

## **Investigative Reporting Trends in Bangladeshi Newspaper: Selected Print Media Coverage Analysis**

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this research was to examine the actual state of investigative journalism in Bangladeshi print media. The content analysis method was used to scrutinize the investigative reports, employing both quantitative and thematic approaches. Four daily newspapers - The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Bangladesh Protidin, and Juger Alo - were selected for analysis, with 61 copies from each, totaling 244 newspaper copies. The three national dailies were selected as the most circulated Bangla and English newspapers of Bangladesh according to the department of film and publications (DFP) and the local daily was chosen as per researcher convenience. The theoretical framework for this study utilized the social responsibility theories of the press and agenda-setting theory. The results indicated that a limited number of investigative reports were published in Bangladeshi daily newspapers, with the theme of economy-related issues receiving the most attention in investigative reporting. Concerns were raised regarding the high percentage of anonymous sources (41%) and second-hand investigation (69%), casting doubt on the quality of investigative reporting. Future research could explore a broader perspective of investigative reports through textual analysis conducted over an extended period.

**Keywords:** Investigative reporting, Bangladesh, Print media, Journalism

## Introduction

The media serves as a guardian of society and should not confine itself to reporting only on current events. It is crucial for the media not only to report on surface-level issues but also to delve deeper into uncovering the underlying causes, the untold narratives, and the individuals responsible for certain actions. Investigative reporting focuses on exposing corruption, crime, political matters, and administrative mistakes. Journalists consider investigative reporting to be the most demanding and challenging form of journalism. Investigative journalism is inherently risky and requires substantial resources at every stage (Williams, 1978). Despite the high costs and dangers involved, investigative reporting plays a vital role in fulfilling journalism's objectives. Investigative journalism contributes to freedom of expression and freedom of information (Rahman M. G., 2014). Transparency in business and government is promoted and awareness is raised. Wrongdoing is exposed and societal issues are highlighted through investigative reports, educating the public on important matters.

Following the revelation of the Watergate scandal, investigative reporting gained widespread attention. The increased interest in investigative reporting in the 1970s, particularly after Watergate, sparked extensive discussions (Williams, 1978). Since then, many countries have prioritized investigative journalism, including Bangladesh, where the press has gained more interest in investigative reporting. The press in this region operates with a degree of independence but is subject to some level of control, with each political party attempting to influence newspapers for their own advantage. Bangladesh is one of the deadliest countries for journalists on the list of Committee to Protect Journalists. In Bangladesh, corruption, threats and powerful people or groups affect journalistic work (Solheim, 2017). There is also a growing influence from ownership and advertising companies. This study aims to evaluate whether Bangladeshi newspapers can effectively fulfill their societal role given these circumstances. Can newspapers conduct investigative reporting on political parties in power, media conglomerates, and multinational corporations? The media is often regarded as a country's fourth estate. Although not formally defined by law, they play a crucial role in upholding the integrity of other institutions. The media covers these sectors along with various social, political, and educational organizations. By publicizing the activities of these organizations, the media encourages them to be more proactive, accountable, and responsible. The transparency in government organizations, businesses, and society is ensured by the media. Problems are brought to the public's attention by the media. This is accomplished through their coverage of specific issues. The media's investigative reporting may be more effective in

communicating the public agenda. The Watergate scandal or the Hall Mark scandal is still being discussed by people.

Furthermore, aside from the mentioned roles, the media takes on numerous duties by engaging in investigative journalism. For instance, journalist Paul Henderson from the Seattle Times managed to demonstrate the innocence of a convicted sex offender through his investigative reporting. This research aims to evaluate the social accountability of newspapers in Bangladesh, their capacity to shape public discussions, and their role in holding the government and businesses responsible and open.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Investigative journalism is a widely discussed and significant topic within the journalism field, with extensive international research conducted on the subject. Media scholars explore investigative journalism to understand its role in shaping societal agendas. The media typically fulfills its watchdog function by conducting investigative journalism on various issues and thereby fulfilling its societal obligations. When corruptions and irregularities of service sectors of government and nongovernment are unearthed and exposed by reporters they become service to the society (Rahman M. G., 2014).

In Bangladesh, there is a strong academic focus on investigative journalism, evidenced by numerous articles written by scholars, journalists, editors, columnists, and organizations. However, there remains a lack of emphasis on this crucial aspect of media research, with minimal study of investigative journalism in Bangladesh. This study is centered on analyzing investigative reporting in Bangladeshi newspapers, aiming to contribute fresh and valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge in media studies. The functions of media in shaping public agenda and influencing society are uncovered by this research. It will demonstrate the present influence of Bangladeshi media. Studying how media affects viewers is both pertinent and rational.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. Examine the Bangladesh Newspaper's Investigative News Scenario.
2. Examine and evaluate the quality of investigative reports published in Newspaper.
3. Examine the watchdog role of the media in Bangladesh.

### **Investigative reporting**

Investigative journalism is a widely sought-after area in the field of journalism. Its primary goal is to uncover information that government entities, organizations, or

individuals attempt to conceal, and to expose corruption, misconduct, and wrongdoing, as well as to investigate the motives behind these actions and identify the individuals responsible. Here a relentless effort is made to open the doors of information uncovering those stories some people want to keep secret (Rahman M. G., 2014) This form of journalism delves beyond routine reporting of events, press conferences, and press releases to reveal concealed information related to societal harm, misconduct, and criminal activities (Ongowo, 2011, p. 10).

According to Horrie (2008), investigative journalism involves initiating stories based on suspicions of deception, rather than passively and disinterestedly reporting on daily news, natural disasters, and unforeseen accidents (p.114).

Investigative journalism is a process of digging out in-depth information (Rahman & Harun-Or-Rashid, 2020). Conducting investigative reporting is a challenging endeavor. Investigative journalism is undeniably intricate and high-risk, yet it is an indispensable component of journalism at all levels (Williamson, 1978). Williamson (1978) characterized investigative journalism as an intellectual process, involving the accumulation and organization of ideas and facts, the development of models, the analysis of alternatives, and the making of logical decisions devoid of emotional influence.

## **Literature Review**

The media plays a crucial role in setting the agenda and acting as a watchdog primarily through investigative journalism. Investigative reporting is considered the most challenging and desirable task for journalists. It also holds significant appeal for media researchers who are interested in studying media effects, agenda setting, and watchdog roles. Many national and international investigative reporting projects have been carried out. Numerous studies closely related to this topic have been examined. This study involves analyzing newspaper content as a form of media content analysis. Previously, extensive research on investigative journalism was undertaken globally utilizing content analysis, in-depth interviews, critical discourse approaches, and other methodologies.

To describe the investigative news scenario, Hasib and others (2023) say that the majority of investigative news produced in Bangladesh's national dailies is urban-based(86.2%), with little scope for local investigative stories(13.8%). In 1994, Rina Sultana Haq conducted a study on investigative reporting trends in Bangladesh, and the findings were published by the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in 1996 that stated the majority of reports in Bangladeshi newspapers are likely to be interpretive or in-depth. According to Haq (1996), most of the reports published as

investigative news are not truly investigative but rather interpretive. Furthermore, she pointed out that most case stories fail to meet the minimum standard of investigative reporting (Islam, 2012, p. 33).

But Islam (2012) notes that in most cases, journalists do not name their sources; they simply use the term “unnamed source” (p.34). Journalists do not go into detail or reveal key information, and no photographs accompany the article (Haq, 1996, p.16). Though, Hasib and others (2023) found that 74% of investigative reports include at least one photograph.

Bangladeshi newspapers devote very little space to investigative reporting. The number of investigative reports and the space devoted to them are very small (Haq, 1996, p.8).

To set the agenda, more stories on a topic are published. The following article may be the first choice to put a topic on the public agenda. Most investigative reporting in Bangladeshi newspapers fails to set the public agenda. To set the public agenda, the media must publish more and more stories on the same topic. But Bangladeshi newspapers do not publish follow-up articles on the topic being investigated. Readers are waiting for the rest of the investigative report but no sequel has been published (Islam, 2012, p.34). No further articles, editorials, sub-editorials, columns or letters have been published about an investigative report (Haq, 1996, p.16). Islam (2012) discussed the gender perspective of doing investigative reporting. Almost all the reports are covered by some male journalist which carry the meaning of male activeness (p. 34)

Investigative journalism is a very important activity all over the world and most of the jobs in the field of journalism today are related to investigative journalism. All major media outlets are paying more attention to investigative journalism and in Pakistan, this type of reporting is also important because it enhances the credibility of the news (Yousuf, 2012).

The media makes the government more accountable through its watchdog role. Yousaf (2012) argues that “Investigative journalism is one of the most important contributions of journalism to democracy. The disclosure of political and economic wrongdoings can lead to legal investigations. Sometimes government institutions fail to investigate matters of public concern until an investigative journalist brings the matter to light. Investigative journalism faces a variety of problems in Pakistan as in other countries. Lack of press attention, threats to journalists' safety, media commercialism, media corruption and media politics have negative impacts on investigative journalism (Yousuf, 2012).

Investigative reports on strong men who hold significant political influence are typically not desired by the media. China's research journalism operates and enhances the interaction between political clients and benefactors. Male voices with political clout and political protection are aired by the media. Form their positive image in exchange for financial and personal objectives (Wang, 2010). The media in China have always served this function, as the Marxist point of view claims. It is utilized to save the profits of the ruling class. According to Wang (2010), the Chinese media system has always been predicated on the notion that the media serves as a vehicle for the party to disseminate its ideologies and programs. Journalists were instructed to act as party mouthpieces and propagandists for communism (Lee, 1990).

In Chinese newspaper there is hardly opportunity to make investigative report over politics. The topics range from official wrongdoing, policy brutality, illegal labor and unlawful business to corruption and crime (Wang, 2010). The practice of investigative journalism in Nepal has been influenced by significant elements such as resources, professionalism, courage, and commitment. Conversely, the professional practice of investigative reporting has been fundamentally challenged by factors like limited resources, deadline pressure in standard reporting coverage, and the absence of investigative bureaus in Nepali media, as highlighted by Regmi (2022).

Investigative reporting is growing higher in the countries like Bangladesh than developed countries. Investigative journalism in western countries such as US and UK is now in deep crisis because of cuts to newsroom budget; yet it is experiencing a golden age in some other parts of the world such as South America (Waisbord, 2000). Media researcher of Slovenia Melita Poler kovacic(2009) named investigative journalism practice in Slovenia as semi- investigative journalism (p. 95).

Investigative journalists can't play there watchdog role properly. They broke the news what already been broken by official. The journalistic investigation began only after the scandal was uncovered by official sources (Kovacic, 2009, p. 103). In the information gathering phase of news production, it was found that uncovering scandals usually is not a result of a journalistic investigation made on journalists (Kovacic, 2009).

Journalists are unaware of their societal responsibility. While apparently enjoying media freedom, some journalists have solely strayed from the standards set by journalistic principles (Kisan, 2014, p.80). Investigative journalism aims to reveal immoral, illegal, and unethical behavior by politicians, public servants, and private

individuals (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2007). Journalists frequently violate journalism ethics in their quest to tell readers these things, which they always want to do. However, according to Huston (2009) on page 108, "investigative reporting not only demands the highest standards of accuracy, but also delivers more ethical dilemmas on a daily basis than almost any other form of journalism."

We can infer from the discussion that a great deal of research has been conducted globally on various facets of investigative journalism. We discovered that studies have been conducted on a variety of topics, including the ethics of investigative journalism, the connection between investigative journalism and politics, and the capacity of investigative journalism to create agendas. These illustrate the availability of opportunity to examine investigative journalism from several angles.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study utilized social responsibility theories of the press and agenda-setting theory as the conceptual framework. Social responsibility theory emerged in response to issues associated with its predecessor, the libertarian theory of the press. According to Okunna & Omenugha (2012), the fundamental idea behind the social responsibility theory of the press is that the press should have the freedom to carry out the functions allowed by the libertarian theory, but this freedom should be exercised responsibly. The main assumptions of the social responsibility theory are that the media is supposed to function autonomously while still fulfilling some social responsibilities to work as a watchdog to hold authorities accountable and responsible. Agenda-setting theory examines the media's role in shaping the public agenda. The basic hypothesis of the theory is this: Over time, the media agenda shapes the public agenda (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019). The media shapes the agenda through various techniques such as gatekeeping, priming, framing, follow-up storytelling, and others. This research aims to explore the roles of social responsibility and agenda setting in Bangladeshi print media.

### **Research Questions**

The primary focus of this research is to analyze the quantitative and qualitative presentation of investigative reporting in Bangladeshi national dailies, as well as to identify the current trends. To achieve this, the research aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the prevalent topics of investigative reports?
2. Do investigative reports uphold professional standards by presenting evidence, maintaining source transparency, and ensuring balanced reporting?

3. Do journalists or media outlets continue their investigations even after the initial events have been uncovered?
4. Do newspapers pursue follow-up stories to bring attention to important issues?

## Methodology

The method of content analysis was used to study the coverage, thematic meaning, and message of investigative reports published in the chosen Bangladeshi newspaper. Content analysis was chosen for its ability to analyze large amounts of data and identify general trends. This method allows for the independent formulation of topics by evaluating newspaper content (Roberts et al., 2013).

Data were gathered from the daily Star, Prothom Alo, Bangladesh Protidin, and Juger Alo. The newspapers are selected based on the list of the Department of Film and Publications (DFP) of Bangladesh that categorizes newspapers chronologically based on circulation. According to the DFP report, Bangladesh Protidin and Prothom Alo are the two most widely circulated Bangla newspapers in Bangladesh, while the Daily Star is the most widely circulated English daily. The local newspaper Juger Alo was chosen for the convenience of the researcher.

This study examined news stories published over a two-month period. The data were collected from March 2023 to April 2023 from the selected newspapers. A total of 244 numbers of newspaper's copy, 61 each, were evaluated. All investigative reports published in these newspapers during this time period were included for the study. Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS were used to analyze data. After reviewing the initial news articles, pertinent academic sources, and research questions, a coding framework was created.

## Data analysis and presentation:

### Number of investigative reports

In Bangladeshi print media, Table 1 displays the scenario of investigative reporting. According to the data, small quantities of investigative reports were printed in newspapers.

Table 1: Number of Investigative reports

Newspaper	Total news	Investigative news	Percentage
Prothom alo	3918	22	.56%

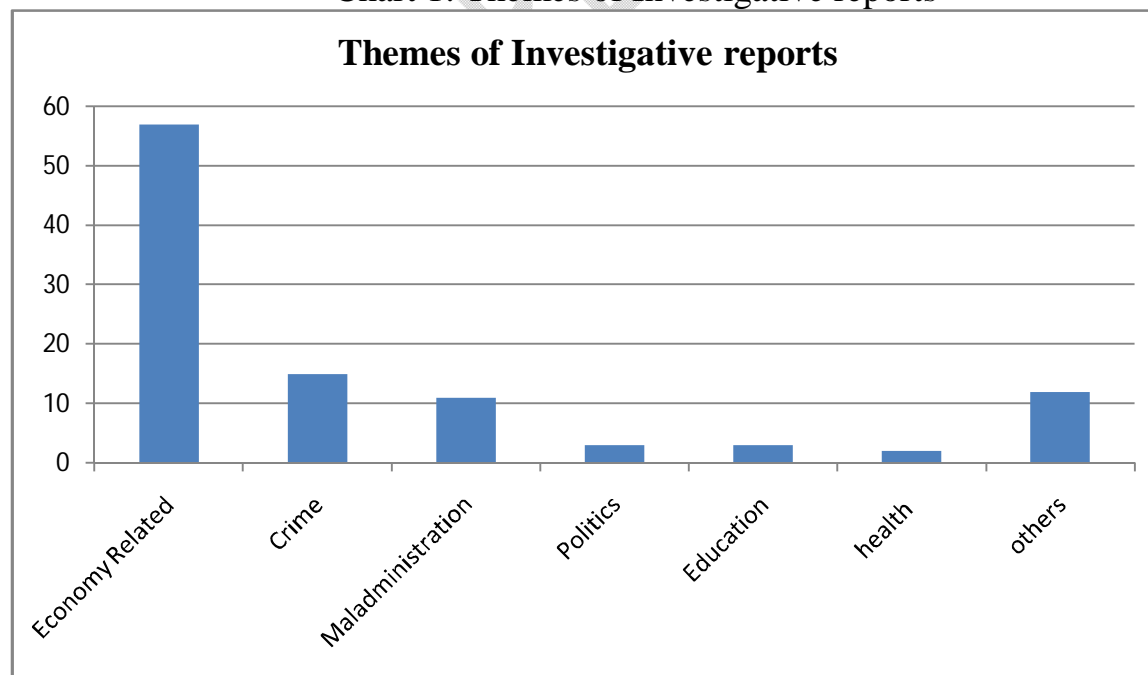
<b>Bangladesh Protidin</b>	4080	21	.51%
<b>Tha Daily Star</b>	3785	25	.66%
<b>Juger alo</b>	4650	35	.75%
<b>Total</b>	16433	103	.63%

Only 103 (0.63%) investigative reports were released, with Bangladesh Protidin having the lowest number(21) and the local daily Juger Alo having the highest(35).Pothomalo and the daily star published .56% and .66% of total number of the news articles respectively.

### Themes of investigative reports

Based on the first chart, it can be seen that 57 out of 103 reports (55%) are focused on economic matters such as economic corruption, embezzlement of money, fraudulent bank loans, illegal accumulation of money and assets. The other major issues include crime and law enforcement, mismanagement, politics, education, health, and other topics.

Chart 1: Themes of Investigative reports



## Treatment of the reports

The investigative reports were given significant coverage in Bangladeshi newspapers. 30 out of 103 reports (29%) were featured as the main news of the day. The majority of the reports were positioned on the first or last page of the paper (62), highlighting the high value placed on investigative reports as newsworthy articles.

Table 2: Investigative news treatments

<b>Variables</b>	<b>categories</b>	<b>count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
News Treatments	First Lead	30	29%
	Firs Page( Exclude First lead)	40	39%
	Last page	22	21%
	Other page	11	11%

## News sources:

Utilizing sources correctly is an essential requirement for producing a high-quality investigative report. Failing to attribute and present sources properly can diminish the overall quality of a report. Regrettably, the table below indicates that Bangladeshi print media fell short of the reporting standards, with a significant percentage (41%) of sources being anonymous, while only 40% were appropriately attributed. Additionally, the limited use of documented sources raises concerns about the overall quality of the reports.

Table 3: Commonly cited sources

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total sources(N= 418)</b>	Properly attributed sources	168	40%
	Anonymous Sources	172	41%

	Documents sources	78	19%
<b>Used human sources(N=340)</b>	Law Enforcement agency	33	10%
	Govt. Officials	115	34%
	Opinion leader	58	17%
	Bank officials	87	25%
	Locals	18	5%
	Others	29	9%
<b>Documents Sources(N=78)</b>	Bank Statement	26	33%
	Govt. data	21	27%
	Law enforcement agency reports	18	23%
	Others	13	17%

The most commonly cited sources among humans are government officials (34%), followed by bank officials (25%) and opinion leaders (17%). When it comes to document sources, bank statements are the most frequently utilized (33%). Government data and reports from law enforcement agencies also make significant contributions as document sources.

### **Second hand investigation:**

Bangladeshi print media yet to properly accomplice the duties of informing their reader covered truth by unveiling them, as they often report news that has already been disclosed by official sources. Kovacic's assertion that "the journalistic

investigation began only after the scandal was uncovered by official sources (Kovacic, 2009, p. 103)" is highly relevant to the investigative reporting patterns in Bangladesh. Out of 103 investigative reports analyzed, over 69% of the stories were initially revealed by official sources before being reported by journalists.

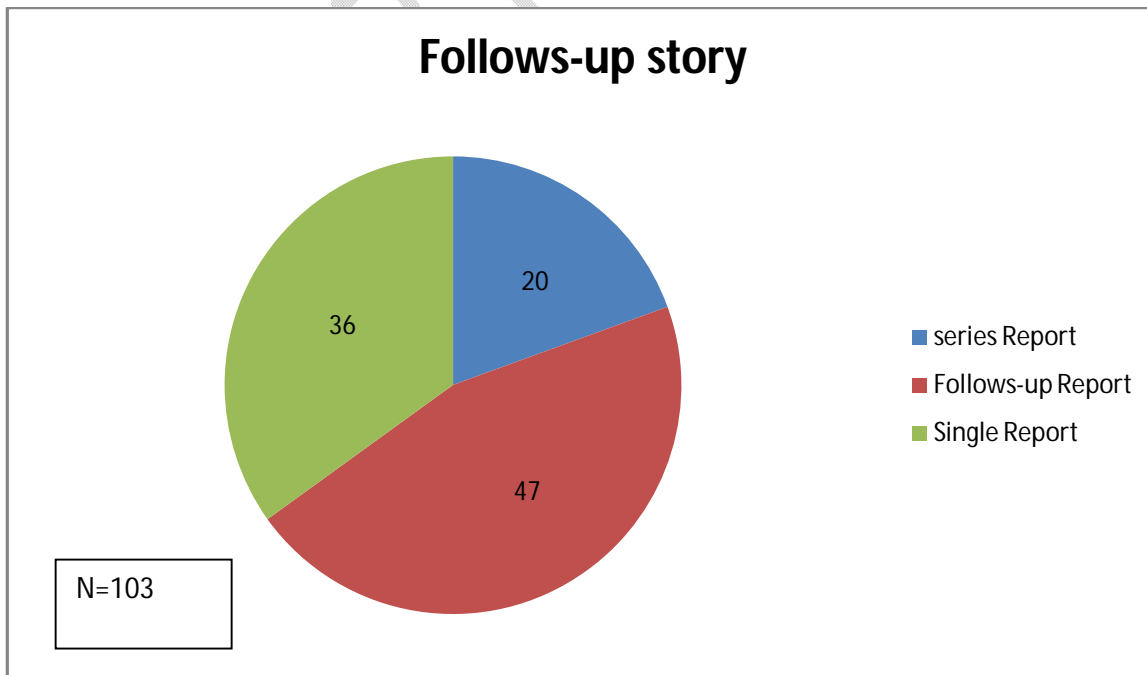
Table 4: Second hand investigation

Variable	Categories	count	%
<b>Doing investigation</b>	Before officials unveiling	32	31%
	After official unveiling	71	69%

**Follow up story scenario:**

Follows-up stories are much like second-day stories, but they may appear not the next day but days, weeks or even months later (Hough, 1988). Follow up story play a key role to set public agenda. A good number of investigative stories, 47 to be precise, published within the research time frame contained at least one follow up story have been published. 15 reports have been published as series report.

Fig 1: Pie chart showing Follow-up story scenario



## **Discussion of findings:**

The study noted that many of investigative reports were prominently featured as lead news stories showing that Bangladeshi newspapers prioritize investigative reporting. Out of the total reports, only 11 were placed on inner pages, with the majority appearing on the first or last page.

The study revealed that the quality of investigative reports is generally low, with a reliance on anonymous sources and a lack of proper documentation to support claims. This echoes the findings of Hasib and others' research, which also highlighted these quality concerns. Rina Sultana Haque contends that investigative reports in Bangladeshi newspapers are essentially interpretative in nature.

In the standard practice of investigative journalism, it is mandatory for reporters to uncover and disclose wrongdoing before government officials, but in Bangladesh, most reports are published after the authorities have already made the issue public. The study shows that 69% of stories were initially revealed by the authorities.

Bangladeshi newspapers play a crucial role in shaping the public agenda, often publishing follow-up stories to keep issues in the public eye. Of the 103 reports analyzed, 47 had at least one follow-up story, and 20 were published as series reports.

## **Limitations and recommendations:**

The study was based on only 244 copies from four newspapers, which is significantly lower than the overall volume of newspapers published in Bangladesh. As a result, it is challenging to make broad conclusions based on this study. To gain a deeper understanding of the investigative reporting landscape in both quantity and quality, it is recommended to conduct in-depth interviews and utilize textual analysis methods for further research. Maintaining strong ethical obligations and reporting with courage is recommended for journalists to uphold professionalism and deliver high-quality investigative reports. Journalist safety should be a top priority for media outlets, including adequate investment and sufficient time for reporters to produce comprehensive reports. The concept of collaborative journalism involves press organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, research organizations, programmers, and other stakeholders working together to produce stories. This approach is also recommended.

## Conclusion

Bangladesh is ranked as one of the countries with the lowest press freedom index, where corruption, threats, and influential individuals or groups greatly impact journalistic activities. As a result, conducting investigative reporting in Bangladesh is extremely difficult. This Study have revealed that the extent and quality of investigative reporting in Bangladesh, especially in exposing corruption at local and national levels, as well as irregularities and illegal activities in both government and non-government service sectors, are significant concerns. Although the quality of the reporting may not meet the necessary standards, the Bangladeshi print media is dedicated to uncovering inconvenient truths about corruption, money laundering, loan forgery, criminal and unethical activities of government officials, politicians, and numerous other aspects. If the media is allowed to operate independently while prioritizing their social responsibility, they can effectively fulfill their role as a watchdog and serve as the fourth estate of the state. Investigative reporting is considered the primary tool for fulfilling these responsibilities, and it is recommended to conduct further research on the topic to identify key challenges and ways to overcome them.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author hereby declares that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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