

NEW FRONTIERS OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM: FROM THE LONE WOLF TO THE PACK

Pedro Coelho

ICNOVA, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This paper resorts to a literature review to cover 100 years of investigative journalism history, focusing on the concept by choosing journalistic investigation as the prime embodiment of high-quality journalism, providing a broad perspective on the topic.

Resuming the debate on the differences between investigative journalism and day-to-day journalism, which still creates rifts among the journalistic class, but also within academia, this article dismisses the all-encompassing view that all journalism is investigative.

By assessing the impact of external factors, such as the market and technology, on the matrix of the investigative journalism concept, this analysis seeks to identify potential solutions that can sustain the *watchdog* role associated with investigative journalism.

As such, this paper delves into the new frontiers of investigative journalism, simultaneously highlighting the potential of digital technology to keep powers under scrutiny in an increasingly complex world; create collaborative networks among journalists that expand the scope and enhance the impact of published stories; foster partnerships between media organisations, non-profit organisations and universities; and find long overdue solutions to ensure that investigative journalism reaches peripheral territories, where it still has an utterly marginal presence.

KEYWORDS

investigative journalism, quality journalism, day-to-day journalism, technology, market

NOVAS FRONTEIRAS DO JORNALISMO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO: DO LOBO SOLITÁRIO À ALCATEIA

RESUMO

Este artigo recorre à revisão bibliográfica para percorrer 100 anos de história do jornalismo de investigação, fixando-se no conceito, em toda a sua amplitude, ao eleger a investigação jornalística como a expressão mais direta do jornalismo de qualidade.

Retomando a discussão sobre as diferenças entre jornalismo de investigação e jornalismo quotidiano, que, ainda hoje, cria clivagens no seio da classe jornalística, mas também na academia, este artigo rejeita a visão abrangente de que todo o jornalismo é de investigação.

Avaliando o impacto dos fatores externos, como o mercado e a tecnologia, na matriz do conceito de jornalismo de investigação, esta análise tenta identificar soluções que contribuam para que a função de *cão de guarda*, atribuída ao jornalismo de investigação, permaneça ativa.

Nesse sentido, este artigo aprofunda as novas fronteiras do jornalismo de investigação, salientando o potencial da tecnologia digital para, simultaneamente, manter sob escrutínio os poderes num mundo cada vez mais complexo; criar redes de colaboração entre jornalistas que alarguem a escala das matérias publicadas e reforcem o impacto; promover parcerias entre órgãos de comunicação social, entidades não lucrativas e universidades; encontrar soluções, que tardam, para que o jornalismo de investigação chegue aos territórios periféricos, onde ainda tem uma expressão absolutamente residual.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

jornalismo de investigação, jornalismo de qualidade, jornalismo quotidiano, tecnologia, mercado

1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the classic concept of investigative journalism, emphasising what sets it apart from everyday practice and how digital technology has promoted its expansion, adding new challenges to journalism and the investigative journalist without alienating the concept matrix. Within a market-driven environment, this reflection also analyses how investigative journalism endures, supported by new business models and new production and distribution methods.

The crisis of sustainability in the media, triggered by digitalisation and further exacerbated by the 2007 burst of the mortgage market bubble in the United States, has, as several authors recognise, led to the disintegration of the journalism business, causing newsrooms cutbacks, salary reductions and closure of journalistic platforms worldwide (Birnbauer, 2019; Cagé, 2016; Hoxha, 2019; Jack, 2006; Starkman, 2014; Starr, 2011). This “meteorite”, as Ramonet (2011, p. 11) puts it, has caused a radical shift in the entire “media ecosystem”, journalistic quality being the first victim, as underscored by several analyses (Cagé, 2016; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010; Tong, 2022).

Navigating the inherent challenge of defining the concept of quality, especially if applied to journalism (Marinho, 2015), several authors draw a direct correlation between quality and investigative journalism¹ (Antelava, 2018; Birnbauer, 2019; Coelho & Rodrigues, 2020; Starkman, 2014; Tong, 2022). Concurrently, other scholars emphasise that the decline in quality caused by the sustainability crisis has had a particularly significant impact on investigative journalism (Burgh, 2021; Cagé, 2016; Hamilton, 2016; Hoxha, 2019; Jack, 2006; Knobel, 2018).

¹ In this article, we analyse the broad scope of the investigative journalism concept, encompassing the neighbouring concepts of accountability journalism watchdog journalism, in-depth reporting/long-form exposé, public interest journalism as Bill Birnbauer (2019) describes it, highlighting the analogy many authors have drawn between investigative journalism and democracy (p. 57).

Dean Starkman (2014), prolific on the subject, describes the disappearance of dissenting voices in newsrooms and emphasises the permanent cuts that the “disintegration of the financial underpinnings of the news business” (p. 246) has caused in investigative journalism. Disinvestment in investigative journalism “could not have come at a worse time” (p. 246). “The watchdog didn’t bark” (p. 4), he concludes.

Bill Birnbauer’s (2019) analysis seems to point in the opposite direction. To prove his thesis, the Australian author draws on several studies, including a study by Knobel (2018), where the author, responding directly to Starkman, provides evidence that “the watchdog still barks”. Drawing on his interpretation of these studies, Birnbauer (2019) concludes that editors enforced “the culture and values of professional journalism” (p. 52) by protecting investigative reporting and teams of journalists.

We will see below that these two seemingly opposing perspectives share a common ground.

The omnipresence of the war in Ukraine serves as a backdrop to delineate the underlying thought processes that shape this article. It underscores not only the varying paces of journalism but also highlights the new challenges that journalism must confront to participate in the preservation of democracy (Sarmina, 2018).

As Natalia Antelava (2018) points out, day-to-day journalism is “disposable” and “not designed for staying on a story” (p. 220). The war in Ukraine, elevated to daily news status since 24 February 2022, disrupts this universal logic.

In war, an environment shaped by propaganda and fake news, the spread of amputated truths is fast and difficult to control and journalists, as Medea Benjamin (2014) acknowledges, tend to be more *lapdogs* than *watchdogs* of the government leading to the suppression of dissenting perspectives.

The texts Martha Gellhorn (2007) wrote about the Vietnam War were never published in national newspapers. The reporter needed the British *The Guardian* to publish and counter the “official American version of the war” (p. 448).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the State’s control of information allowed it to have “control of reality” (Sarmina, 2018, p. 193), which facilitated the exclusion of Martha Gellhorn from the chorus of official voices that aligned with a particular vision of the Vietnam war. However, in the digital age, the control of information flows requires much more complex tools, that “the more invisible such instruments are, the more powerful they are” (p. 194).

The digital age will have to use the formula the analogue age tried to use to tune out the chorus of the official narrative forged in propaganda and disinformation. In the last century, Martha Gellhorn (2007) relied on “serious, careful and honest journalism... as a means of (...) getting the facts straight” (p. 420). In the digital age, Jingrong Tong (2022) contends that when “disinformation and fake news further damage the health of democracy”, “we need quality journalism more than ever” (p. 170). She adds that “this need” is one of the primary reasons that journalism is “obliged to survive and revive” (p. 170).

We are exactly at the point of survival, Barbie Zelizer (2017) warns us: “with journalism’s exhaustion, comes the potential for journalism’s height and rebirth” (p. 7).

In the digital age, the rebirth of “quality journalism, such as investigative journalism” (Tong, 2022, p. 171), however, requires journalists to have “new skills, but also requires an ability to think independently and critically” (p. 138). Indeed, Oliver Hahn and Florian Stalph (2018) acknowledge that “investigative journalism is heavily affected by digital transformation” (p. 2).

2. INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The classic definition of investigative journalism has stood the test of time. Even though the original concept has broadened its scope due to market and technological influences, demanding new skills from investigative journalists and imposing new challenges, the concept’s matrix remains. The classic definition of investigative journalism, based on the desire forged in the late 19th to early 20th century, from the contribution of muckrakers² to put the powerful under scrutiny, remains essentially unchanged and has been endorsed by numerous authors throughout different periods (Anderson & Benjaminson, 1976; Aucoin, 2005; Birnbauer, 2019; Burgh, 2021; Hamilton, 2016; Houston & Horvit, 2021; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010; Randall, 2016; Starkman, 2014; Tong, 2022)³.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Journalism* (Harcup, 2014) encapsulates the essence of investigative journalism’s *watchdog* role, defining it as “reporting that sets out to discover something that somebody wishes to remain a secret” (p. 144). The mission of an individual journalist or a team of journalists involves “detailed and time-consuming” investigative work in “inquiring into some kind of alleged wrongdoing” (p. 144).

This definition should be complemented with a description of specific tasks investigative journalists undertake, within ethical guidelines, to uncover hidden information, determining who, when and where they hide, why they hide and how they hide.

2.1. INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND DAY-TO-DAY JOURNALISM

In 1976, in the aftermath of the Watergate affair and the two-year spurt of revelations about the 1972 break-in at Democratic Party headquarters, investigative journalists David Anderson and Peter Benjaminson (1976) published the first book entirely devoted to investigative journalism.

The book introduces an argument challenging the distinction between investigative journalism and everyday journalism: “any reporter who does the job well is already part investigator. Those who merely report the public words of people powerful enough (...) to attract the media’s attention are publicists or stenographers; they are not journalists” (Anderson & Benjaminson, 1976, p. 3).

² The term was coined by President Teddy Roosevelt in 1906 and is related to the act of “digging in the muck for sensationalistic stories” (Zelizer & Allan, 2010, pp. 74–75) and portrays the restricted group of journalists critical of power who, at the beginning of the 20th century and until the advent of the First World War, denounced, above all, cases of corruption. Despite sharing similarities with advocacy journalism and deviating from literary canons, muckrakers are closely associated with the origins of investigative journalism (Hoxha, 2019; Starkman, 2014).

³ The reference is not comprehensive and only aims to highlight structuring moments through the perspectives of influential authors in journalism studies. Hahn and Stalph (2018), Hoxha (2019), Lück and Schultz (2019), Knobel (2018), Starr (2011), Zelizer and Allan (2010) share the same approach.

Indeed, many journalists (Aucoin, 2005)⁴ and certain scholars (Lanosga et al., 2015)⁵ have put forth the notion that all journalists are guided by an inherent *watchdog* instinct, suggesting that there are no differences among their profiles and levels of engagement with the journalistic object. That is not the stance taken in the present discussion.

David Randall (2016) succinctly captures the boundary between investigative journalism and day-to-day journalism in one sentence: “investigative reporting starts at the point where the day-to-day work stops” (p. 128). The news, the raw material of day-to-day journalism, has tight deadlines, and publication cannot stretch beyond the demands of the ephemeral. Randall underlines just that, “a point” at which the journalist has “to stop and report” what has found or not found (p. 128). In turn, investigative reporting, functioning at a different pace, “does not accept the secrecy and the refusal of officials... It finds out for itself” (Randall, 2016, p. 128).

Randall’s (2016) observation suggests that investigative journalism does not cancel out day-to-day journalism. The two approaches complement each other, embodying journalism’s noble mission to serve the public.

Dean Starkman (2014) also establishes a clear distinction between investigative journalism, which the author classifies as *accountability reporting* and day-to-day journalism, *access reporting*. However, the author’s line of argument reflects a clear overestimation of *accountability reporting* while pointing to a set of access reporting practices that distort journalism’s framework of values. Dean Starkman (2014) breaks the link and the complementarity between the two paces of journalism, whose grounds have already been emphasised here:

access reporting tells readers what powerful actors say, while accountability reporting tells readers what they do (...). Access reporting tends to talk to elites; accountability, to dissidents (...). Access tends to transmit orthodox views; accountability (...) heterodox (...). In business news, access reporting focuses on investors’ interests; accountability, on the public interest (...). Access (...) its stories are, if not easier, certainly quicker to produce and rarely confrontational (...). Accountability reporting is forever marginal, a cost center... time consuming, stressful, and enemy making... Put simply, accountability reporting – the watchdog – got the story that access reporting missed... Without accountability, journalism has no purpose, no focus, no point. (pp. 10–11)

⁴ In the list of journalists who argue that all journalism is investigative journalism, James Aucoin (2005) highlights Carl Bernstein and Robert Maynard, citing public statements that the two *Washington Post* journalists made in the mid-1970s. Aucoin also highlights the positions of Richard Dudman of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and Jonathan Kwitny of the *Wall Street Journal*, expressed in the same period.

⁵ In a study published in 2015, the result of two surveys with the same type of questions, given to 1,900 American journalists (1,080 day-to-day journalists, 861 investigative journalists) in late 2013, Lanosga et al. (2015) concluded there are differences between investigative journalists and day-to-day journalists. However, these differences mainly reflect the roles each group believes they have in the trade. The authors challenge the fact that journalists and scholars assume that investigative journalists form a “breed apart” without this claim being legitimised by academic studies. This study, as the authors argue, addresses this “lapse”. Analysing the responses, the study’s authors admit that investigative journalists, because they are more likely than everyday journalists to use “controversial practices”, have “lower ethical standards” than other journalists, which, the authors conclude, are “contrary to suggestions in the literature” on the subject. The authors also note what they consider to be an “intriguing consequence”: “while investigative journalists are generally more adversarial toward public officials than journalists overall, they are also more likely to work” alongside them (Lanosga et al., 2015, pp. 2, 20).

2.2. THE TOPICS THAT TRIGGER INVESTIGATIONS

Investigative journalism is frequently linked to uncovering malpractices within public administration involving public servants, particularly active politicians or individuals who have held significant public roles. The most prominent thematic range of investigative journalism also encompasses the exposure of misconduct within private companies and their managers, particularly those with close professional connections to the Government. It further extends to foundations, their managers, and other civil society entities, especially those receiving public funding.

The choice of the topic depends mainly on three factors: the reporter's originality and proactivity (Hamilton, 2016; Houston & Horvit, 2021; Hunter, 2018; Novais, 2022; Randall, 2016), the associated costs of the investigation (Hamilton, 2016), and the potential impact that *uncovering* the topic may yield.

In assessing the impact of investigative stories, Hamilton (2016) analysed the career of Pat Stith, an investigative journalist based in North Carolina. The study concluded that in four decades of work, Stith's investigative reports generated \$4,700,000 in community benefits. Thus, the conclusion drawn by the US scholar urges political authorities and civil society to prioritise the reinforcement of investigative journalism:

each dollar invested (...) in investigative work can yield hundreds of dollars in benefits to society when public policies change. Investigative reporting costing thousands of dollars can generate millions in benefits spread throughout a community. (Hamilton, 2016, p. 279)

Andrew Lehren (2018) takes the example of Pat Stith to emphasise the relevance of the impact of investigative journalism. Stith's alliance with technology has allowed him to expand the scale of his stories and their impact.

The social profit associated with such work, when it leads to change, reforms outdated laws, exposes corruption, and uncovers criminal networks, is not directly matched by financial profit. However, as Philippe Meyer (2004) acknowledges, the investment in quality investigative journalism is a long-term venture, as "quality produces business" (p. 79).

The impact of an investigation dictates that the journalist does not abandon the topic after publication or exposure. They must follow the story's lead and investigate new leads generated by the impact (Hamilton, 2016; Houston & Horvit, 2021; Hunter, 2018).

2.3. THE CHALLENGE OF UNCOVERING

Because it is more complex and original than breaking news or beat journalism, it takes longer, it upsets people, and it is more demanding of official responses (Birnbauer, 2019); because investigative journalists face greater ethical dilemmas, have greater transparency concerns, refer to more documents, spend more time producing stories than day-to-day journalists (Houston & Horvit, 2021), investigative journalism is "a higher form of journalism" (Coelho & Silva, 2018; Knobel, 2018).

The investigation challenge is too demanding for the journalist for the reasons outlined. "To stir up a hornet's nest", recognise Oliver Hahn and Florian Stalph (2018, pp.

2–3), has costs. There is a permanent conflict between those who investigate and those who are investigated and who strive, by creating “obstacles”, to avoid the pressure of the investigation. It is up to the journalist to resist, “to fiercely overcome” these obstacles.

Jingrong Tong (2022) summarises the nature of this conflict — “investigative journalism pits the press against power” (p. 34) — and this evidence underpins a paradox noted by two authors in an analysis spaced 12 years apart. James T. Hamilton (2016) and Érik Neveu (2004) emphasise that investigative journalism is highly esteemed by both the public and journalists themselves, yet it is under-practised.

The time that investigative journalism requires, the uncertainty of the outcome and the costs associated with more complex investigations may not be the only justifications for the minimal expression of investigative journalism. Tong (2002) complements this assumption. The author writes that in an environment dominated by “severe financial losses”, journalistic media “may not be able to afford to damage such relationships” (p. 34).

Coelho and Silva (2018) and Houston and Horvit (2021) use the same expression — “bulletproof evidence” — to stress the need for the published story to withstand the pressure of vested interests, which the investigation aims to uncover, but also the inevitable lawsuits that this reveal will eventually raise.

In the same vein, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2010) associate investigative reporting with the imperative to attain “a higher standard of proof” while also maintaining “high levels of transparency” and providing “great detail about sources and methods” employed to demonstrate the report’s “independence” (p. 72).

2.4. UNDER THE PRIMACY OF ETHICS

The most distinctive task involves a stronger commitment to ethics and careful reflection on situations that can create doubt in the public eye. Such a commitment forges “bulletproof evidence” and enhances transparency. David Randall (2016) notes, “ethics are not some optional extra but are integral to every aspect of the job” (p. 171).

Thus, Hoxha (2019) proposes that the investigation be subjected to “layers of verification of facts” (p. 1), a task that Houston and Horvit (2021) categorise as “line-by-line checking”, which requires the journalist to “check out each fact” and to go back “to the original documentation” and “interviews”, “the reporter checks quotes”, identifying “logical inconsistencies or information gaps” (p. 104).

The most demanding ethical commitment also requires investigative journalists to be particularly careful in their relationship with sources. Preserving a distance from the source, decoding from the outset what motivates them to make a certain revelation, limits the risk of the journalist allowing themselves to be instrumentalised, becoming hostage to the interests of that source (Anderson & Benjaminson, 1976).

Using anonymous sources is another decision that can compromise the transparency of the investigation. Houston and Horvit (2021) recommend that anonymous sources should only be used after the relevance of the information has been considered and all alternative options available to the journalist have been exhausted, such as trying

to verify the information with another person with real knowledge of the matter, or ensure it can be confirmed in official documents.

3. THE PARTICULAR PERSONALITY OF THE INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST

Amidst the paradoxes inherent in investigative journalism, James Aucoin (2005) is willing to tackle yet another one. In a detailed analysis of the evolution of the investigative journalism concept from 1960 to 1975, Aucoin cites one of the journalists who has achieved legendary status in the history of journalism, Carl Bernstein. In 1975, Bob Woodward's partner in the Watergate revelations publicly refused the title of investigative journalist: "all good reporting really is based on the same thing, the same kind of work" (p. 85), "I've always approached especially long pieces by digging into things... I don't think you do such stories any differently" (Aucoin, 2005, p. 108).

Alicia Shepard, who in 2007 published a detailed account of Bernstein's and Woodward's journey following their Watergate coverage, recognises that "three decades after Watergate", the two names "are still synonymous with the gold standard in investigative, in-depth reporting" (p. xiv). Shepard's (2007) description shows that Bernstein's position on investigative journalism differed from the one he expressed in 1975. The biographer recalls that, during the Bush administration, Bernstein publicly demanded "a Watergate-like investigation" (p. xv).

In the great detail she puts into the characterisation of Carl Bernstein's journalistic personality, Alicia Shepard (2007) reproduces the opinions of co-workers, editors, and, in everyone's voice, the distinctive traits that Bernstein devalued in 1975 stand out: "an unstoppable desire to be at the center of things, a ferocious curiosity... bright, intense, and aggressive" (pp. 21–22), which, from the outset, accentuates the adversarial position usually associated with the investigative journalist (Lanosga et al., 2015; Novais, 2022).

David Anderson and Peter Benjaminson (1976) discuss the particular personality of the investigative journalist. The authors consider that "uncovering information, particularly information that has been deliberately concealed, requires a certain type of personality", characterised by "extraordinary patience" and an "extremely high threshold of boredom" (p. 3). In 1976, these authors established a distinction that is still replicated today in textbooks dedicated to the study of investigative journalism. "What separates the investigator from other reporters is a willingness to dig" (Anderson & Benjaminson, 1976, p. 4)⁶. More than 40 years later, Houston e Horvit (2021) emphasised exactly the "penchant for digging" (p. 3) as the watermark of the investigative journalist.

3.1. USING THE PRIVILEGE OF TIME WISELY

The time that journalists "who had survived the cutbacks" increasingly spend on "superficial stories" (Birnbauer, 2019, p. 44), developing an almost mechanical work, like

⁶ In 1975, a year before Anderson and Benjaminson's joint work, we find the expression "digging specialists" quoted by Walter Lubars and John Wicklein (1975) in the volume they organised at the Watergate conference at Boston University.

the “hamster wheel” (Starkman, 2014, p. 246), is, in the newsrooms of the digital age, a privilege. Time allows digging and widens the gap between the day-to-day journalist and the investigative journalist; it is an achievement and a responsibility.

Pat Stith, an investigative journalist for four decades, was given “the gift of time” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 278). The *News Observer* journalist, whose career James T. Hamilton (2016) analysed, was able to construct “a happy combination”: his reporting generated “financial returns”, “professional pride”, and “social responsibility” (p. 278). Stith managed his time wisely, condensing, in that management, the main traits that set an investigative journalist apart: “get training”, as one of the pioneers of data journalism, “fight for records, analyze data, prepare for interviews, check and verify, publish frequently, and to do follow-ups that generate change” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 278). However, to the time the *News Observer* gave him, Stith added his own time, “going beyond the normal pay-day to spend nights and often weekends to gather evidence and confirmations” (p. 278).

3.2. DOUBT AND METHOD

Stith was guided by “a mantra”, doubt: “I doubt that... the phrase pops up frequently – in interviews about his work” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 208).

John Pilger (2005) also encourages scepticism in the investigative journalist. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2010) recommend that reporters always start a story as if they know nothing, cultivating a permanent “sceptical knowledge” (p. 30). David Randall (2016) argues that being a “sharp and sceptical questioner” is an attribute of the “universal journalist” (p. viii). Houston and Horvit (2021) recommend the investigative journalist “healthy scepticism” (p. iv). David Anderson and Peter Benjaminson (1976) characterise the investigative journalist as one who distrusts “human nature” because, they add, “someone, somehow, is working against the public interest” (pp. 3–4).

While doubt sets the story’s pace, from the unrest that launches it to the moment it is published or aired, curiosity fuels it. Curiosity mirrors the “desire to know the story behind the story” (Houston & Horvit, 2021, p. iv). David Randall (2016) believes that the best journalists display a “compulsive curiosity” (p. 279) that urges them to know more and more about the subject they are investigating. The information they amass on their journey towards in-depth knowledge of the subjects they cover requires investigative journalists, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2010) see it, “such methods” are “a way of disciplining their curiosity” (p. 153). Only then, the authors conclude, can journalists “always go further in the process of questioning” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 153).

3.3. PERSISTENCE, INTELLIGENCE AND CREDIBILITY

Digging deeper into the *how* requires “personal engagement” from the reporter (Hunter, 2018, p. 9), commitment, dedication, many hours of research, sharp thinking, and intellect. As Randall (2016) notes, “I have never met a very good or great reporter who was not also highly intelligent, reflective and thoughtful”. And those, “are generally

more meticulous in their reporting than most journalists” (pp. 277–278). “Exceptional journalists” cultivate a “subtle signature” that pushes them to dig deeper in their verification work (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 153); “the voice and words of these journalists reinforce the credibility of the investigation” (Novais, 2022, p. 313).

This commitment to journalistic knowledge reinforces the usefulness of the verb “dig”, already mentioned here, and associates the investigative journalist with other traits that separate them from the rest. Starting with persistence. David Randall (2016) states that this “determination” is what allows them to move forward, overcoming the “inevitable frustrations” (p. 131).

Anderson and Benjaminson (1976) add that “the challenge of unraveling” (p. 4) encourages the investigative reporter to persist and not give up. “To uncover concealed information” (p. 5) — enduring the hostility of those targeted and the stonewalling of those who want the information to remain concealed create — the investigative journalist must go to great lengths in this exercise of *uncovering*.

3.4. SUBVERSION

John Pilger (2005) and Dean Starkman (2014) associate investigative journalists with a less obvious trait, subversion, which places them in marginalised territory. The authors do not use the word, but the examples they highlight seem to associate investigative journalists with a certain defiance, a certain contempt for the rules and a willingness to shake up the dominant view.

In his compilation of examples in *Tell Me No Lies*, Pilger (2005) highlights journalists who refuse to become “part of a propaganda apparatus” and reject the role of being “spokesmen of the spokesmen”. Instead, they endeavour to alert their readers “to vital hidden truth”. These journalists cultivate a certain “insurrection against the rules of the game” (pp. xv–xvi).

Meanwhile, Dean Starkman (2014) details the role of Mike Hudson, a fringe journalist and society reporter for a Pittsburgh weekly, in covering the events that triggered the United States mortgage market crisis. In Starkman’s (2014) analysis, Hudson was one of the few who exposed Wall Street, overcoming the constraints of the official view: “the business press in general was guilty of missing the moment” (p. 287). When he was hired by the *Wall Street Journal*, Hudson, like “a basketball player playing out of position”, never adapted and resigned (Starkman, 2014, p. 271).

4. THE NEW FRONTIERS OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The defining influence of digital technology on journalism at large, particularly investigative journalism, suggests we should go back to *The Elements of Journalism*, the first edition of which Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel published at the turn of the century. Revisiting this seminal work six years later, the authors elaborate on the effects of the digital revolution on journalism while retaining its essence:

the purpose of journalism is not defined by technology, nor by journalists or the techniques they employ (...) are defined by something more basic, the function news plays in the lives of people... The face of journalism has changed, indeed, its purpose has remained remarkably constant. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, pp. 11–14)

Focusing exclusively on the influence of digital technology on the “evolution of investigative journalism”, Abit Hoxha (2019) recognises that “the role of the investigative journalist has changed during the last decades, although verification and deeper understanding” of the topics being investigated “will always remain at the core of investigative journalism” (p. 1).

The premise is echoed by other authors who have studied the new frontiers of investigative journalism. Oliver Hahn and Florian Stalph (2018), for example, argue that new investigative techniques and devices “push the boundaries” of journalism and expand the traditional techniques of journalistic reporting, but “traditional journalism remains the pillar of news production” (p. 89).

Jingrong Tong (2022) also notes that data help tell stories but do not tell them alone. “Data as a vital supplement to traditional human news sources” (p. 62), as data journalism and traditional journalism are combined in a “continuum” in which journalists “adopt computer tools and algorithms to collect, store, clean and analyze data and to present their findings in such a way that it helps to tell stories” (Tong, 2022, p. 62).

Although, in a clear “business mistake”, technology, at the turn of the 20th to the 21st century, was seen by many as a panacea for all journalism problems (Downie & Schudson, 2009, p. 16), two decades later, technology smoothly occupies the place of a tool that empowers and enhances journalism, without jeopardising the values that structure it. Hugo de Burgh (2021) emphasises that “journalists have to treat data like any other source of information (...) with the same level of scepticism” (p. 3). According to the author, the challenge for data journalists is therefore “obvious”: “living up to the levels of impartiality, evidence and fact checking of the best journalists of the pre-digital past” (Burgh, 2021, p. 6).

4.1. THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGY

To keep the mission of inspecting the actions of the powers, the digital era investigative journalist must acquire new skills and take on new roles. Accessing digital sources and knowing how to capitalise on the data they contain — giving the data a journalistic meaning, building a story with the potential to create impact from that work — requires “hybrid journalists”, who “combine journalism practice with methodologies drawn from sciences and innovative technologies” (Hahn & Stalph, 2018, p. 7).

This *digital hybridity* is an expansion of the concept of precision journalism, coined by Philip Meyer in the 1970s, which essentially applied social science methodologies to journalism. In the digital age, this alliance is extended to computer science and statistics (Hahn & Stalph, 2018; Tong, 2022).

The technology that provides the means to filter and decrypt a volume of data with the gigantic dimension of the leak that the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists dealt with in the Panama Papers⁷ is the same that made it possible to build the network that brought together the 370 reporters scattered in different parts of the world, bridging different cultures, different languages and providing each reporter with the protective shield that, especially in regions of the globe affected by attacks on freedom of expression, made it possible to dilute the risk for all the journalists involved (Coelho & Rodrigues, 2020; Lück & Schultz, 2019; Sambrook, 2017).

Technology, which allows journalism to cross borders, gain scale and achieve a global impact, is, however, the same technology that feeds the security paranoia of states, simultaneously creating bubbles of information protection — which make access to essential materials difficult or even impossible — and watching, monitoring, at all times, any citizen, even if this tapping is merely an expression of uncontrolled power.

Collaborative investigative journalism is undergoing a “technological dilemma” (Coelho & Rodrigues, 2020, p. 143), which Bell and Owen (2017) describe in these terms: “the very reasons the State wants to tame, penetrate, and control the digital universe are the same reasons that make it an instrument of liberty” (p. 8).

The dilemma we discussed gained particular relevance with the Edward Snowden revelations, which had a double effect on investigative journalism. On the one hand, it made it stronger — by empowering the creation of a network of journalists who investigated and revealed the leak, allowing the denunciation of the National Security Agency’s massive surveillance to reach a global dimension, which weakened the US administration —, on the other hand, this revelation inaugurated a new era of security paranoia, with direct negative effects on investigative journalism: “*five eyes*⁸ had the technology to snoop on journalists and their sources, a major reevaluation of journalism tradecraft has begun” (Burgh, 2021, p. 4).

To regain the trust of sources, many investigative journalists, even realising that surveillance is everywhere, have resumed direct contact, while others have learned encryption techniques. The financially stronger media organisations, where investigative journalism is prominent, have set up digital security training for journalists, and journalists have extended this training to their sources. However, the realisation that information security is no longer an absolute given has set in: “the Snowden Affair turned upside down the work of journalists” (Posetti, 2018, p. 252).

⁷ The Panama Papers investigation, led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, brought together 370 journalists from 80 countries with 25 different languages and 100 media organisations. The group worked on a leak of 11,500,000 documents with multiple layers of encryption. The investigation exposed the connections of hundreds of politicians and public figures to 250,000 offshore companies. The journalists worked for a year, following strict rules set by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, without any of them breaking the silence to which they were bound. The consortium published 4,700 articles (Burgh, 2021; Dias-Struck & Cabra, 2018; Houston & Horvit, 2021; Hoxha, 2019; Tong, 2022).

⁸ An alliance between the secret services of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

4.2. THE CHALLENGE OF COLLABORATION

Digital technology, associated with investigative journalism, has made it possible to strengthen collaborative journalism. In fact, collaborative projects have been identified since the 1970s. In 1976, at a time when long-distance communication depended on the telephone or letters, and the culture of the “lone wolf” (Burgh, 2021, p. 3) set the pace for investigative journalism in newsrooms, the *Arizona Project* brought together 40 journalists from 12 media outlets to pursue the investigation of journalist Don Bolles, murdered in Phoenix, Arizona (Houston & Horvit, 2021). The *Arizona Project* sent the clear message that “no one could kill a story by killing the reporter”⁹ (Houston & Horvit, 2021, p. v). It was the inspiration for all the collaborations that followed, especially the one that, underpinned by data journalism, reinvented the concept of collaboration (Hoxha, 2019) and changed “the very anthropology of investigative journalism” (Burgh, 2021, p. 3) — the Panama Papers investigation we mentioned earlier.

Collaboration is based on what the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists categorises as “radical sharing” (Guevara, 2016). Networked reporters share the results of their findings at all times. Sharing is a challenge for journalists, especially those trained in a world of competition. Therefore, to be effective, sharing requires trust, the principle on which journalistic collaboration is based (Días-Struck & Cabra, 2018; Houston & Horvit, 2021).

4.3. THE CHALLENGE OF INNOVATION

As the analogue era journalist has always faced, the data journalist faces the challenge of form. Houston and Horvit (2021), for example, consider it “a huge mistake” for investigative journalists to devote “little thought” to how to present stories: “there are countless examples of brilliantly reported work that (...) had little impact because the writing was impenetrable” and unable to captivate the reader (p. 77). The criticism is valid for the press but also television, multimedia or podcast.

In the digital age, investigative journalism is rising to the challenge of form by committing more to visual form in its various dimensions: video, interactive infographics, graphics, photography, and drone footage. As such, teams are expanding to include computer graphics experts, designers, photographers, programmers, visual journalists and drone operators (Kreimer, 2018; Radu, 2018).

“Innovation” is the key word for Natalia Antelava (2018). The CODA¹⁰ platform, which she co-founded, results from two alliances: it merges different professional

⁹ The same principle was echoed in 2018 with the launch of the *Daphne Project*, the consortium’s first project created by Laurent Richard, Forbidden Stories. The *Daphne Project* brought together 45 journalists from 15 countries and 18 media outlets who continued the investigative work of Daphne Caruana Galizia, the Maltese journalist murdered in 2017 following her investigation into suspicions of alleged favouritism of the political power to a “mysterious” company, 17 Black, based in Dubai (Coelho & Rodrigues, 2020).

¹⁰ Coda Story is a journalism start-up that connects multi-generational journalists, designers, technologists and editors. The platform aims to break out of the disposable news cycle by covering “crises in a way that creates a meaningful, cohesive narrative” (Antelava, 2018, p. 222).

categories and articulates traditional storytelling models — “traditional text, features and video” — to “distinct, innovative and inventive digital formats” (p. 223). CODA’s alliances are structured with the essential in mind: producing “high quality” content.

5. CONCLUSION

Investigative journalism, combined with digital technology, is adapting to the world’s growing complexity, embracing stories that transcend borders, creating networks of journalists who, from many places in many cultures, manage, with the story as the ultimate goal, to collaborate rather than compete. Teaming up with computer engineers, data science specialists, computer graphics experts, scholars and designers, investigative journalists are pushing the boundaries of the profession, storing, organising and filtering huge amounts of information, giving it meaning and shape, and building quality stories that generate impact.

Digital technology is also underpinning the creation of new business models in investigative journalism, from start-ups that investigate niche stories, some of them financially fuelled by crowdfunding (Antelava, 2018, p. 226), to the large non-profit entities that burst in the United States following the mortgage market crisis (Birnbauer, 2019, p. 64).

In the United States mainstream media, investigative journalism, as Birnbauer (2019) emphasises, and as we have previously described, has resisted the cutbacks that have affected day-to-day journalism. However, it has also endured because a not-for-profit sector, supported by foundations and individual donors, has rapidly emerged in the wake of the crisis. Fearing that the worst predictions about the future of investigative journalism would materialise, these protagonists have saved it in anticipation by giving hundreds of millions of dollars in donations to leading journalists who, having abandoned traditional media, have founded non-profit entities entirely dedicated to investigative journalism.

Thus, Birnbauer (2019) is optimistic about the future of investigative journalism in the United States of America, clearly dismissing the various threats that he identifies, which, in our view, are not to be dismissed.

The author also highlights that over 40% of donations are channelled to three national organisations — ProPublica, the Center for Public Integrity and the Center for Investigative Reporting (Birnbauer, 2019). While the future of these three organisations does not seem to be threatened, Birnbauer’s study casts significant doubt on the future of smaller non-profit organisations, which serve local areas and where, as the author notes, donors do not share the same values as those funding national organisations.

While Bill Birnbauer (2019) believes that in the future, national non-profits will be able to partner with smaller ones, boosting their vitality and making them less dependent on the uncertainties of local donors, the basis for this future is not described.

In the marginal territories of the United States, although the non-profit sector dedicated to investigative journalism does not seem to have the strength to resist, it is also true, as the author points out, that the second life of investigative journalism has not reached the North American metropolitan newspapers either (Birnbauer, 2019).

Following this approach, we can establish a parallel with other less vigorous markets, such as Portugal, for example, where the expression of investigative journalism is equally marginal (Coelho & Silva, 2021; Freitas et al., 2019).

The possibility that we are fuelling a two-speed world is real. On the one hand, the penumbra — suggested by the absence of accurate scrutiny of the exercise of powers reached by journalistic investigation — on the other, the permanent critical vigilance that feeds quality, rigorous, verified, in-depth information to those who can access it.

Investigative journalism may be living a second life, but there is a risk that this re-birth is not reaching everyone, and it should not be overlooked.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Pedro Coelho is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, NOVA University Lisbon, and SIC's *Grande Repórter* (Great Investigative Reporter). He holds a PhD in media and journalism studies from NOVA University Lisbon. Integrated researcher at the NOVA Institute of Communication. He is the author of several major investigative reports and several scientific articles published in national and international journals on investigative journalism, academic training in journalism, reporting and neighbourhood journalism. He is the author, co-author and editor of six books, five academic and one of reportage. He has been honoured with several journalism awards, including two Gazeta de Televisão awards (2017, 2014). He has won two investigative journalism grants from the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. He is a founding member of the inter-school network (higher education) Repórteres em Construção. Pedro Coelho is president of the “V Congresso dos Jornalistas”. He was a member of the

executive and organising committees of the “IV Congresso dos Jornalistas Portugueses”. He is a member of the International Press Institute and served on the General Council of the Union of Journalists until 2021.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5734-4731>

Email: pedrocoelho@fcsh.unl.pt

Address: Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humana - Av. de Berna, 26 C · 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal

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