



## CHAPTER 2

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# Making Investigative Journalism in a Hybrid Manner

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It is easy to forget that, historically, hybridity has always been a part of journalism (Hamilton, 2016). For example, ethnographer and sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978) first engaged with the ‘hybrid’ context of the television newsroom in the 1970s, unpacking its use of sound, moving images, still images, and lighting in relation to the traditional newspaper newsroom, which she had studied for her 1969 dissertation research. That ten-year production study relied upon the direct observation of news workers, editors, and their workplaces and led her to the powerful conclusion that journalism was in fact socially constructed or ‘made’ (Tuchman, 1969). She would develop her thinking about the news across media in her book *Making news: A study of the construction of reality* in 1978. Her work

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remains a model of scholarly engagement with journalism and its various platforms and practices even today.

Such production studies typically looked upon the news media as a ‘social institution’ which enables citizens to acquire information *and* as ‘an ally of [other] institutions’ (Tuchman, 1978, p. 4) due to the ease with which these institutions and authorities could access newsrooms and act as sources for them (whereas regular citizens had a much harder time doing so). Nowadays, the link between the news media as a social institution and as an ally of other institutions has weakened. In a recent book on the ‘institutional press’, Reese (2021, p. vi) first laments the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic enfeebled civil social institutions in China (‘including journalism’) which help provide accountability with regard to the government. We might suggest, instead, that the institutional situation has taken a hybrid turn, in that journalism now incorporates new actors, units and organisational structures, and technology into its traditional investigative practices and methods. Hybridisation has been described as ‘a process of simultaneous integration and fragmentation’ (Chadwick, 2017, p. 18), and it has changed the media’s relationship to other institutions in society as well. Chadwick (2017) identifies a ‘hybrid media system’ which encompasses ‘all relevant media’, news as well as non-news, professional but also social, featuring practices beyond those typical of traditional media organisations. Reese (2021) likewise describes a ‘hybrid institution’ as the developer of diverse ways of producing news extending ‘beyond the news organization and newsroom, [and] based on news assemblages of professional, civic society, and technological elements’. While ‘first wave’ news ethnographers in the 1960s and 1970s argued that the news was not only constructed or ‘made’ but also negotiated with other institutions (Tuchman, 1978), we would reposition that negotiation today within the field itself. At present, investigative journalism combines the skillsets of developers, statisticians, activists and street reporters as they work together while integrating various new media platforms into their traditional ones (Chadwick, 2017). Since the days when television began encroaching upon the newspaper’s turf, such negotiation has taken place, but today it has become a question of survival as journalism faces greater and greater odds of authoritarian resistance. In what follows, we will draw upon hybrid-related practices in the media ecosystem to better understand changes in news workplaces in the digital era.

## HYBRID INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM DURING CRISES

Is journalism in crisis? Or should we align ourselves instead with those academics who prefer to think in terms of ‘transformations’ (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021) in journalistic practice? Breese (2012) points out that a ‘crisis’ is by definition an exceptional moment which demands a quick, even dire response:

‘Crisis’, like ‘revolution’, implies a break between past and present social conditions. During a crisis, the present is a time of upheaval, and the future is characterized by uncertainty, instability, danger and deterioration. (Breese, 2012, pp. 6–7)

While journalism has long faced such crises in terms of what it covers, it is less clear whether journalism is itself in a crisis. Nielsen (2016, p. 77), a director at Reuters Oxford, thinks so and discerns an economic crisis, a professional crisis, and a crisis of confidence within the field. Investigative journalism, an especially resource-demanding area, takes a particular toll on resources and perhaps feels these crises more than other areas.

With the rise of the Internet and advanced digital technologies, legacy media organisations such as newspapers, radio and television saw a decline in their advertising revenues as advertisers turned to new digital platforms such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In response, those organisations instituted layoffs of both news reporters and investigative journalists. Over time, however, a hybrid type of organisation arose to fill these gaps, bringing with it opportunity in the field and profound changes to practice (Hamilton, 2016). Simultaneously, that is, we can find teams of professional reporters at the *Guardian*, the BBC or the *New York Times* working on traditional investigations as well as activists collaborating on open-source platforms like Bellingcat<sup>1</sup> toward the same ends. In this book, we argue that traditional investigative methodologies can persist alongside hybrid variations upon watchdog journalism, and Part 2 features three

<sup>1</sup> Bellingcat is a Netherlandish group of investigative reporters who are experts on checking facts and using open-source intelligence, or OSINT. Open-source intelligence refers to the way in which data is gathered as well as analysed from open sources with the aim of generating intelligence. Here, open-source means publicly accessible. Although Bellingcat is presently located in the Netherlands, it was originally created by British blogger Eliot Higgins in 2014. Higgins took a particular interest in investigating the weapons being used in the Syrian civil war at that time. See Müller and Wiik (2021) for more.

cases which reflect journalistic hybridity in their organisations and their practices. Other studies have already begun this inquiry into hybridity in journalism. Olsen (2020) looks at the ways in which journalism education can prepare future professionals for a hybridised field. Chadwick (2017, p. 4) even uses the term ‘hybrid media system’ to highlight how newer logics and practices can permeate older ones, and vice versa. Talk shows which incorporate public engagement, for example, demonstrate hybridity in their mingling of news and entertainment (p. 15).

The notion of the hybrid media system has become particularly pertinent in the wake of the Internet’s expansion of the temporal and spatial boundaries of journalism. Today’s media ecology has become much more complex, with diverse actors, aspects and circumstances now informing the work of otherwise ‘conventional’ journalism. Things are changing quickly there as well: the public’s participation in journalism via citizen journalism or User-Generated Content (UGC) was an extremely new logic in 2000 but has become very familiar in 2022. Instagram Live and YouTube streaming have supplanted television as the conventional media for consuming culture among young people. As the new becomes old, hybridity must evolve as well, supplying academics with a rich context for empirical studies of contemporary investigative journalism.

Vital to this process are those digital technologies which have ‘powered social and organizational networks in ways that allowed their endless expansion and reconfiguration’ (Castells, 2010, p. xviii). Castells’ focus on the digitally networked society emphasises the connectivity which is now inherent to journalistic practice, driving hybridised collaboration via advanced technological infrastructures such as big data and computational skillsets; interdisciplinary engagements among journalists, computer programmers, students and academics; and financial support for projects via public donation. Digitised networking has opened up a virtual space for reporters to share but also profoundly accelerated the rate of information flow and expanded its reach. This has been a boon to the work of journalism but an occasional bane to society, as fake news—including misconceptions but also disinformation, misinformation and lies—has travelled just as quickly as real news. To tackle these kinds of societal challenges, watchdog journalism must be more exacting and effective than ever.

To engage with this industry turbulence, we draw upon several theoretical approaches derived from the ways in which journalism has transformed and adjusted to the new media ecology (Anderson, 2016); investigative journalists have networked in the public sphere (Reese,

2021); and news organisations have increasingly engaged in collaboration (Anderson et al., 2014). Our news production studies frame our empirical data in relation to organisations, technology and roles and responsibilities to ask, in the end, how journalistic hybridity is being *negotiated* in the unprecedented political, economic and technological conditions of the twenty-first century. In particular, we rely upon a theoretical framework of journalism-as-institution and journalism-as-work (Örnebring, 2009, 2016).

While journalism scholars have conducted plenty of news production studies over the past 70 years (Westlund & Ekström, 2020, p. 75), studies focusing on the emergence of hybridity in investigative journalism remain scarce. Yet, they are more important than ever, due to the faltering business models of legacy media organisations and the many changes in professionalism within journalism, to say nothing of journalism's restructured relationship with its audiences (Nielsen, 2016). Despite well-documented legacy media struggles, we do not align with those academics who believe that traditional media is on its deathbed (Bromley, 1997; Ryfe, 2012). This oversimplified view fails to account for hybridity as the linchpin to investigative journalism in the twenty-first century and a supplier of win-win opportunities for both traditional and new media participants (Olsen, 2020).

The empirical cases we chose for this study are all emerging situations which capture the processes of negotiation underpinning hybridity and what we think of as 'investigative-journalism-as-work'. In each, various hybrid elements are being implemented and organised. They are Bristol Cable, the Korea Center for Investigative Journalism (KCIJ), and the Bureau Local in the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (a smaller unit within a larger organisation).

## TOWARD THE HYBRID ELEMENTS OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

To understand how hybrid investigative journalism is negotiated and organised, we draw upon the aforementioned analytical framework of 'journalism-as-institution' and 'journalism-as-work' (Örnebring, 2016). Örnebring describes the former as 'the *shared norms and routines* of news production as created and maintained by *a set of organizations*' and the latter as '*the everyday practical activities undertaken by individuals who*

*produce journalistic content*' (2016, p. 15). While journalism-as-institution encompasses management concerns such as economy, standardisation, predictability and infrastructure, journalism-as-work encompasses the reporter's need for peer recognition and effective practices and routines which help gain and maintain status in the field. This framework draws upon sociologist Julia Evetts' (2003, 2006) model of a dual discourse of professionalism, which distinguishes between organisational and occupational professionalism. The former is 'a discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations. It incorporates rational-legal forms of decision-making, hierarchical structures of authority, the standardization of work practices, accountability, target-setting and performance review' (Evetts, 2006, pp. 140–141). In journalism, this discourse would encompass formalised aspects of organisations such as editorial decision-making process, top-down bureaucratic systems, and the managerial level of the staff.

Occupational professionalism, on the other hand, is a discourse constructed within professional groups themselves that involves discretionary decision-making in complex cases, collegial authority, [and] the occupational control of the work and [it] is based on trust in the practitioner by both clients and employers. It is operationalized and controlled by practitioners themselves and is based on shared education and training, a strong socialization process, work culture and occupational identity, and codes of ethics that are monitored and operationalized by professional institutes and associations. (Evetts, 2006, p. 141)

In journalism, it would encompass journalistic practices, and especially those developed in a bottom-up manner among the journalists themselves (including various conventions, roles, norms and values of practice, and editorial codes of conduct).

Evetts frames these professionalisms as oppositional, but Örnebring (2009) emphasises that antagonism between management and practitioner is avoidable because they share important interests. For example, both want their reported content to reach as many consumers as possible for the benefit of the organisation (in the form of profits or the fulfilment of a public interest mandate) and the journalists responsible for it (in the form of success in the field and in their careers). How, though, do these respective profiles combine for success?

As uncovered by the news production studies of the 1970s and 1980s, journalism-as-institution appears to gravitate toward standardised procedures and practices—that is, ways to control and organise the work among organisations regardless of nation or culture. Waisbord (2013, pp. 1–2) notes that reporters with different backgrounds often share their values and norms:

I worked in international aid during a five-year ‘sabbatical’ from academia. As part of my responsibilities, I designed and participated in programs with journalists from Africa, Asia and Latin America. [...] News values, routines, complaints were no different than those common in the West yet production styles, ethics, working conditions, and visions of journalism were entirely different.

Here, then, we see the outcome of the combination of organisational and occupational professionalism: shared ideals, and even shared routines, despite very different professional and cultural contexts. Both profiles must be accounted for in an academic analysis.

Waisbord (2013, p. 10) notes that this engagement between the two profiles evokes the larger engagement of institutions with each other in society, describing professionalism in general as ‘the ability of a field of practice to settle boundaries and avoid intrusion from external actors. Professions do not exist in isolation; they are permanently engaged in relations with other social fields’. He finds this interaction across fields to be particularly important to journalism, and we would add that this is even more true of investigative journalism and its unique shared ‘mindset’.

For our analyses, we developed a simple model of the relations among determinants of journalistic hybridity. The determinants are the role of the organisation in which the journalistic practices are embedded; the role of (changing) technology in daily journalistic activities; and the professional duty of journalists regarding the Fourth Estate’s function in society. We will elaborate upon each aspect of the model in the following sections.

### *The Role of Organisation*

The production of investigative journalism is organised and regulated in various ways across one-off projects, the ongoing work of an in-house investigative unit and the larger priorities and structures of the organisation itself. Within our overarching framework of journalism-as-institution

and journalism-as-work, we take a special interest in whether power tends to move in a hierarchical (up and down) or a horizontal (side to side) manner, and how this flow comes about. In this context, a horizontal way of working means that journalistic practices, routines and decision-making processes are determined by news workers rather than management, and they manifest as their shared norms and values. In a comparative study of newsroom practices in Europe, Örnebring (2016) finds that, as discourses, both journalism-as-institution and journalism-as-work inform practice positively and negatively. While management-driven news work might lead to ‘workplace transparency and fairness, make professionals more accountable to the public, [and] act as a check on group-type workplace behaviour’, for example, it might also lead to ‘labour, increasing workplace surveillance, and edging out public favours’ in the name of profit (p. 21). He also argues that while these two discourses compete at the institutional level, they must be empirically understood and assessed at the workplace level. Nevertheless, given their persistent lack of resources, investigative organisations, networks and teams must pool their people skills, technology and collaborators. This blurs the distinction between organisational and occupational discourses, as Hamilton (2016) points out. While news production studies have long focused on the organisational and political aspects of news work (e.g., Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Schlesinger, 1978), there has been less focus on its technological dimensions. Boczkowski (2004) looks at innovation in journalism through the lens of interactivity and multimedia and introduces an analytical framework for analysing the adaptation of technology in a given field using organisational structures, work practices and the representation of users. Drawing upon these research findings and others, we will argue that emergent technological (and professional) environments are always shaped via a host of dynamics, mechanisms and negotiations, as our cases will show.

### *The Role of Technology*

Journalism is perpetually changing, but the speed of change has been accelerated by an explosion of technological advances in recent decades. Technology is often at the core of professional discussions about the future of journalism, and some academic studies have confirmed that journalists tend to be relatively deterministic in their position. Örnebring (2010, pp. 57–58), for example, wonders: ‘Why is technological determinism so popular among journalists?’ The rapid rise of online journalism and the

Internet's inherent interconnectedness have brought great opportunity to reporters locally, nationally and internationally, and academic studies have tracked the subsequent upheaval in their work practices (Aviles et al., 2004; Boczkowski, 2001, 2005; Deuze & Paulussen, 2002; Duhe et al., 2004). Örnebring (2010) also notes that technology is clearly a source of tension between journalism-as-institution and journalism-as-work. For example, Hardt (1990) observes that technology is a tool with which managers can both discipline and control their workforces (see also Cottle & Ashton, 1999; Marjoribanks, 2000a, b). In traditional media organisations, in particular, organisational professionalism can have an outsized role in the implementation and negotiation of new technology in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the arrival of the Internet and networked society in general have had profound consequences for occupational professionalism as well, especially in terms of its relation to the organisational hierarchy. Writing about networked journalism, Heinrich (2011, p. 67) points out that the Internet and other digital technologies have 'shaken up' journalism's traditional top-down gatekeeping functions and made content more generally accessible. Heinrich also observes that if the legacy media had taken an interest in the Internet from the beginning, it would have had a greater impact upon how the news is shaped today (Heinrich, 2012). Studies such as these clearly indicate that the relationship between journalistic professionalism and technology continues to evolve. One important example of technology's impact on the field is the work of the International Consortium for Investigative Journalism (ICIJ), an American nonprofit organisation with the resources to undertake massive projects such as the Panama Papers (Baack, 2016), which encompassed the development of software that collaborators around the world can readily use to search and study such large data dumps (Sambrook, 2018).

Even in the digital age, that is, some actors have far more resources and power than others, but collaborations across all levels and types of organisations allow for the unprecedented pooling of these resources in the interests of holding power to account (Alfter, 2019).

### *Practices and Routines in Emerging Organisations*

Previous research on journalism has stressed the importance of an improved understanding of how practices and routines arise in the first place, and how they are adapted to change (Ryfe, 2011, p. 165). Journalism

is primarily developed and shared through its practice rather than its ideologies, norms and values (Ryfe 2017), and ‘researchers know very little about how some journalists are processing [...] changes and how little journalists understand the changes that routines and practices undergo’ (Ryfe, 2011, p. 165). Routines—or ‘patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs’ (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 100)—can also be used to justify actions. Recently, scholars have tried to develop a more in-depth understanding of routines (Westlund & Ekström, 2019). By conducting field observation and semi-structured interviews at our three cases, we sought a better understanding of change in routines, work practices and the organisation of work as well.

### INTRODUCTION OF CASE STUDIES AND A BRIEF NOTE ON THE RESEARCH

Our three cases—Bristol Cable and the Bureau Local in the United Kingdom and the Korea Center for Investigative Journalism (KCIJ) in South Korea—encompass different types of hybridity in their production work while sharing a general interest in the possibilities therein. They also cast their journalistic net very widely, addressing local, national and international issues in their attempts to hold power to account.

Bristol Cable, based in Bristol in the United Kingdom, was founded by three university graduates and amateur journalists using a co-op model which encouraged participants to share in the work. The Bureau Local, a unit of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in London, was established as a British outpost of the ICIJ, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, to promote local journalism through a public collaboration network which was opened to local journalists, data scientists, programmers, academics, students and others. The KCIJ, located in Seoul, reflects multiple layers of hybridity in that it is financially supported by bottom-up, community-centred public memberships and cultivates cross-border collaboration with partners around the world.

These three cases are interesting in and of themselves but also linked within a national and even global media ecology (Anderson, 2016) fundamentally underpinned by networked journalism (Reese, 2021). Some have collaborated with one another and pooled resources (Bristol Cable and the Bureau Local). They have also shared staff and sent representatives to the same conferences, such as the Global Investigative Journalism Network

conference. Bristol Cable and the Bureau Local are also partly financed by the same foundations.

We collaborated on the discussion which follows in Part 2 of this book after individually conducting ethnographic research at the following organisations: Maria Konow-Lund at Bristol Cable and the Bureau Local, and Michelle Park at the Bureau Local and the KCIJ. We generated our data after accessing the organisations for weeks to conduct field observation, field interviews and semi-structured qualitative interviews between 2017 and 2019.<sup>2</sup>

As background to this work, Maria Konow-Lund spent several years doing research on investigative journalism in the UK, building contacts and connections (2014–2016). In 2017, she received a prestigious EU-funded Marie Curie Skłodowska fellowship to the UK for two full years. The UK cases selected for this book emerged from Konow-Lund’s UK research and board participation with the Investigative Journalists of Norway for five years (2003–2008) and also the Global Investigative Journalist Conference at Lillehammer in 2008.

Michelle Park has studied investigative journalism in the UK and South Korea since she started research for her master’s degree in 2013 (Park, 2014), which became the pilot research for her doctoral thesis (Park, 2022) at Cardiff University, UK. Her particular focus was on rejuvenating investigative journalism at emergent media organisations with nonprofit funding models, and this drew her to the foundation-funding model of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, within which the Bureau Local is located, as well as the membership-funding model of the KCIJ. Although Park did not have a network in the journalism sector of both countries, she persevered and eventually obtained permission to conduct her newsroom fieldwork in 2018.

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<sup>2</sup>For details on the approach to all three cases, see the methodological appendix.

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