

**Investigative Journalism in India: A study
to analyze the recent trends and impact
of investigative journalism on the society**

ABSTRACT

of

THESIS

SUBMITTED TO

BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY

(A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)

LUCKNOW



FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

MASS COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM

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Enrollment No.: 668/13

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2023

Abstract

1.1 Introduction

Investigative journalism is often reflected as the voice of the voiceless as it serves as the connecting link between the powerful rulers and those who are being ruled. It also brings out the ills of the system and helps the government in finding solutions to these problems. Hence, it is called the fourth pillar of a strong democracy in which the general public can directly participate. Media, which is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy plays an important role in the country's progress and governance. While there are numerous problems facing the media industry currently, there are some media houses that are doing commendable work by disseminating true and reliable facts to the community.

Investigative journalism played an important role in the social, cultural and political scenario. Investigative journalism has contributed significantly to the development of the society and the country. Brings news which are usually hidden from the public. Due to investigative journalism, efforts were made to change the thinking and understanding of the people in the society.

After the ban on press in India at the time of emergency, the tendency of other journalists towards investigative journalism was increased, due to this which journalism gained momentum. However, in the recent times, the media industries are confronted with several challenges that make vulnerable its very own function.

The study attempts to explain the perceptions of investigative journalist and the perceptions of society. The mixed method approach adopted in this study combines interviews and questionnaire with media students. This study has established that the challenges and restrictions upon journalists by the systematic environment of government. Hence, this study contributed to the existing body of research, decreasing trends of investigative journalism and its impacts on the society.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the field of media studies, there are few debates, discussions, and discourses about investigative journalism. Reviewed from the literature, there is a lack of comprehensive research on investigative journalism in India. This research includes a structured examination of investigative journalism's historical, contemporary, theoretical, and fragmentary aspects in the context of India. This will be the first comprehensive investigation into investigative journalism in India.

This research will make a significant contribution to investigative journalism discourse and future research. This research will provide vivid picture of investigative journalism, its trends and its impact on the society. The findings of this research will act as the stepping-stone for the future references and study about this subject. This will be a great help for those who want to get acquainted with the historical evolution, overall scenario and status of investigative reporting. Therefore, this study would be an attempt to analyse and understand recent trends and impact of investigative journalism in the society

1.3 Scope of the study -

This research is crucial because, when it is being conducted, a new government was established in India in 2019 that promises to make corruption free India and government fight against the corruption at any level. This government has initiated reform and anti-corruption efforts. Politicians, ministers, businessmen and high-ranking officials were imprisoned on corruption charges, putting high pressure on investigative journalism. This is original research that examines the potential impact of the changes and whether or not the investigative report can be conducted in this environment.

The reasons behind the declining credibility of media in India and its detachment from public interest issues are to be highlighted. The hidden evils of the society have been brought to the light through investigative journalism, but for the past few years, a continuous decline is being seen in such reporting. Through this research, an attempt has been made to find out these reasons.

1.4 Review of Literature and Theoretical framework

The Oxford Concise Dictionary (2004) defines investigative journalism as; Investigating and looking for instances of injustice or wrongdoing. According to media scholar Derek Forbes, investigative reporting encompasses a variety of reporting activities, from straightforward news-based inquiries to undercover operations that build together a timeline of events to produce a final expose or scoop.

David Kaplan, is an investigative journalist added, 'in-depth, systematic use of original research and reporting. He views investigative journalism as a process of unveiling secrets that are often hidden from the public domain, emphasizing strongly on social justice and accountability'. (Kaplan, 2015)

Moreover, Moilanen (2014) explains, how the authority threatened investigative journalism with arbitrary suppression on media houses, limited freedom of speech and expression, lawsuits for investigative journalists, criminalization of some investigations, abrupt shutdown of some 'unlawful' web sites and web portals, tougher access to official records, physical and mental attacks, etc.

According to media scholar Aucoin (2005), there are five distinct components of investigative reporting such as: -

- i. Unveiling of information
- ii. about an important public issue
- iii. that someone or some organization does not want reported that is revealed through the original, time

Social Responsibility theory

This theory was developed by Siebert et. al. to reform the pure libertarian theory of the press. This theory developed after second world war. It was associated with commission of the freedom of press in the united states at the University of Chicago in the 1940s (the commission also known as the Hutchins Commission).

According to Picard, the commission was established to outline freedom of the press in relation to responsibility and to codify a set of public questions and to seek reform in the liberal theory of the press. Some scholars call this the result of liberal theory.

The theory's central premise mentioned by Peterson that liberty carries concomitant obligations and that the press. Press enjoys a privileged position under the government and performs some essential functions in contemporary Society. The press has been given privileges under the Constitution of India so that it can do its work with freedom and responsibility without any pressure, hindrance, and inclination so that there can be a change in Society and the country. Under the principle of social responsibility, the media should be a reformer and giver of correct information.

Agenda setting theory

The mass media can brighten and focus attention on issues, helping to generate public awareness, and momentum for change. agenda setting involves setting the media agenda (what is covered), the public agenda (monitoring or legislative actions taken on issues) (Dorfam&Krasnov,2013). study on agenda shows that the amount of media coverage an issues receives correlations strongly with the publics opinion on how important the issues is.

Has not investigative journalism in India been able to set the agenda and influence change? In answering this relatable question, it is significant to turn to the agenda-setting theory for answer the purpose.

1.5 Delimitations

Since the research problem of the study is too broad, it needs to delimit. The study delimits its periphery purposively selecting media students and investigative journalists.

1.6 Objectives of the study

- To examine the recent trends of investigative reporting.
- To analyse impact of investigative journalism on the society.

- To examine various factors and challenges in investigative journalism practice.
- To determine the ways for improving the practice of investigative reporting.

1.7 Research Question

1. How do investigative journalist and media students perceive investigative journalism?
2. Does sting operation compromise right to privacy of citizens?
3. What is the status of investigative journalism currently?

1.8 Hypotheses –

- Ho – The investigative reports do not have any impact on the society.
- H1- Investigative reports affect male and female respondents differently.

1.9 Methodology –

The present study adopted descriptive research design. Research methods can be divided into quantitative, qualitative and mixture methods.

This study employs a mixed-methods methodology, engaging both quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate and comprehend the trends of investigative journalism and its impact on society.

1.10 Unit of study: an individual (media students) /expert investigative journalist

1.11 Sampling: purposive sampling adopted for the quantitative data and for qualitative data collection researcher used non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling was used. For that the researcher collected data from 10 expert investigative journalists. Also several informal interactions and non-participatory observation includes in qualitative data.

1.12 Sample of the Study –sample size for this study is 400 media students and 10 investigative journalist

1.12 Variable of the study: independent and dependent variables

- I. Dependent variables –opinion of respondents
- II. Independent variables –investigative reporting

1.13 Data collection tools –

Presented study conducted questionnaire and semi –structured interviews in order to explore the trends and impact of investigative journalism in the society. The questionnaire was used for collecting data from the media students and its allied subject while the interviews were conducted with the investigative journalist.

1.14 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis was done to meet the need of the researchers and various types of analysis were done to enable the research to meet the research objectives. A portion of the data analysis was conducted on statistical analysis, which permitted researchers to compare the results.

Quantitative data analysis with the help of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysing the data acquired through the questionnaires administered to the study's population. The study also uses the chi-squared test for testing the research hypotheses. Then, tables and figures generated. Basis of that interpretation have been done.

1.15 Main findings of the study

1. Trends of investigative journalism

The data shows that majority (64%) of the total respondents were familiar with the concept of investigative journalism. Little less than half (47%) of the total respondents were those who stated that they recently consume investigative reporting. However, with more than half (52.9%) of them did not consume any investigative reports among respondent's web portals were the most popular medium (48.2%) to get the investigative reports. it is followed by newspaper and broadcast (37.9%) and 48.2% respectively). it was found that little less than half (47.4%) of the total respondents consume investigative reports on government and politics, and local administration. This is followed by little less than one fourth (23.2%) stated they read investigative

reports about service sector. Furthermore, according to 44.7% of the total respondents, the trends of investigative reporting have been increased. It is evident from the data about 40% of the total respondents agree on that investigative reporting vital information about sensitive issues on the society also, little less (31.6%) of them stated/replied that they are fully agree that investigative reporting improve that media reporting.

Hence, it is clear from the analysis of the data the that is trends of investigative reporting has increased.

2. Impact of investigative journalism on the society

Most of the time investigative journalism involves reporting crime, corruption, unethical practices in organisations. Such reporting is meant to inform the public about the hidden problems of the society. Investigative journalism impacts society on structural, community and individual level. This study investigates impact of investigative journalism on the society. It was found from the primary data that majority (60.3%) of the total respondents observed the investigating reports have impact of the society. Rest of them (39.7%) either said no impact or can't say about any impact of investigative reporting on societal level. There were around 60% of the total respondents stated that they have seen investigative reporting both positive and negative impact on society. But, there were little more than one-third (34.7%) of the total respondents replied that investigative reporting positively impacts the society. Further, it is evident from the data that the overwhelming majority (85.5%) of the total respondents responded that investigating reports expose every hidden issues of the society include good and bad exposes. And also the large majority (80.3%) of the total respondents believe that investigative reporting plays bigger role in any society.

3. Influencing factors of challenges in investigative reporting practice

The second question in this study sought to investigate the key factors of the challenges in investigative reporting practice in field .it was answered by the analysing the questionnaire and interview responses. It was found from quantitate data that about 40% were agreed the investigative journalists face challenges in reporting. Respondents who were strongly agree that investigative journalist face severe challenges in terms of

restriction and censorship while reporting. Only one-tenth of respondents thinks investigative reporters not face any challenges in reporting. Thus, it is clear the large majority of respondents believe investigating reporting has more challenges than other reporting.

If we differentiate the challenges of investigative reporting according to the investigative journalist. Several challenges they identify in investigative reporting during the interviews.

Lack of funding -

“lack of funding is a challenges to the profession as a whole. according to him, “we don’t have enough funding, we have little funding”. (IJ 4)

Insecurity –

..... Risk of personal safety. No institutional mechanism to save or support investigative journalist. They are mostly on their own. (IJ 5)

Threats and suit –majority of the respondents admit that current time is not good for investigative reporting, now lot of pressure and restrictions from the higher ups and the political dissensions. journalist is facing criminal and sedition charges. Hence India is lowest on the freedom indexes.

Ownership influence –many investigative believe that there is a huge influence from the media ownership which affecting the journalistic practices. they are not able to do free and fair reporting. If you will not follow their agendas so you will not able to work with their organizations.

Influence to personal life – if you are an investigative journalist so u have to keep your profile low, u will not enjoy social media life and personal life (a female investigative added) *However*, investigative journalism is like a rose that blooms among thorns; a rose is a rose; it will continuously bloom like this (IJ 1)

Poor access –investigative journalism key tool of documents, it is required a lot more to investigative but now days we are facing information shortage of form the officials. we are getting only governments agendas and parties briefing.

Poor compensation: five of ten journalists admitted that, there is poor compensation for their work. They are not getting money for their work, its affecting their work and life.

Poor follow-ups –poor follows are also a challenges for the investigative piece, because investigative reporting requires lot of time, but when your stories published, sometimes we did not get enough attention and lack of follow ups from other media houses and others stake holders.

Inaction from the concern authorities and administration –

Inaction and lack of support for government and other relevant authority is one of the challenges faced by investigative journalist.

Media is considered the watchdog of democracy, they have to be free and independent Recently, government investigative agencies raided a digital media platform, threaten their journalist, so government creating an atmosphere of fear on media houses and journalists. The government is too harsh with the journalist if you are writhing against them, which is not right for a democracy. If freedom of press will hamper, then country will suffer.

4. Ways for improving the practice of investigative journalism

As the present study reveals that investigative reporting has many challenges. So, in this study we tried to get some suggestions from the experts of field of investigative journalism to improve the condition of investigative reporting practice in India.

Many suggestions were given by the experts which the researcher listed in this chapter. Suggestions given by experts to enhance the practice of investigative reporting- Media expert highlighted some key issues in the interviews such as; Training, Proper funding, Editorial independence, Media freedom, Effective Right to Information Act, Good Remuneration and welfare, Open / Supportive governance, Active public participation, Social audit, Academic collaboration.

Research Question

1- How do investigative journalist and media students perceive investigative journalism?

However, quantitative data shows that, majority of the respondents (36.3%) understand investigative journalism as “journalism which use undercover reporting followed by journalism based on the in-depth research (24.2%) .however ,15.3% respondents understand investigative journalism as “journalism which reveals some malpractices ”and 12.4% respondents understand investigative journalism as “journalism based on private and unpublished document documents” and rest of the respondents (10.5%) understand this as “journalism which reveals something which was not widely known ”.

And investigative journalist also given their own understanding of investigative journalism; they coined the word, such as –

“watchdog of journalism,” “uncovering the truth”, “ISTIGATING JOURNALISM,” “requires in depth inquiry of the problem,” “Investigative journalism foe the uncovering the tool” etc.

RQ 2. Does sting operation compromise privacy of citizens?

Form the quantitative data, 40.8% respondents are neutral about this statement and 25.5 % are agree 12.9% are strongly agree with this statement. rest of the respondents 20 % either disagree and strongly disagree with this statement. This data show that majority of the respondents have neutral views about this statement it means they are accepting sting is good tool for the investigative journalism.

8 Out of 10 investigative journalists, said that sting operations should use but for the public interest. One the contrary 2 out of 10 journalist said that you can violate someone personal privacy which is the violations of the fundamental rights.

RQ 3. What is the status of investigative journalism currently?

This study shows that; the majority of respondents agree that investigative journalism is currently underdeveloped in our nation. According to the present time is not suitable for journalists and investigative journalism has become even more difficult profession.

This sharp decline in press freedom reveals a dangerous state of affairs in the functioning of the media and democracy in India. The condition of the press in India is more often attributed to the vulnerabilities of Indian democracy and the attitude of the political leadership. Many journalists are facing criminal case and harassment from the authorities.

70.2 % of the respondents who are either agree or strongly agree about the decline position of the Indian media.

Therefore, this study found that recent trends of investigative journalism has decreased according to media practitioners. On the other hand, public understanding that the trend of investigative reporting has increased. The investigative reporting has declined in terms of numbers and quality. But the present study discovered that alternative media platforms doing more investigative reporting than mainstream media. The study also found that investigative reporting has impacted cultural, community and individual level in the society. Majority of the respondents admitted that investigative reports has positive impacts on the society. And it impacts on the grassroots level.

1.16 Recommendations

There are several recommendations given by the respondents during their interviews.

- There is need a proper public participation in the investigative journalist because they are in critical time. If they will get proper encouragements for their work so they can do it better. which will be good for the society and for the common masses.
- For the media students, there is a need to introduced a specialized curriculum of investigative journalism in the Mass Communication Departments. because media students are the aspiring journalist, in near future they will join the field reporting. As one of media expert, said that, now days everyone wanted to become an Anchor, he added “Anchoring is the worst form of journalism”. Journalism department and media school can make good investigative journalist.

- A good investigative reporting cannot possible without the support of public, civil society, media and constitutional institutions. every stake holder of the democracy should support and encourage investigative journalist and their work for the public interest.
- The most of the investigative journalists suggested that in investigative reporting there should be training, proper funding, editorial independence and media freedom given to journalist. Moreover, effective Right to Information Act, and academic participation and academic collaboration in these type of reporting provided by the institutions.

1.17 Limitations and Further scope of the study:

During the research period, we all have been affected in one way or the other due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher also got affected by this pandemic. The research work of the researcher was completely related to the field study, due to which there was a lot of trouble in data collection and difficulties were faced because at this time all the universities were closed or were online. And I had to do personal interview for my qualitative data, there was a delay in that. So the researcher did all these things after the situation was restored later. This epidemic has greatly affected the research work of the researcher.

- Present study only concludes respondents from the universities those located in Lucknow city. Although, respondents of this study have representation from different parts of the country, colour, race, gender and even different societies.
- The researcher did not receive encouraging responses from the media professional /investigative journalists.
- The study found that investigative journalism covered by limited researchers. This area has so many aspects those have not researched yet. This study mainly focused on trends and impacts of investigative journalism. The present study done on very limited population of Lucknow city. So, we cannot generalise the findings of this research over the whole population of India.

Further, there is need to study investigative journalism in holistic way. However, studies should be interdisciplinary. The present scenario of the investigative journalism totally changed by technological interventions. More media persons move towards investigative reporting. And society also becoming more aware on this type of reporting. So, there should be studies conduct on factors and challenges of investigative journalism. From that we analyse social, political, cultural and economic aspects of investigative reporting.

1.18 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. In Chapter 1 that is 'Introduction'. This chapter is an introductory chapter which presents the background of the study, its significance, aims, objectives, research questions, hypothesis, research methodology. Chapter 2 entitled 'Literature review and Theoretical framework' examines available literature on investigative journalism, the concept of investigative journalism, trends, impact of investigative journalism, challenges. This chapter also deals with the theory underpinning this study, social responsibility theory, and agenda setting theory. Chapter 3, 'Understanding investigative journalism' provides a brief history of investigative journalism globally and in India. This chapter deals with the evolution, and how investigative journalism has progressed historically in terms of trends and development. Chapter 4 of the thesis, 'Quantitative data analysis and Interpretation'. This chapter presents the quantitative results of the questionnaire. Chapter 5, 'Qualitative data analysis and Interpretation' presents and analysis the data collected via semi-structured interviews. Chapter 6 which is conclusion of the study entitled 'Conclusion, Findings, Recommendations and Limitations' concludes the summary of the findings of the study, contributions to the literature and recommendations for the future.