

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Abstract

Investigative journalism is an important part of journalism practices as it unveils the matters that are deliberately hidden from society. This study aims to examine how journalists perceive the factors affecting investigative journalism in Pakistan. More specifically, how intra, extra, and within-media elements influence media content and decisions of coverage. Through purposive sampling method and for data collection procedure, structured questionnaire tool was utilized. The results showed that certain forces inside and outside the media organizations impact media content in Pakistan. These influences include organizational sources, pressure groups, personal biases, job threats, economic constraints. Thus the study proposes that journalism in Pakistan can meet its true objectives only by dealing or at least minimizing the factors affecting investigative journalism in Pakistan.

Keyword: *Investigative Journalism, Social Responsibility, Pressure Group, Media Content, Watchdog Journalism*

Introduction

Investigative stories in media are systematic, in-depth and original reporting and it mostly uncovers wrongdoings, misappropriations, scandals etc. (Kaplan D, 2013). Investigative journalism helps to reveal these matters that are concealed deliberately by the ones who are in power. It contributes to freedom of expression and strengthening democracy. The media in this regard play the role of watchdog to secure public interest and well-being UNESCO (2018). Also, it should not be confused

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with a scoop or invading one's privacy to harm their reputation typically of those who are in political power. In simple terms, investigative journalism needs years of struggle and hardships to bring forward what is undermining the solidarity of a society ("Investigative Journalism: Defining the Craft," 2012). Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's 'Watergate Scandal', Seymour Hirsh's stories on the Vietnam War and Bill Clinton's scandal with Monica Lewinsky are glaring examples of investigative reporting. Also the 'Panama Papers' broke the hell on top government functionaries in various developed and developing countries. Especially in Pakistan, where Nawaz Sharif had to lose premiership following a court verdict triggered by the biggest investigative reporting work of the current decade. The 'Panama Papers' further enhanced the scope of investigative journalism in two ways. First of all, it brought forth that the government functionaries could not only remain involved in wrongdoings in their own countries but in other countries as well. Secondly, it gave way to another dimension to collaborative journalism, as scores of reporters and interpreters from various countries took part in this major work. However, amidst wide-ranging threats, besides one own safety, the investigative journalists always have to worry about the safety of their family. They have to bear the brunt of the editorial policies with most stories and uncovering shenanigans of corrupt entities end up not getting published UNESCO (2008). Practicing investigative journalism can be dangerous, particularly in countries that don't enjoy the press freedoms and protections that exist in only in few countries. Investigative journalists face many risks but their work is essential

to create a more 'just society. (Dickinson & Memon, 2012). Investigative journalism faces external and internal constraints. Several invisible/visible state-patronized, religious and ethnic groups vent their anger in various ways including intimidation and harassment if a story spills the beans and goes against their interest, and at the same time, the story has passed through several filters before being published or filtered out by media owners and editors (Waisbord, 2002).

Similarly, in Pakistan in spite of the democratic consolidation authoritarianism is a critical hurdle for investigative journalism. The authoritarian position of the government officials and administrations about the issues of the press is the most important opponent of investigative journalists. Several groups including security agencies put pressure on investigative journalists to back out from bringing out stories that may challenge their stated position. Several journalists lost their lives while reporting on specific issues whereby the shenanigans of different groups and agencies were disclosed (Ahmad, 2012). The persistency of insult and defamation law can be seen as a tactic of the officials of the government for the investigative journalists and the press in general. Those who believe that investigative journalism is trouble, are usually worried about the strengthening freedom of the press. In Pakistan, investigative journalists face political obstacles. Those who are responsible of wrongdoings influence the news stories by pressing the editors and publishers and sometimes threatening reporters (Sullivan, 2013).

Previous studies examined the overall problems faced by journalists in Pakistan with different findings. There are very limited studies investigating the issues confronted by investigative journalists. Whereas, in this study, an attempt is made to explore the perceptions of experienced journalists about investigative journalism. Also, the theme of the study is very compatible with the current socio-cultural dynamics of the world. Because without the understanding of investigative journalism, we will be unable to practically improve policies according to the compatibility of the single or collective society of the world. Likewise, the study is an attempt to improve our awareness about freedom of speech and freedom of expression by investigating the phenomenon to investigative journalism in Pakistan. Therefore, the basic aim of this study may include:

- To find out factors (intra journalist, intra and extra organization) that affects the investigative journalism.
- To find out factors outside the media organizations affecting the scope of investigative journalism in the country
- To recognize what type of pressure and threat the journalists suffer to accomplish his/her task
- To examine which placement was given to the investigative news stories
- To give recommendations to enhance investigative journalism in Pakistani media.

Factors Influencing Newsroom Decisions

Bias and Prejudices:

Journalists are influenced by personal beliefs and mindset, often hardened by lifelong experiences. They develop a specific perception of the various matters and project their own understanding as hard facts. They are also influenced by their audiences, as they bow to the likes and dislikes of who can be their potential audience. According to Patching (1997). Interest in particular conflicts, issues or matters, the factor of proximity, personal interest and the like also influence their impartiality while reporting on certain happenings.

Journalists often are attracted to this field in the hope that they would be able to serve their communities by projecting factual reports (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). However, a study illustrated that journalists are affected by their personal beliefs and hardened mindsets. Initially, they make reports on the basis of facts, however; later they tend to mold facts to fit in the beliefs they inherit by their past experiences (Voakes, 1997).

Senior Colleagues

As confirmed by 1992 media and democracy survey, cub journalists are inspired by their senior colleagues, who train them on reporting techniques. The seniors can have their own set of beliefs, who inculcate the same into the minds of junior journalists. The newcomers adopt the same way of thinking following their seniors and view facts from a certain perspective (Schultz, 1998).

Organization

A study conducted by Voakes (1998) revealed that the organization is the most influencing factor in compelling the reporters to project fact in a specific way. Johnstone et al, (1973)

unveiled that it is the organisation that makes the journalist realize his or her responsibilities in a professional or non-professional way. The study revealed that larger organizations tend to be more professional than smaller organizations that are more likely to pursue specific agendas.

Academic Background

Studies showed that media organizations are less likely to require their staff members to be properly educated. It is observed that individuals trained in other disciplines in the media organization. They have less understanding of the placement of facts and the concept of objectivity. Birhanu (2009) revealed that people with education backgrounds in language and literature make the largest portion of media industry workers.

Remuneration

Sanders (2003) argued that for developing countries journalists are most often underpaid and have lesser financial sustainability. This gives way to interest groups to infiltrate journalists through monetary to make them represent facts in a way that most suits them. According to Kasoma (2000), the journalists must understand that anyone who offers monetary or other benefits to the journalists intends to influence them for their own sake.

Personal Association

The age in which an individual enters the field of journalism often ranges above 25. The reporter is most likely to have developed an association with a political, religious or other such groups. It is observed that such reporters tend to make favours to their groups. In certain cases, the journalists even get involved in propagating false news against those who would differ with the groups they are attached with (Starbird, Dailey, Mohamed, Lee, & Spiro, 2018).

Legal Constraints

Some of the legal constraints make it difficult to publish an investigative piece, as democratic constitutions are insufficient to protect investigative journalists. In some countries including Mexico and Bolivia, it is difficult for a journalist to access laws, which ultimately limits the work. Whereas, the majority of countries have laws granting journalists the right to petition for information (Peñaranda, 20132).

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework is supported by two leading theories in mass communication., First, we have 'Agenda Setting Theory' by Professor Maxwell McCombs. As according to McCombs (2014), the power of media to divert attention on some key issue is highly accepted. Not only people start giving attention to specific issues also the learn the extent to which importance should be given to them (McCombs, 2014). The agenda-setting theory advocates that media set the public agenda which is "what to think about" and not exactly what to think. The main principle of agenda-setting theory is that "Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind" (McCombs, 2004). Similarly, Lazarsfeld and Merton noted the importance of factors which were affecting the media's contents. They were of the view that media content is controlled by powerful organizations and also opined that their powerful groups set the agenda for the media (McCombs, 2004). In this regard, Shoemaker and Reese had developed their hierarchical model of influences, in which "onion diagram" shows the levels through which media

content cannot be displayed/published in its original form (Shoemaker & Reese, 1994).

Social Responsibility theory is the second conceptual background supporting this investigation. As this theory also helps to know journalists' perceptions about investigative journalism in Pakistan. Alliance (2018) stated that it is an ethical concept according to which an individual is liable to fulfil their responsibilities. As a result, this must benefit the whole society. (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956) also proposed that "freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory. One's right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against vital social interests." In Pakistan, investigative journalism is not an easy task. Several factors are there to hinder investigative journalism. Political pressures, economic pressures, owners and managerial influences also affect the investigative reporting.

Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature. Close-ended questionnaires was used to collect the data for quantitative findings. The questionnaire consisted of four main variables including Intra-journalists' level, Intra organizational level, extra organizational level and systematic level. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 30 close-ended statements and one open-ended question. Five Points Likert Scale was used for data collection.

Population and Sampling

Investigative reporters, editors and news editors of mainstream media organizations of Pakistan were the universe of

study. Further, the stratified sampling technique was used in which researcher first divided journalists into different types and then randomly selected one hundred investigative journalists from all over the Pakistan.

Variables of the Study

The variables of the study include: Educational level of Respondents .**Dependent Variable** is investigative Journalism and **independent variables** are factors affecting investigative journalism; bias and prejudices; senior colleagues; organizational pressures; academic background; remuneration; personal association and legal constraints.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	91	94.8%
Female	05	5.2%

Tables 1 shows the frequency and percentage of respondents regarding their Gender. Based on Genders. 91(94.8 %) males and 5 (5.2%) females shared their opinions about the factors they perceive as impediments in investigative journalism in Pakistan. A total of n=96 investigative journalists were selected

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Interval	Frequency	Percent%
20-30	09	9.4%
31-40	34	35.4%
41-50	40	41.7%
Over 50	13	13.5%

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' age groups. Respondent were classified in five classes including 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51 and above and frequency distribution 20-30 (9.4%), 31-40 35.4%), 41-50 (41.7%), 51 and above (13.5%) respectively. Nine respondents in 20-30 category, 34 in 31-40, 40 in 41-50 and 13 in above 50 participated.

Table 3: Employment Agency of the Respondents

Field	Frequency	Percentage
Print Media	53	55.8%
Electronic Media	34	35.8%
Periodical	0	0%
Others	09	9.5%
Freelance	1	1.1%
Wire Service	1	1.1%

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' employment agency. Respondents were divided into six categories including Print media, Electronic media, Periodical, Freelance (1.1%), Wire service and others. The frequency distribution showed 53(55.8%), 34 (35.8%), 0 (0%), 9(9.5%), 1(1.1%), 1(1.1%) respectively.

Table 4: Beat Distribution of the Respondent

Field	Frequency	Percentage
Crime	12	12.6%
Politics	45	47.4%
Economics	14	14.7%
Foreign Affairs	16	16.8%
Judiciary	1	1.1%
All	1	1.1%
Others	5	6.3%

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Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' beats in the organization. The respondents of the survey were from the beats including Crime, Politics, Economics, Foreign affairs, Judiciary, all and others. The frequency distribution showed that 12 (12.6%), 45 (47.4%), 14 (14.7%), 16 (16.8%), 1 (1.1%), 1(1.1%), 5 (6.3%) respectively.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for the Frequencies of Gathered Responses

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
Government Usually hinders investigative journalism	24	45	17	7	2
While working on some story, I am usually aware of my own biases	5	65	15	8	1
Investigative journalists share a common code of conduct irrespective of the organizations they work for	2	38	18	36	1
Our social culture system supports investigative journalism	3	21	20	43	7
I don't have to worry about the safety of my family when doing my job as a journalist	4	21	11	48	12
The culture of my organization supports independent thinking	9	32	22	25	6
I feel safe performing my job as an investigative journalist	5	23	17	32	16
My organization offers training, refresher courses and coaching to help polish my skills as investigative journalist	6	12	16	46	14
I have the requisite skills to become a successful investigative journalist	30	47	11	4	2
My education prepared me well for a role in investigative journalism	16	29	28	21	1

Findings show that many factors including intra-organization, extra organization and intra-journalists are affecting investigative journalism in Pakistan. The perceptions reflect from the responses showed that the majority of investigative journalists in the country were not having specific training, requisite skills

and related education to deal with the news items. About job threat, the results suggest that very few feel themselves safe working on investigative news items as the majority of them feel insecure. Rest of them also preferred to stay neutral in their response over the matter related to job threat. The important factor of personal autonomy in media organization showed mixed opinions as half perceived that they were independent in their thinking. The ratio of neutral in their opinion was also not much high as per the results.

Similarly, the perceptions about the risk factor were much clear from results as it showed the majority feel unsafe performing investigative work. Nearly one third came up with the different answer and almost negligible chunk ignored this important element. About the social-cultural barriers, the results mainly showed that this element was dominantly affecting investigative journalism. Very few perceived that social-cultural never prove as impediments. Furthermore, the results suggest personal biases of investigative journalists have much importance in journalism. It was considered a negative element and very few ignored this element. The role of government for giving access to record or information to journalists always is one of the important factors. The perception about this element showed in the results suggests the government usually hinders the information, as the majority blamed the government.

Table 4 Cross Tabulation of Responses Affirming Influences on News Media Decisions

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
Geopolitical context affects the ability of journalists to investigate and report in-depth stories	04 (4.2%)	16 (16.8%)	19 (20%)	50 (52.6)	06 (6.3%)
In my opinion media are free to report competing perspectives	17 (17.9%)	53 (60%)	13 (13.7%)	08 (8.4%)	0 (0%)
Investigative journalism can benefit from a shared code of conduct	12 (12.6%)	60 (63.2%)	09 (9.5%)	14 (14.7%)	0 (0%)
Our cultural norms sometime create hurdles in investigative journalism	13 (13.5%)	64 (66.7%)	11 (11.5%)	08 (8.3%)	0 (0%)
My organization has mechanism in place to evaluate credibility and authenticity of information	10 (10.6%)	41 (43.6%)	18 (19.1%)	24 (25.5%)	1 (1.1%)
At times, journalists risk safety to dig out investigative stories	16 (16.7%)	75 (78.1%)	03 (3.1%)	02 (2.1%)	0 (0%)
My story purely gets place/flash in the newspaper/news bulletin on merit	11 (11.6%)	44 (46.3%)	19 (20%)	21 (22.1%)	1 (1.1%)
An inadequate staff size hurts the quality of news coverage	21 (22.3%)	05 (63.8%)	09 (9.6%)	60 (5.3%)	0 (0%)
Advertisers often demand favorable coverage	40 (41.7%)	41 (42.7%)	11 (11.5%)	04 (4.2%)	0 (0%)
The journalist also sometimes prefer to hold stories fearing consequences, like a threat to deny advertisement to the organization	22 (22.9%)	48 (50%)	14 (14.6%)	12 (12.5%)	0 (0%)

The editorial policy of media organization usually creates hindrance in the line of duty, as news items are stopped. It shows the importance of editorial policy as a major element affecting

investigative journalism. The advertisers' pressure was observed as one of the major factors affecting journalism in the country. The owners of media organization hardly compromise before the advertisers' pressure. The results showed advertisers' pressure was one of the main impediments in journalism.

The influence of pressure groups might never be ignored in journalism of Pakistan. This fear factor was perceived as a stumbling block in investigative journalism. The power of this factor to change media contents has a negative impact on journalism. Similarly, the controversial topics are the main areas of interest of investigative journalists. The study in hand suggests that the investigative journalist have to adopt a very cautious approach due to pressure as mostly the controversial issues were even skipped. It is also observed that the factor of government's public relation department in journalism has much importance as it compelled the media organization to skip any controversial news items or even avoid publishing telecasting it. The investigative journalists have to accept the pressure of the public relations department because of economic pressures. Moreover, the prejudice of journalists can never be ignored as it also has much negative impact. The perception about the prejudice in sub-conscious, according to the results, showed that this factor affects the impartiality of news items.

Lastly, the owners' interests and highly insecure environment are also perceived as the main reasons coming in the way of investigative journalists. It was also the opinion that the money, establishment, life threat, job threat, terrorist outfits and anything

worst can happen with any journalist, which affect investigative journalism.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Frequencies of Gathered Responses

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
There is inherent risk in uncovering stories and unveiling truth to society	10	61	11	7	0
Journalists have 'job threat' in their minds while investigating a matter for news	27	51	14	3	1
Prejudices in sub-conscious affect neutrality/impartiality of a writer/investigator	10	54	21	8	0
Economic pressure/constraints matter in the line of duty	24	57	13	2	0
Journalists are under pressure to carefully handle stories involving companies or Organizations who have.....	30	51	10	5	0
Journalists avoid covering a particular story under the negative influences of public relations practitioners	6	50	28	12	0
Sometimes journalists feel pressure to skip controversial topics	24	59	7	5	1
Sometimes journalists do not run stories because they could offend politicians or government officials	12	50	8	22	2
Sometimes journalists decide not to run stories because they might offend owners or top executives	25	49	13	9	0
Journalists often avoid covering stories or topics due to fear of pressure groups	20	58	8	10	0

Journalists' opinion about factors affecting investigative journalism (A Qualitative Assessment)

The respondents came up with different opinions about the elements affecting investigative journalism in Pakistan. They asserted that lack of resources, the reluctance of government officials, job threats and threats to journalist life are main elements to affect it. They shared that non-professional journalist such as industrialists and top business owners have now become owners of media houses. Free investigative journalism has fast becoming challenge throughout the world. Also, not only in Pakistan but all over the world there is no such thing as free investigative journalism, however, in Pakistan, these factors are more decisive and dominating while doing the investigative reporting.

Participants also perceived that there is no real trend of investigative journalism on hidden and actual issues in Pakistan. First of all, the journalism and media industry itself should be investigated because of their self and organizational interests. Likewise, they believed financial, physical and legal safety of journalists needs to be ensured. Transparency in recruitment, promotions and financial matters of media houses need to be ensured.

Discussion

Several studies addressed the effects of media on public but there is a dearth of research studies about the elements affecting investigative journalism in Pakistan. The factor affecting the media contents in Pakistan are equally important to understand. Pakistani media especially electronic media is flourishing with a fast pace but the editorial policy to deal with media contents still need to be improved. In Pakistan, print and electronic media are indirectly influenced by the government. The government

exploits the media owners indirectly with the help of advertisement. The media owners have to take care of government due to economic constraints and even sometimes change the media contents both in electronic and print media. Financial benefits are offered to media owners to exploit them.

The Pakistani private electronic media, which emerge over the decade before, now facing decline due to economic constraints. The media owners are compelled to downsizing in media organizations, which resultantly affecting the investigative work. Almost the same is the situation in print media, as media persons are afraid of job threat in sub-conscious, which consequently affect investigative journalism. The investigative journalists have to drop their exclusive news items, which may help to create significant changes in society. The journalists in this study also put weight behind the compulsions of investigative journalists as they never feel safe working on investigative news items. It was mainly observed that investigative journalists lack personal autonomy in their media organizations as they have to follow the directions of the owners. Likewise, personal biases of investigative journalists sometimes also stop him/her working on any specific areas.

The other objective related to factors outside the organizations affecting the scope of investigative journalism in Pakistan was also observed in the study. The risk factors also compel the journalists to avoid taking much risk due to insufficient support from the media organizations. Majority of journalists came up with the response that they always feel unsafe performing investigative work. The social-cultural barriers force

the journalists to avoid touching these sensitive areas in their news items. The role of government for not giving access to the record to journalists has much importance as it also affects the scope of investigative journalism. The study in hand also showed that government usually avoids sharing access to important information. The findings suggest that advertisers' pressure on media organization is adversely affecting the investigative journalism. Often exclusive news items are not properly placed on the main pages of newspapers because of the pressure from advertisers. The owners, as per the study, have to accept the demands of advertisers due to economic constraints. It also suggests that different elements of media affect media coverage. More instances of pressures from advertisers lead to more instances of agenda-cutting effects on news content. Public relations practitioners have also a role in affecting media coverage. The results of the study also show that Public Relations sections of government also force the decision-makers of media organizations to not publish news against the government.

The other objective was to find out reasons behind terming journalism especially investigative journalism a challenging profession. The fear of pressure groups, risk factor and controversial areas are the factors in the mind of investigative journalists discourage them to perform duties. The journalists perceived that most of the investigative journalists avoid involving in controversial matters due to insufficient support from the organization. About risk factors, the study also suggests that several journalists despite knowing life threats make all-out efforts to dig out misappropriations and wrongdoings.

Additionally, the study also finds out factor related to personal biases and prejudices in sub-conscious that affects the impartiality of news items. It was observed that these factors can never be ignored as a large number of journalists perceived it as an impediment.

Both 'Social Responsibility Theory' and 'Agenda Setting Theory' of mass-communication were kept in mind to know the perceptions of journalists about the elements creating impediments in investigative journalism. Agenda of print and electronic media organizations are changed due to Intra-Journalist, Intra organization, Extra organization reasons. As the 'Agenda cutting theory' advocates that sometimes even news items are dropped due to multiple factors. The study identified that peoples from outside or inside the news organization easily kill a news item or decreased the impact of a news story.

Conclusion

Pakistan is a developing country, where media has unfortunately never enjoyed complete freedom of expression. Investigative Journalists working in private media outlets have to keep job threat in their minds. The rest of the unavoidable elements including 'life threats' and 'economic constraints' tacitly compel investigative journalists to avoid working in sensitive areas. Likewise, the journalists from the government's media organizations never dare to reveal wrongdoings of government, due to job threats and strict culture of the organization. The journalists can raise voice for all segments of society, but they never freely raise voice for their own rights. The factors within media organizations or outside keep creating a stumbling block

in their way, but no serious steps were taken for their rights. The standards of investigative journalism in the country can only be improved by enacting proper legislation in parliament for the journalists, which seems not the preference of lawmakers. The fourth pillar of the state - Journalism- can only be strengthened by giving it equal importance.

Limitations and Recommendations

Due to certain finical and objective constraints, this study is conducted on a limited scale and finite time period. However, the findings of this research provide possible solutions but it raised more questions as well. The future researches can highlight more solution of issues faced by investigative journalists of Pakistan. They can further explore the hidden elements affecting investigative journalism in Pakistan.

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