



The Journal of *News Science*

Vol. 14, No. 4, Ser.53, Winter 2025, P. 1-20

Journal homepage: <https://www.mjourcom.ir/>

DOI : <http://doi.org/10.22034/lrsi.2024.478625.1251>

Investigative Journalism in the Digital Age; Challenges Facing Investigative Journalism in Iran

Hatef Pourrashidi¹  | Mehran Samadi² 

1. Corresponding author, Assistant Professor, Department of Communications, University of Religions & Denominations, Qom, Iran. E-mail: h.pourrashidi@urd.ac.ir

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Communications, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Tabriz, Iran E-mail: m_samadi@iaut.ac.ir

Received: September 14, 2024 Accepted: January 15, 2025

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Interdiction:

Investigative journalism, as a vital aspect of the work of journalists, defenders of freedom of expression, and civil society activists, has gained significant prominence over the past half-century. It has laid the groundwork for exposing and combating corruption in various countries. The fundamental purpose of the media and journalists is to uncover the truth and facilitate the resolution of political and social issues by providing diverse evidence and perspectives to inform decision-making. While conventional journalism tends to be reactive—reporters often waiting for news events to unfold—investigative journalism aims to proactively initiate stories that can drive social change. This form of journalism plays a crucial role in holding corporations and the government accountable, fulfilling one of the primary responsibilities of the media: monitoring the environment. However, it requires thorough investigation and a review of improvement strategies to effectively establish the role of the fourth estate in democracy. Moreover, the primary responsibility of investigative journalists is to embody the concept of social responsibility in journalism, which is inherently collaborative and impacts all participants in the communication process. Therefore, a journalist engaged in investigative work not only advances public discourse on social responsibility but also upholds the media's obligation to serve the public interest, a principle supported by the theory of social responsibility.

Investigative journalism has significantly shaped the perspectives of many activists in this field, particularly regarding its role in the United States' political landscape, including its

contribution to the impeachment of a president due to abuse of power. This legacy can be traced back to the reporters of the Watergate scandal, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose methods are now emulated in journalism schools across the country. However, it is important to recognize that since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the practice of investigative journalism has expanded considerably in various countries. Notably, active newspapers and magazines in Brazil, China, and India have established dedicated investigative teams. Since 2000, this surge in interest has attracted approximately 2,000 journalists from over 50 countries. Despite this global trend towards investigative journalism, the challenges faced by practitioners have also become increasingly prevalent.

Due to its inherent nature, this type of journalism has consistently faced challenges on a global scale, and Iran is no exception. The primary obstacles confronting this genre of journalism stem mainly from governmental entities, pressure groups, and organized crime syndicates. Each year, numerous journalists encounter significant difficulties worldwide. Economic hardships faced by reporters, coupled with political, legal, and social restrictions imposed on activists in this field, along with the absence of a safe and conducive environment for their work, have severely hindered investigative journalists globally. This issue has been highlighted in various studies conducted in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in 2024; Nigeria in 2023; Nepal in 2019; Ethiopia in 2017; and the Arab world in 2015. In contemporary Iranian society, issues such as whistleblowing are encompassed within the framework of investigative journalism. Investigative journalism relies on verifiable documents and evidence that cannot be concealed or disregarded, and, like other journalistic genres, it emphasizes the authenticity of sources. However, in Iran, investigative journalism also grapples with numerous challenges.

Method:

This article employs qualitative content analysis to examine interviews with 12 communication professors and media activists from various institutions, including Al-Mustafa International University, the University of Religions and Denominations, Imam Sadiq University, the University of Tehran, Tabriz University, Islamic Azad University, Din Online website, Hamshahri Newspaper Institute, and Etemad Newspaper. Following the interviews, a three-stage coding process was implemented: identifying primary concepts, organizing concepts, and finally, developing general or inclusive concepts. As a result, 76 primary concepts were extracted from the interviews, which were subsequently categorized into eight organizing concepts. These include "financial and economic limitations and pressures, "limitations in access to information, "lack of a clear definition of investigative journalism, "technological challenges and the proliferation of fake news, in public trust, training for investigative journalists, and "ethical challenges. of "challenges of investigative journalism in Iran. the challenges faced by investigative journalism in Iran can be summarized within these categories.

Findings:

The challenges facing investigative journalism in Iran include financial and economic restrictions, limited access to information, an inadequate definition of investigative journalism, technological obstacles, and the proliferation of fake news. Additionally, a decline in public trust, political, legal, and social issues, insufficient training for investigative journalists, and ethical dilemmas further complicate the landscape. These challenges are largely similar to those encountered in many developing or underdeveloped countries. However, this does not imply that investigative journalism is thriving globally, including in developed nations; rather, it highlights that a lack of development is a fundamental factor contributing to the decline and

stagnation of this journalistic genre. Economic pressures and restrictions on information access are common issues faced by all developing countries, including Iran, in advancing investigative journalism. A key distinction between the situation in Iran and that in some developed countries lies in the proper definition of investigative journalism. This, coupled with inadequate education, has hindered the growth of investigative journalism in Iran. Such challenges are also evident in other areas of journalism and are not exclusive to this genre. Another pressing issue in Iranian society today is the diminishing public trust in official media and the rise of virtual and fake news, which can be attributed to a loss of credibility among official news outlets.

Conclusion:

The findings of this research indicate that the majority of concepts derived from interviews pertain to the political, legal, and social constraints faced by journalists in this field, which have impeded their ability to engage effectively in investigative work. Furthermore, ethical challenges present additional obstacles to this style of journalism. In summary, the advancement of investigative journalism in Iran during the digital age relies on the establishment of a conducive environment fostered by governance and the professionalism of journalists.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank anonymous reviewers.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Asadi, A., (2012). The role of investigative journalism in the development of social welfare, *Journal of Society, Culture, media*, No 2, 13-44. [in Persian]
- Bankole, Shukurat A. (2021). Challenges and Prospect of Investigative Journalism Practice in Nigeria, Lagos State University.
- Basirian Jahromi, H.& Lotfi, A., (2020). Fuzzy Hierarchical Analysis of Barriers and Challenges to the Formation of Investigative Reporting in IRIB, *Rasaneh Journal*, Vol. 33 (2), 29-50. [in Persian]
- Bebawi, S. (2016). Investigative journalism in the Arab world: Issues and challenges. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bohnstedt, A., (2011). Investigate without peril: How to support investigative journalism in East Africa, Anti-Corruption Resource Center.
- De Burgh, H., (2000). *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice*. London, Routledge
- Dejen, A., (2017). The Role of Investigative Reporting to Address Public Issues; The case of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Department of Journalism and Communication, Dilla University.
- Horrie, C. (2008). *Investigative Journalism and English Law, USA*, New York, Rutledge Publishers.
- International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (٢٠١٥). *Investigative Journalism in the Arab World: Issues and Challenges*, Journalism Investigative, UNDP Report.
- Investigative Reporters & Editors. (1983). *The reporter's handbook*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ismail, Adibah; Ahmad, Mohd Khairie; Mustaffa, Che Su (2014). Conceptualization of Investigative Journalism: The Perspectives of Malaysian Media Practitioners, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155, 165 – 170. Doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.274
- Kantumoya, Leonard M. (2004). *Investigative Reporting in Zambia: A Practitioner's Handbook*, Transparency International Zambia.
- Kaplan, A. D (2008). *Investigating the Investigators: Examining the Attitudes, Perception, and Experiences of Investigative Journalists in the Internet Age*. University of Maryland, College Park.
- Lalemi, Shideh (2009). Obstacles and challenges in the formation of investigative journalism in Iran, M.A thesis, Allameh Tabataba'i University. [In Persian]
- Middleton, Melisande (2009). *Social Responsibility in the Media*, Center for International Media Ethics, Oxford University.
- Musa, M. & Antwi-Boateng, O., (2023). Investigative journalism in the era of promotional politics: The case of Nigeria, *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol 9 (2), 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2244153>.
- Okunna, C.S. & Omenugha, K.A. (2012). *Introduction to Mass Communication (3rd Edition)*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Regmi, U. K., (2019). Challenges of investigative journalism in Nepal: the case of Kantipur Daily, Nagarik Daily, and Nayapatrika Daily, Master thesis in Global Journalism, NLA University College Kristiansand, Norway.
- Reese, S. (2021). *The crisis of the institutional press*. Polity.
- Reporters without Borders (2023). 2023 World Press Freedom Index – journalism threatened by fake content industry. <https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>
- Schreier, M., (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, London: Sage.
- Shahin, U. K., (2024). Challenges and Prospects of Investigative Journalism in the South Caucasus, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs.
- Shava, G.N.; Hleza, S.; Tlou, F.; Shonhiwa, S. & Mathonsi, E. (2021). Qualitative Content Analysis, Utility, Usability and Processes in Educational Research, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, Volume 5 (7), 553-558.
- Siebert S, et al. (1963). *Four Theories of the Press*. USA, University of Illinois Press.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K., & Galperin, H., (2000). "Discourse ethics and the regulation of media: The case of the U.S. newspaper", *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 24(1), 19-40.
- Waisbord, S. (2000). *Watchdog journalism in South America: News, accountability, and democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cite this article : Pourrashidi, H, & Samadi, M. (2025). Investigative Journalism in the Digital Age; Challenges Facing Investigative Journalism in Iran. *News Science*, 13 (4), 1-20. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22034/Irsi.2024.478625.1251>

© The Author(s).

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22034/Irsi.2024.478625.1251>

