Investigative Journalism, Democracy and the Digital Age

Investigative Journalism, Democracy and the Digital Age explores watchdog reporting in the digital age. Mapping new forms of global collaborative investigative journalism, the book debunks the myth that traditional newsrooms and investigative journalism are dying, and shows how journalists are adapting and experimenting.

The book brings together expert analysis and lively examples of investigative journalism in developed economies, with a close focus on the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Combining decades of investigative journalism analyses with expert interviews with watchdog reporters from across the globe, the author shows us how investigative journalism thrives despite significant challenges, and explores why investigative journalism is integral to democratic accountability and public trust in the news in a fake news era.

Offering an original contribution to media theory and providing a new methodology for defining and evaluating investigative journalism, this book will be an essential volume for scholars, media professionals, and academics in the fields of media and communications and postgraduate students of journalism.

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Andrea Carson
For my wise and supportive parents,
Vonda and Stewart Carson
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Acknowledgements

This book was many years in the making. My early impressions about investigative journalism formed during profitable times for newspapers in the 1990s. I was working as a journalist at The Age in Melbourne, Australia, and had a front row view of the painstaking work undertaken by practitioners like Gerard Ryle (now head of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism). By 2004, I had moved to producing radio, television, and online content for Australia’s public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). What followed were more austere times for Australian media.

By 2010, I had returned to study, focusing my doctoral thesis on an analysis of what was happening to Australia’s investigative reporting amid deepening economic uncertainty for the traditional journalism models. My interest in the media’s watchdog role led to further studies in the United Kingdom and United States. The result of these multi-nation endeavours is this new comparative study: Investigative Journalism, Democracy and the Digital Age.

This monograph would not have been possible were it not for the selfless assistance and time of many wonderful people whom I would like to thank here. I begin with the investigative journalists, editors, proprietors, media equity analysts, and other media experts who agreed to be interviewed so that I could advance the story of what has happening to investigative journalism in the first decades of the 21st century.

I sincerely thank Wendy Bacon, Mark Baker, Richard Baker, David Barstow, Eric Beecher, Emily Bell, Helena Bengtsson, Linton Besser, Hamish Boland-Rudder, Tim Burrowes, Louise Connor, Sheila Coronel, Ross Coulthart, Mike Dobbie, Tim Duggan, Rafael Epstein, Jon Faine, Robin Fields, Michael Gawenda, Ray Gill, Ross Gittins, the late Michael Gordon, Christian Guerra, Bruce Guthrie, Jonathan Holmes, Brant Houston, Michael Isikoff, Andrew Jaspan, David Kaplan, Alan Kohler, Jeff Leen, Charles Lewis, Tory Maguire, Chris Masters, Kate McClymont, Nick McKenzie, Anna Nemtsova, Michael Parks, Paul Robinson, Walter ‘Robby’ Robinson, Gerard Ryle, Mark Scott, Fergus Shiel, Margaret Simons, Lenore Taylor, Hedley Thomas, the late Evan Whitton, and Marian Wilkinson. All gave generously of their time and expert knowledge.
about journalism and the media for no reward other than assisting me with my research. I also add the usual but sincere disclaimer that any errors are my own.

To my academic colleagues who have offered valuable assistance along the way, I also extend my heartfelt gratitude. These include Emeritus Professor Graeme Gill and Professor Sally Young who guided me when I decided to begin this project. My sincere thanks also to Emeritus Professor Rodney Tiffen, Professor Darren Halpin, Dr Denis Muller, and Dr Andrew Gibbons for commenting on earlier versions of this text and providing their constructive advice.

I am indebted to Tom Ormonde, whose passion for clarity and knowledge of journalism contributed to making this a better read. I also note the help of Dr Kate Farhall and Leon Gettler during the information gathering process. I have great appreciation for Hamish Wallace for his efforts in helping me in the final stages of this demanding project.

The team at my publisher, Routledge, have been a pleasure to work with. I acknowledge that sections of Chapters 5 and 7 draw on my published journal articles ‘Behind the Newspaper Paywall—Lessons in Charging for Online Content: A Comparative Analysis of Why Australian Newspapers Are Stuck in the Purgatorial Space Between Digital and Print’ in *Media, Culture & Society*, and ‘Understanding Collaborative Investigative Journalism in a “Post-Truth” Age’ in *Journalism Studies*. A section of Chapter 7 on new digital entrants is informed by Facebook-funded research *The Future Newsroom* published online at the University of Melbourne (https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/2517726/20913_FNReport_Sept2017_Web-Final.pdf).

I want to further acknowledge my alma mater, the University of Melbourne’s School of Social and Political Sciences, for providing me with opportunities to teach and research journalism and political science. A visit to Nepal for the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) conference in 2016 gave me the pathway to interview some of the experts quoted in the chapters ahead, and I thank the University of Melbourne Arts Faculty for the research grant that supported this travel.

Importantly, I must thank my current employer, La Trobe University, and especially Professor Lawrie Zion, Dr Kevin Brianton, and Professor Nick Bisley for their first-class welcome and for allowing me time to finish this work.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, and I appreciate my friends and family who have made life enjoyable during the more challenging stages of writing, including Farah Farouque and fellow *Media Files* (iTunes) podcaster, Associate Professor Andrew Dodd, and Professor Matthew Ricketson.

Finally, but never lastly, thank you to Andrew, my supportive husband, and our children, Alex, Lilly, and Emma, for your love, humour, and everyday acts of kindness.
Introduction

Studying Investigative Journalism

When one of Australia’s leading newspaper companies announced in 2006 that its flagship city headquarters would move to an upmarket district overlooking Sydney’s Darling Harbour, it was hailed as a ‘Darling deal’ (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2006).

John Fairfax Holdings occupied all five floors of the purpose-built building from the outset. Executives were on the top, with commanding views of city skyscrapers and the harbour, while the group’s *Sydney Morning Herald, Australian Financial Review*, and *Sun-Herald* reporters filled the floors below.

The journalists had barely settled in to their swish new open plan office when the global financial crisis (GFC) struck, dealing a heavy financial blow to an already ailing global newspaper industry. Suddenly, Fairfax’s new fancy harbourside building was taking on the appearance of a badly timed indulgence. Across North America and Europe, the GFC led to masthead closures, newsroom cutbacks, and thousands of job losses (Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery 2010). While Australia initially appeared to escape the worst of it (Young 2010), the combined effects of the GFC and the rise of the internet soon engulfed the local newspaper industry. In 2012, facing collapsing advertising revenue and falling newspaper circulations, Fairfax shed 1,900 staff, sold its main broadsheet printing presses at Chullora (Sydney) and Tullamarine (Melbourne), and converted its premium mastheads—*The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Canberra Times*—to tabloid size. It then erected paywalls to try to stem the revenue decline as audiences continued shifting online.

As reporters were made redundant, newly empty floor space in the Darling Harbour building was sublet to internet giant Google. As Google’s business kept expanding, and as Fairfax’s kept contracting, the global tech company took over the lower three floors, leaving remaining journalists to share desks on levels four and five. Then in January 2018, four years after Google moved in, Fairfax confirmed it was turning over the remainder of the building to the internet company and looking for a new home.

The symbolism was hard to miss. Google, having effectively conquered newspaper companies in the global battle for online advertising, was now...
physically taking over Fairfax’s Sydney HQ. Although not the only online company to have been sucking ad and subscriber revenue away from traditional media companies, Google had certainly been among the main players. By 2019, the online giants known collectively as the FAANG—Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google (trading as Alphabet)—had risen to achieve a collective market value just under US$3 trillion (Nasdaq 2019). By contrast, many of the legacy media companies at whose expense some of the FAANG group have prospered were struggling to stay alive.

Fairfax’s mastheads have (so far) survived the digital revolution, but revenue and profits are a fraction of what they were in the boom times of the late 20th century, and the company no longer exists as a separate trading entity. Like so many other struggling newspaper companies in mature markets this century, Fairfax was taken over—in this case by an Australian commercial television network, Nine, at the end of 2018.

It is not an unfamiliar story. For many years, staff of the Miami Herald enjoyed some of the best views overlooking Biscayne Bay. In 2011, facing financial difficulties and needing to raise funds, its parent company Knight Ridder attached a huge billboard to its prized building, advertising Apple’s iPad. At the time both companies were valued at just under US$4 billion (Grueskin, Saeve and Graves 2012, p. 1). By 2019, Apple was valued at US$787 billion while the struggling Knight Ridder, like Fairfax, had been taken over and had ceased to operate as an independent company.

The financial predicament of traditional media companies—particularly those involved in print, radio, and free-to-air television—has enormous consequences for journalism. Yet the future of journalism is not necessarily synonymous with that of the traditional media companies. Numerous academic studies this century have sought to shed light on how the collapse of the business model that supported mainstream media in the 20th century has impacted on journalism (Collins 2011; Nielsen 2012; Newman and Levy 2014; Picard 2011, 2014). Clearly, there are negative consequences for news reporting. As newsrooms have lost revenue, some areas of journalism have declined, including local reporting (Kurpius et al. 2010; Hayes and Lawless 2015; Nielsen 2015, 2012) and specialised areas such as courts (Graber and Dunaway 2017). Other studies have identified a widespread trend to a downmarket news approach, with concerns that this means less emphasis on investigative reporting (Sparks and Tulloch 2000; Street 2011; Dahlgren 2009) and a growing appetite for ‘clickbait’. These are stories of high entertainment value but questionable wider public benefit that attract mass audience attention online (Bazaco, Redondo and Sánchez-García 2019).

Fears of an existential threat to investigative journalism have accompanied the closure of many mainstream media mastheads and the
shrinking of newsrooms where mastheads continue to survive (Schultz 1998; Franklin 2008a; Curran 2005; O’Neill 2009, Kelley 2009; Beecher 2007). In the first decade of the new millennium there were predictions of ‘a retreat from investigative journalism and hard news to the preferred territory of “softer” or “lighter” stories’ (Franklin 2008a, p. 15). James Curran (2005, p. 225) reasoned that market pressures would lead to the ‘downgrading of investigative journalism in favour of entertainment, while corporate ties [could] subdue critical surveillance of corporate power’. By the start of the second decade, Street (2011) observed that the narrative of decline of investigative journalism was widely accepted in scholarly circles. Yet he cautioned that it should not be embraced uncritically, but that ‘a decline in investigative journalism’ was context specific (2011, pp. 194–5). In this volume I take up that challenge to critically assess investigative journalism’s prospects as the digital era enters its next phase.

What This Book Is About

This book is about investigative journalism and its monitorial role in a democracy in the digital age. It examines the changes to the operating environment of the news media from the 20th century and into the 21st, and the effects of the digital age on watchdog reporting. It takes the somewhat controversial view that investigative journalism is a distinct genre of reporting that must be considered and measured separately when studying the news media in democracies (for full details, see Chapter 2). As we near the end of the second decade of the third millennium, it is an opportune time to revisit the prevailing narrative of investigative journalism’s inevitable decline—a narrative founded in the financial devastation suffered by mainstream media outlets in developed economies since the commercialisation of the internet in the mid-1990s (detailed below). As we move deeper into the century, changes in the practice of investigative journalism have emerged, and with them new opportunities for journalists. These developments warrant a reappraisal of widespread fears for the future of watchdog journalism and offer significant hope that this valuable pillar of modern democratic societies can continue to prosper, albeit in different forms.

Background: The Digital Disruption to 20th-Century Press

At the start of the 21st century, most newspapers in developed economies were experiencing declines in advertising revenue and paid circulation (Schudson 2003; p. 175; Tiffen 2002, p 38). Technological change that enabled new types of competition is the most commonly cited reason for declines in newspaper circulations dating back many decades. In the 20th century the fresh competition came in the form of radio and
television, while in the 21st century it was the internet, online search engines, and social media.

The digital revolution has also largely emptied the so-called rivers of gold—classified advertising—over which press companies enjoyed a virtual monopoly throughout much of the 20th century. eBay and Craigslist Inc. were formative examples of non-media companies penetrating the classified advertising market, shifting advertisers’ interest and dollars away from analogue and print to digital platforms. Digital competition further exacerbated media companies’ revenue collapse by driving down unit costs of advertising. In 2012 the Newspaper Association of America found newspapers were reclaiming only US$1 in digital advertising revenue for every US$25 of print ad revenue lost. Alarmingly, the ratio had escalated from 1:7 just the year before (Brendish 2012).

Shifts in political attitudes in many democracies, including the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, have resulted in relaxation of restrictions on foreign and cross-media ownership, which in turn have led to mergers and acquisitions across the media industry and an increase in concentration of mainstream media ownership generally. In Australia, changes to content and media ownership regulations in the late 1980s, along with the rise of television news, contributed to the demise of all of its evening newspapers by 1990 (Tiffen and Gittins 2009, p. 181). Further changes to media ownership laws this century have resulted in a more foreign ownership and further consolidation of ownership of traditional media companies (Carson 2018).

Cultural and societal changes have also contributed to falls in newspapers’ hardcopy circulations in developed nations. Faster-paced lifestyles have changed news consumption habits (Franklin 2008a, p. 6), while urban sprawl has altered commuter patterns and led to worsening traffic problems, making distribution of evening papers more difficult. The lack of public transport in outer areas of many cities means reading a newspaper on the way to or from work has ceased to be an option for many people (Franklin 2008b, p. 635). While nightly television news bulletins contributed to the demise of evening newspapers in the late 20th century, free-to-air television as a medium for news and current affairs has in due course become a victim of technology, having lost large numbers of viewers and advertising revenue to the internet in the 21st century. The arrival of on-demand viewing and easy access to an array of viewing platforms including mobile phones, game consoles, tablets, and computers, has spurred the drift of audiences away from scheduled free-to-air television.

Thus, the financial decline of large newsrooms in traditional media outlets in the digital age has been caused by a convergence of potent technological, economic, political, and cultural factors. Conversely, in less developed nations like India and Brazil, as literacy rates have improved so too have the fortunes and numbers of legacy media such as print
newspapers (Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery 2010, p. 24). The complexity of these changes is discussed in Chapter 1. The financial challenges for traditional media in mature economies have raised questions about the viability of investigative reporting, which takes more time and money to produce than daily reporting (see Chapter 2). If large newsrooms are unable to fund watchdog journalism, how can it survive in the digital age? This is a key question that is addressed throughout this book.

**Why Study Investigative Journalism?**

The internet is a contradictory force for news media in the 21st century. On one hand, it has displaced mass media’s revenues—advertising and subscription sales—and weakened its monopoly on news; on the other hand, it has expanded the potential aggregate digital audience for traditional media’s news provision through links, story sharing, and the reimagination of space and time. No longer are stories limited to a few column inches in the newspaper on one day. The digital age provides new methods for gathering and interpreting information, such as crowdsourcing stories and big data analyses. These provide journalists with new opportunities for greater audience reach and impact, and to engage in unprecedented global collaborations that put the international spotlight on injustices like slavery, environmental destruction, and economic inequality in its various forms.

Investigative or watchdog reporting is an important subject for academic inquiry because of its history of interrogating the use (and misuse) of power in society with outcomes that affect people’s lives. This is a normative function of the news media in democracies (McNair 2017). To apply the simplest definition, watchdog reporters uncover information that matters to the public that would otherwise remain hidden were it not for a journalist’s inquiries (de Burgh 2000, p. 17). Such revelations can have impacts on society in a number of ways. These include changes to government policies, closure of legislative loopholes, public repercussions such as criminal or civil charges for those who have acted illegally, or removal from public office of those who have breached public trust (the most famous example being the resignation of US President Richard Nixon in 1974 after reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate scandal in *The Washington Post*). Investigative reporting can also increase the salience (public attention) of an issue that informs how people vote.

Investigative reporting is a sub-field of journalism studies that has received increased scholarly attention over recent years as concern about its future has intensified. Earlier studies like Jessica Mitford’s (1979) *The Making of a Muckraker* were significant for returning credibility to investigative reporting after a period of complacency during the Cold War. Mitford was a pioneering investigative reporter before entering academia.
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Her exposés included a book-length investigation into the funeral home industry in the United States, \textit{The American Way of Death} (1963). In post-Watergate America, the decade-long research of Protess et al. (1991) explored different dimensions of investigative reporting to conclude that it was important for raising issue salience in the media, and for heightening the awareness of the public and elites to a level necessary to bring about policy reforms. They termed this ‘agenda-building’ (1991, p. 6).

Other seminal work about investigative journalism from the late 20th century included the research of James Ettema and Theodore Glasser, which differentiated investigative journalism from daily news reporting. Ettema and Glasser also focused on the moral dimensions of investigative work and its role in marking out the boundaries of social norms. Arguably, their most notable contribution was the 1998 book-length study \textit{Custodians of Conscience}.

Julianne Schultz’s (1998) assessment of the Australian media’s role in providing democratic accountability raised questions about the autonomy of reporters and their capacity to investigate as media businesses became more revenue focused. David McKnight (1999) also traced the peaks and troughs of Australian investigative reporting and, like Schultz, concluded that the best days of reporting were probably in the past. British academic Hugo de Burgh’s (2000) \textit{Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice} provides case studies showing the societal impact of investigative reporting. Michael Schudson’s books (2003; 2008) explain investigative reporting’s unique accountability role in democracies.

Schudson (2008, pp. 14–15) provides two related reasons for why investigative journalism is important. The first is that it strikes a fear of negative publicity in the minds of public officials, and therefore cautions them away from wrongdoing. The second is that, unlike daily news reporting, which is targeted at a general audience, investigative reporting targets society’s elites and decision makers and can trigger public debate about issues of democratic governance and corporate behaviour.

Notable accounts of investigative journalism practice in the 2000s include Mark Feldstein’s (2010) historical analysis of Watergate and James Aucoin’s (2007) \textit{The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism}. Aucoin’s social-moral development theory helps account for how the group Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) developed American investigative journalism, with a case study on the murder of founding member and reporter Don Bolles. More recent book-length studies of investigative journalism include James T. Hamilton’s \textit{Democracy’s Detectives} (2016), Bill Birnbauer’s \textit{The Rise of Nonprofit Investigative Journalism in the United States} (2018), and Beth Knobel’s \textit{The Watchdog Still Barks} (2018). All these studies focus on investigative reporting in the United States and provide evidence to reappraise earlier pessimism about investigative journalism’s prospects. This volume, while drawing similar conclusions, differs markedly in approach from these other studies by
providing a systematic analysis of investigative journalism from an international perspective.

The findings in this book contest the view that investigative journalism is ‘dying a death’, as one British documentary maker stated (Toolis cited in Halliday 2010). Rather, I demonstrate how digital technology has opened up new opportunities for investigative journalism, including through access to large-scale data and new techniques and tools such as machine learning and free software for ‘big data’ analyses. Contrary to earlier predictions, watchdog reporting is also being sustained and nurtured by traditional media organisations, which have adapted and innovated to suit their tighter present-day editorial budgets. The changes include more focused selection of story targets and a trend towards collaborations—including with rival media outlets and with non-media organisations such as academia.

Of course, the normative aims of investigative journalism do not always match the reality, and there are limitations to the potential for investigative journalism this century. These themes are critically considered throughout this volume. However, while the broad conclusions of this book might be counter-intuitive for many, the theoretical framework (see below and Chapter 3) helps explain why investigative journalism endures in the digital age, and the empirical evidence accounts for how it does so.

The Book’s Methods

In making the argument for a more optimistic view about investigative journalism’s future, Investigative Journalism, Democracy and the Digital Age builds upon the empirical research of my PhD inquiry into Australian investigative journalism (Carson 2013), which developed a coding frame to examine six decades of newspaper investigative journalism (1956–2011). To achieve a more comprehensive picture, I conducted extensive interviews with investigative reporters and other media specialists, and content analyses of investigative journalism from the peer-reviewed Australian journalism awards, the Walkley Awards. This book builds on that foundational study, and on my subsequent studies on media payment models published in Media, Culture & Society (Carson 2015) and journalism research appearing in Journalism Studies (Carson and Farhall 2018; Simons et al. 2017; Young and Carson 2018). It incorporates valuable feedback on my research presented at international conferences, including Cardiff University’s biennial ‘Future of Journalism’ (2013, 2015, 2017) and annual meetings of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR 2015, 2018) and American Political Science Association (2015, 2016).

The book’s central argument is developed and further substantiated through international fieldwork interviewing investigative journalists in 2016 and 2017, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom, United
States, and Australia for comparative analysis. Further fieldwork was undertaken in Australia exploring the state of digital-only newsrooms and their funding models (Carson and Muller 2017). I also undertook desktop studies of industry and academic reports from specialist research institutions including the European Journalism Centre, Oxford University’s Reuters Institute, and the US Pew Research Center, as well as government and intergovernmental agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Britain’s Ofcom. Given the rapid pace of change in the media, reports by consulting firms and trade unions have provided useful up-to-date accounts of media trends. These have included PricewaterhouseCoopers’ annual Global Entertainment & Media Outlook and publications by the Newspaper Data Exchange and Australia’s Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance (MEAA), among others. By gathering this international data from industry and academia, cautious comparisons can be made within and between news organisations and countries about the state of investigative journalism this century.

Scope

This book traces changes in newsrooms since the late 20th century after the collapse in the historical business model and revenue bases of traditional media companies in Europe, Australia, Britain, and North America. To gain a specific understanding of what has happened to investigative journalism in democracies in the internet era, I undertake a comparative analysis focused on original data gathered from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. For a more granular assessment, a single country case study approach is applied to Australian investigative journalism (see Chapter 4).

The study comprises mixed research methods including almost 50 original interviews with media experts, content analysis of Australian daily newspapers (1971–2011), and longitudinal examination of the comparator countries’ award-winning journalism sourced from national journalism awards. To befit the theoretical framework, I focused on similar countries with mature economies to test the health and role of watchdog reporting this century. The study does not explore investigative journalism in non-democratic or democratically transitioning countries. While this would be a useful area of inquiry, these countries do not easily fit within the theoretical framework, and to do so was beyond the reach and expertise of this volume.

Investigative journalism is examined across various media platforms including analogue and digital-only, as well as outlets with varied funding models. Where detailed analysis is required, the focus is on newspapers because, notwithstanding significant cutbacks, they (and their online iterations) remain central to original news provision in democracies. Collectively, newspapers still employ very large numbers of professional
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journalists and remain important providers of investigative journalism (Knobel 2018).

Theories Used in the Book

This book brings together theories from disciplines of political science, journalism, media, and communication studies. Journalism and media power, democratic governance, and politics cut across research disciplines just as they intersect in the living world. Therefore, media theories of liberal democracy, political economy, critical studies, and the public sphere are drawn upon to interrogate the relationship between liberal democracy, the public sphere, and investigative journalism (see Chapter 3).

These different traditions offer dialogic insights about media historically. They provide useful normative frames to direct inquiries about what drives the technological and regulatory environments for journalism in contemporary liberal democracies. The different approaches also offer a multifocal lens for understanding how the dynamic reporting environment impacts upon investigative journalism and the organisations and people undertaking it.

However, the main framework applied in the book for understanding the endurance of investigative journalism is a chaos-and-control model arising from the 20th-century mass media theories of dominance and pluralism. Looking at its components separately for a moment, theories that best fit within the chaos paradigm are liberal democratic theory and McNair’s (2006) revision of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s use of the term ‘cultural chaos’. Dominance or control theories include the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory, other Marxist perspectives, and political economic approaches to the mass media.

Before considering the main framework, a useful starting point for understanding the role of the media in political discourse and democratic accountability is Jürgen Habermas’ theorisation of the public sphere—which across its lifespan influenced both chaos and control paradigms. Habermas also outlines a special role for the press in formulating the public sphere. As the public sphere is referred to throughout this book, I briefly touch on Habermas’ account here to show the relationships between the ‘ideal’ of the public sphere, the media, and democratic accountability.

The Public Sphere

While Habermas’ writings have evolved since his 1962 text The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, his original thesis has continued to heavily influence media scholarship. The public sphere’s enduring appeal is as a conception of a public communal space, free of the state, where public opinion can be formed.
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Defined as the communal, communicative space in which ‘private people come together as a public’ (Habermas 1992, p. 27), the public sphere emerged because increased trade activity required regular information, free of state interference, to prosper with the rise of mercantilism (p. 36). Coffee houses in Britain, tea salons in France, and ‘blossoming journals’ in Germany provided public spaces for the bourgeoisie to exchange information (p. 72). This spread to the United States through political pamphlets such as Thomas Paine’s famous Common Sense. But the public sphere was more than a space for regular information exchange; it enabled the visible transfer of ideas beyond state control, forming a ‘private domain carved off from public authority’ (p. 25). It was a place to critique the state and compel public authority to ‘legitimate itself before public opinion’ (p. 25).

Newspapers spread information further than any public gathering and provided a key means, beyond the coffee houses and journals, to communicate and facilitate political discourse. The newspaper, in the words of Habermas, had become the ‘public sphere’s pre-eminent institution’ (Habermas 1992, p. 181). By 1834, a significant milestone in the development of public opinion occurred, when England’s House of Commons overturned its ban on reporters taking notes in the London gallery and finally acknowledged the role of the press by providing physical space for reporters (Vice and Farrell 2017, p. 15).

The Fourth Estate

Half a century earlier, in 1787, the term ‘fourth estate’ was coined by the Scottish philosopher and writer Thomas Carlyle. Noting the reference by the Irish statesman Edmund Burke to the existence of three estates, or powers, in the British Parliament—the commons (House of Commons), the nobility, and the clergy (House of Lords), Carlyle reported: ‘Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all’ (Carlyle [1908] 1948, p. 392). While scholars note that the fourth estate is a mutable term that has represented different things in different country contexts, it has become a short form for the ‘ideal’ of the news media providing democratic accountability.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the United States welded journalism to democracy in the First Amendment to the US Constitution: ‘Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech, or of the press’ (Schudson 2003, p. 200). While Australia has not explicitly enshrined freedom of the press in its constitution, its highest court, like Britain’s, has interpreted an implicit right to freedom of expression to make the system of democratic government work. For the press, however, this freedom has been qualified in common law and refined from time to time in case law.
Introduction

Transformation and Degeneration of the Public Sphere

For all its promise, the role of the press in connecting people to one another in an ‘imagined community’ to actively participate as citizens outside state control was not to last, according to Habermas. The successful commerce that engendered the public sphere became the instrument of its failure. Media organisations, which Habermas described as ‘public organs’ evolving out of the public’s use of its own reason, were transformed by the late 19th century into ‘a medium for culture as an object of consumption’ (Habermas 1992, p. 183). Capitalism enabled successful profit-seeking news organisations to concentrate power and cultural authority, thus interrupting the free flow of ideas. Habermas stated that newspapers succumbed to the needs of their publishers, rather than their editors, arguing that ‘they will do as they are told in the private interest of a profit-oriented enterprise’ (p. 186). Habermas’ criticism of the modern mass media was blunt and scathing: ‘The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only’ (p. 171). Here, Habermas’ disillusioned perception of 20th-century media usefully links us to Marxist critiques that underpin ‘control’ theories of the media, which conceive of media owners prioritising profits above all else. While it is true that Habermas ultimately reconsidered his fatal conclusions about the public sphere, determining that deliberative democracy was still possible in the digital age, he attached significant qualifications.

Habermas’ original theory, while compelling, as the number of texts dedicated to it testify, is critiqued on many fronts, including for its lack of inclusivity (mainly of class, race, and gender), its singularity (overlooking the coexistence of multiple public spheres), and its historical amnesia. Rather than elaborating on these issues here, it should suffice to acknowledge the detailed appraisals of the theory by others (see Calhoun 1992).

For all its shortcomings, the conception of the public sphere has endured, and liberal democratic theory of the media was reinvigorated from the Habermasian framework. As media scholar Michael Schudson (2003, p. 67) stated, it has ‘been held up as a normative model of exemplary civic life’.

Liberal Democratic Theory of the Media

Democracy literally means rule by the ‘demos’, or the people. The liberal tradition emphasises the virtues of freedom and liberty of the citizenry. Representative democracy is therefore predicated on the idea that the representatives of the ‘demos’ are accountable to those they represent. Thus ‘democracy is about an autonomous demos governing itself as a collective, which entails that rulers who control the coercive power of the state need to be constrained’ (Hendriks and Karsten 2014, p. 42).
This book is concerned with the *liberal* aspect of democracy and the media’s role in facilitating democracy. This includes providing quality information so that citizens are informed and able to meaningfully participate in the democratic process. Citizens should be able to encounter diverse and multiple viewpoints in the public sphere, including those of dissenting and critical voices of the state. According to Brian McNair (2003, p. 18), a well-functioning democracy requires at least three key elements: *participation*, *rationality* of choice, and *constitutionality*. Italian political philosopher Norberto Bobbio (1987, p. 19) combines the concepts of participation and rationality, saying the role of the media is to inform citizens so that they can ideally ‘vote for the wisest, the most honest, the most enlightened of their fellow citizens’.

Important also are the constraints on public representatives to ensure they do not abuse their legislative powers or take undue advantage of the spoils of office by acting outside the rules. For McNair, *constitutionality* encompasses the agreed set of procedures and laws governing the conduct of elections. It oversees the behaviours of those who win them, and the legitimate activities of those who dissent (McNair 2017, p. 18). Therefore, a well-functioning democracy depends on the public being able to monitor its representatives and on the state accepting criticism of its own exercise of power. The media plays a role in both of these functions.

Investigative journalism goes a step further by exposing concealments in democratic governance. Nick Davies, a reporter for Britain’s *The Guardian*, made an important observation about democracies compared to autocracies: ‘In an established democracy, abuse of power cannot afford to be visible’ (2014, p. xiv). In other words, if the rule of law in a democracy is deliberately broken, concealment becomes necessary to avoid consequences.

Direct democracy—a pure, idealistic form of democracy in which people would decide on policy initiatives directly—would be impractical for everyday national governance. Therefore, the relationship between the democratic representatives who govern and the governed has largely been facilitated by the mass media in the 20th century. The monitorial role is the domain of investigative journalism.

In the 21st century, however, this intermediary role is changing as social media allows direct engagement between legislators and the people. Different forms of monitoring power are also possible in the digital age. Political theorist John Keane (2010) observed that the digital age was a time of ‘communicative abundance’ (p. 739). The new century has provided new mechanisms for observing and reporting abuses of power, in an extension of what he calls ‘monitory democracy’. Keane noted: ‘Power-monitoring and power-controlling devices have begun to extend sideways and downward through the whole political order’ (p. xxvii). But he also observed that monitory democracy’s future ‘has not yet been determined’ (p. xxxiii). This book aims to show that investigative journalists remain part of that future, finding new ways to observe and report abuses of power on an unprecedented scale.
The Chaos-and-Control Framework

The relationship between media and power in democracies is often understood through the theoretical lenses of ‘chaos’ and ‘control’. The control (or dominance) paradigm broadly includes critical approaches to media that view it as upholding the interests of dominant elites in capitalist societies. This approach largely assumes that audiences are passive and unable to rebuff media influence, and are disempowered by top-down economic and political forces. It is a pessimistic assessment of modern news media, and is often referred to by critics when trying to make sense of rising infotainment, tabloidisation of content, and clickbait, which are all generally considered to be undermining journalism’s civic role of accurately informing the public.

The chaos paradigm generally includes approaches that embrace technological developments such as the internet and, as Keane sees it, that allow for pluralism of media content, sources, and audiences. Its emphasis is on mechanisms for ‘dissent, openness and diversity rather than closure, exclusivity and ideological homogeneity’ (McNair 2006, p. vii). In the modern news environment, the digital age tends to be viewed optimistically and media technologies are seen as liberating, providing citizens with greater opportunities for participation and engagement and enabling greater political accountability and transparency in society. Yet it also has a darker side, one that enables the fast, viral spread of false information from anywhere at any time that can confuse the public about what is factual and what is not.

I propose a conceptual reorientation of these different approaches for the study of investigative journalism. While each of these streams is useful for understanding aspects of media power and its functionality in society, they are usually regarded as binaries, as oppositional. Instead, I propose that these two paradigms are not mutually exclusive but can coexist in relation to investigative reporting. Applying an overarching chaos-and-control theoretical framework helps explain the empirical evidence indicating that investigative journalism continues to prosper despite the uncertain economic future of many newsrooms. To do this I conceptualise the chaos and control paradigms as occupying two spaces on a continuum, with the possibility of overlap. This provides a theoretical space, however narrow, where a shared objective is possible (to undertake investigative journalism), even though media outlets’ motivations for doing so may be disparate. Within this shared space, investigative journalism endures.

Philip Meyer and Kim Koang-Hyub (2003, p. 1) and other scholars have previously described this space in varying terms such as the ‘profit controversy’ and the ‘sweet spot’ (O’Donnell et al. 2012, p. 7). In essence, this space is where the imperatives for commercial news media to remain profitable and to maintain a public interest role can coexist. Chapter 3 explains the book’s theoretical framework in detail.
The Chapters Ahead

To answer the primary question about the role and capacity of investigative journalism to survive in the digital age, the first three chapters of the book outline the background to the study, provide a working definition of investigative journalism, and describe my methods for measurement and the theoretical framework. The remaining chapters (Chapters 4–7) provide empirical evidence and multilevel analysis to show how investigative journalism has survived and adapted from the 20th century and into the 21st century. Together, these chapters bring together various strands of an important, timely international debate about the viability of investigative journalism and its relationships with the public sphere and democracy in the digital age. In doing so, the book rejects the view that investigative journalism is in perilous decline and argues, by contrast, the case for optimism about its future.

Chapter 1 outlines the major global trends in developed liberal democracies for the news media since the analogue era of the late 20th century through to the digital age. It includes a sobering account of the more recent financial hardships experienced by the press in developed economies, with a focus on the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. The chapter introduces the Australian mastheads to be analysed in Chapter 4 to empirically test the assertion that investigative journalism is in decline.

Chapter 2 examines what is meant by investigative journalism. Through a review of investigative reporting’s antecedents, and drawing on the work of scholars who have researched this question to date, combined with my own interviews with investigative journalists from different countries, I identify key elements that are commonly thought to constitute investigative reporting. An original working definition of investigative journalism is advanced here based on nine traits, including five mandatory elements. In this chapter, concepts such as ‘public interest’, morality, objectivity, and journalistic ethics are brought into focus to further probe contemporary understandings of what constitutes investigative journalism.

Having established what investigative journalism is (and is not), Chapter 3 critically examines why investigative journalism matters to democracies and describes in detail the main theoretical framework outlined in this introduction. The chapter compares and contrasts the positive appraisal of investigative journalism that largely falls within liberal democratic theory with political economic theorists’ negative assessments of the role of mass media in democratic societies, which also resonates with Habermas’ conclusions in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. In doing so, the chapter discusses limitations and common criticisms of investigative journalism. Importantly, while tensions exist between the two streams, the theoretical framework
is employed to show why they are not entirely mutually exclusive and why neither theoretical space can fully explain modern mass media. It concludes by conceptualising an overlapping space between the ‘control’ and ‘chaos’ theories of mass media, where investigative journalism’s economic viability and contribution to democratic accountability coexist.

In order to evaluate the state of investigative journalism today, it is important to understand its past practices and norms. Chapter 4 uses Australia as its case study to trace six decades of investigative reporting. It addresses two questions: How has investigative reporting developed and changed since the mid-20th century? And how has it fared since the arrival of the digital revolution? I address (and contest) the widely held romantic view that investigative journalism’s ‘golden age’ is behind us. I demonstrate that there is no simple linear relationship between falling print media revenues and the state of quality newspapers’ investigative journalism. Rather, I find that through experimentation and adaptation by newspapers, investigative journalism continues to endure and thrive in the 21st century.

Chapter 5 applies the working definition established in Chapter 2 in its content analyses of national journalism awards in the United States, Britain, and Australia. It aims to track the practice of investigative journalism over recent decades and to identify key changes in the transition from print and analogue to the digital era. I find that earlier adaptations and experimentations are paying off, with cross-media collaborations starting to win major awards and data journalism in watchdog reporting becoming more prevalent, while traditional media outlets continue to play an important role. However, these positive developments are occurring against a backdrop of the ‘fake news’ phenomenon and falling public trust in media. I argue that traditional media’s evidence-based storytelling through investigative reporting provides a critical counterpoint and refuge for the public as confidence in the media is shaken by the virulent spread of fake news.

Chapter 6 uses original interviews and a comparative case study approach to expand on the implications of transnational cross-media collaboration and use of big data in investigative reporting. It examines the value of connecting large-scale data with unprecedented large-scale collaborations to critique global power and its injustices. I also consider negative impacts of the data age, including breaches of privacy through mass data surveillance, which can lead to pressure to reduce press freedom. The chapter begins with a short history of data journalism, including its roots in computer-assisted reporting (CAR), and progresses to the comparative study of the three most famous mega data leaks in recent journalism history: WikiLeaks, Edward Snowden’s National Security Agency (NSA) revelations, and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism’s (ICIJ) Panama Papers. These examples reveal different models of transnational investigative collaborations and use of social science
methods in parsing data. I highlight mainstream media’s role in supporting (and criticising) these large-scale investigations during a transformative period for news media.

Underpinning each of the chapters is the important question of how investigative reporting is financed. Chapter 7 examines revenue-raising options being employed by news media outlets in developed countries. Among the models investigated are digital paywalls, native advertising, crowdsourcing, philanthropy, micropayments, and ‘white knight’ proprietors. I find there is no single solution for funding news this century. Rather, what has emerged is experimentation, adaptation, and flexibility in the continuing search for new ways to fund journalism and, by extension, investigative reporting. While erecting paywalls has become the most common adaptive mechanism employed by print mastheads in the second decade of this century to get online readers to pay for content, this option is largely shunned by digital-only newsrooms.

The concluding chapter brings together the earlier findings and provides an assessment about the future of investigative reporting and its role in democratic accountability in the digital age. It offers a relatively positive appraisal about how technology can regenerate the public sphere on a global scale, offering new ways to critique power and injustices through investigative journalism. It shows how reorienting the relationship between political economy and liberal democratic theories can explain investigative journalism’s endurance and its ongoing capacity to inform the public sphere. While there are challenges and problems ahead for investigative reporting, which are not ignored, the book concludes there is considerable cause for optimism about this essential component of modern democratic society.

A Final Note

This book uses a number of terms interchangeably. References to ‘media’ and ‘news media’ are assumed to have the same meaning, as are ‘reporter’ and ‘journalist’. Although ‘online’ and ‘digital’ are not precise synonyms, they are also used interchangeably here in reference to media.

My hope is that readers will find this book a useful guide for navigating recent dynamic changes to the media landscape and the consequences of these changes for investigative journalism from one century to the next. To my academic colleagues, the book presents a reappraisal of some of the main theoretical frameworks used in their teaching and research areas. I offer what I hope is a useful working definition for detecting and measuring investigative journalism. My goal in writing this book is to contribute useful empirical evidence and theoretical insights about investigative journalism in the digital age to the existing scholarship. In doing so, I offer an alternative narrative to the pessimistic predictions for investigative journalism.
I have another, more personal reason for writing this book. As a political scientist, I have a keen interest in the intersection between media and politics, and I seek to acquire a better understanding of journalism’s role in informing the public and safeguarding democracy. As a former journalist with almost 15 years’ experience in newspapers, radio, television, and online reporting, I am concerned about the quality of information in the public sphere and the deleterious effects of fake news and falling public trust on civic discourse. For these reasons I am curious about the practice of investigative journalism in all its forms, its role in fact-based storytelling, and its impacts on society. Thus this book aims to engage various types of readers with academic, professional, or personal interests in journalism and its contribution to democracy. I hope you enjoy it.

Notes

1. The qualifications were that a self-regulating media system must maintain its independence in relation to its environments while also connecting political discourse with both civil society and the institutionalised political centre. The second condition was that an inclusive civil society must ‘empower citizens to participate in, and to respond to, a public discourse which, in turn, must not degenerate into a colonising mode of communication’ (Habermas 2009, p. 173).

2. Important elements of representative democracy include popular, periodic elections; competitive political parties; a free mass media; and parliamentary representative assemblies (Almond et al. 2010, p. 23).

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Introduction


The decline of legacy newspaper businesses has implications for print investigative journalism. Compared to others types of journalism, it is expensive and time-consuming. Yet, as this chapter has shown, Australian newspapers, particularly broadsheets, have a long history of producing it. And although the line between news reporting and investigative journalism can sometimes appear blurred, the additional time, expense, and effort required to produce investigative journalism goes part of the way towards defining it and differentiating it from other forms. The next chapter tackles the question of ‘what is investigative journalism’ by tracing its history and, combined with expert interviews, arrives at a working definition of it. While this chapter has drawn a sobering account of how newspapers have suffered in the late 20th century with the onset of the digital age, subsequent chapters of this book show that investigative journalism is not only withstanding the slow, steady decline of print newspapers, but it potentially has a bright future as journalists and media outlets adapt to a new (global) news environment in the 21st century.

Notes

1. News Limited is now News Australia Holdings Pty Limited, but operates under its parent company News Corp and is referred to as News Corp Australia.
3. They were the *Daily News* in Adelaide, Sydney’s *Daily Mirror*, and Melbourne’s *Truth*.
4. The S&P/ASX 200 is recognised as the primary investable benchmark in Australia. The index covers approximately 78 per cent of Australian equity market capitalisation.
6. Out of 18 surveyed nations, newspaper circulation has only increased in Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, and Ireland between 1980 and 2007.
8. Ibid.

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From ‘Rivers of Gold’ to the Digital Economy


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to the digital age—which are generally considered to be important moments in the evolution of its practice and public impact. In tracking these epochs, we discover that the objectives of investigative reporting have remained largely constant: to expose wrongdoing on behalf of the public for the common good. What has changed temporally are the methods and scale of investigations, which in the digital age have come to transcend national borders. This is made possible through journalists’ unprecedented access to data, highly skilled data journalism, and cross-national collaborations. It is also important to remember, however, that over time investigative journalism has always remained the outlier in the field of reporting. As stated by Leen:

Maybe only one per cent of journalism is true investigative journalism. And that’s journalism that’s done by well-funded mainstream outlets just because it’s so expensive and so difficult and takes so much time.

(Leen 2016, interview with the author, 30 August)

Leen’s observation also emphasises the historical role of traditional established media in producing quality investigative journalism, particularly newspapers. While this chapter has addressed the question of what is investigative journalism and why journalists do it, Leen’s observation leads us to the important questions examined in the chapters ahead about the viability of watchdog reporting in the digital age, and which outlets are likely to undertake it in the future. We begin this task in the next chapter by examining a theoretical framework to explain why watchdog reporting endures in the digital age, and which outlets are producing quality examples of investigative reporting, offering some confidence about its future.

Note

1. Aucoin, J. 2006 notes that reform journalism, muckraking, and investigative reporting were used interchangeably, citing Carey Williams, editor of The Nation, and Jessica Mitford, a freelance reporter who exposed the unethical practices of the funeral industry in America in The American Way of Death in 1963.

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What Is Investigative Journalism?


What Is Investigative Journalism?

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and other collaborating partners, resulting in unprecedented information flows within, and between, nations. Indeed, as Doig had foreseen, investigative journalism exists and endures in a different environment (as it must) ‘than that which promoted it in the past’ (1997, p. 206).

Sustainable funding remains a perennial challenge for watchdog reporting. Its future is also made vulnerable by governments enacting laws that limit media freedom and diversity. To assist our understanding of how watchdog reporting can survive into the future, the next chapter explores its past, and in particular how it has changed and developed since the mid-20th century.

Note
1. The internet’s egalitarian power was mobilised through social networking sites such as Twitter during the 2009 Iranian elections. The voices of many allowed greater international scrutiny of the corrupt conduct of those elections.

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Why Watchdog Reporting Endures


Another way of understanding the modern phenomena of fewer investigative series, less mainstream media follow-up, and more intense short-term promotions is that investigative stories can achieve a bright initial flare of interest, but the flame does not last as long as it once did—such as the time when a newspaper would write a series to keep the issue on the public agenda for months, or even years, as was the case in the 1950s. This difference might create the (false) perception that there are fewer investigative stories—or, perhaps more arguably, that investigations are of lesser quality.

The second question relating to the quality of investigative journalism over time is more complicated. As circulations and revenues fell from the late 1980s, investigative journalism experienced qualitative changes. Fewer investigative stories defended the powerless or uncovered a breach of public trust. But to argue the ‘quality’ of investigative journalism is less now than in the past would be to overlook critical changes that have enabled investigative journalism to survive to continue producing public interest investigations. The finding that watchdog reporting endures suggests, as argued in the previous chapter, its continuation is important both as a branding strategy for mastheads to demonstrate their unique worth to shareholders and also as a means for monitoring power in democracies.

Significantly, the emergence of collaborative investigative reporting denotes a seismic shift in reporting practice from the ‘old model’ of single newsroom investigations marked by cutthroat rivalry to a ‘new model’ of multiple newsrooms cooperating and sharing information to expose systemic wrongdoing. As the next chapter will show, these collaborations extend to transnational investigations on a scale not previously thought possible. While this chapter has shown Australian newspapers have lost some cultural power and investigative journalism has had to adapt to tougher economic conditions at the end of the 20th century, the opportunities born from these changes pave a future for investigative reporting in the 21st century.

Notes

1. The start date of 1971 was selected because it represents the start of the ‘second wave’ of investigative journalism in Australia, and captures The Australian and National Times, which did not exist a decade earlier. This content analysis ends at the beginning of the second decade. Further analysis is undertaken after this date later in the chapter. April was selected because it is outside the summer festive season, when newsrooms tend to be less intense with staff on holidays. April is also sufficiently distant from the end of the financial year of June 30, when newspapers (and news pages) can be limited if the masthead experiences a budget shortfall.

Six Decades of Investigative Journalism

(2003), 'Business Journalism' (1993), 'Investigative Journalism' (1991), 'Sport Reporting' (1997), 'Gold Walkley' (1978), and 'shared Winners’ (1956). The date in parentheses is the year the award was first introduced. All except ‘Best News Report’ and ‘Newspaper Feature Writing’ were open to all media forms at the time of analysis.

3. The Walkley data for 2010 and 2011 is excluded because it was not a complete decade and therefore made comparisons with the other decades less useful.

4. Five inaugural categories in 1956 swelled to 34 categories by 2011.

5. Winning stories were blindly tested for ‘investigative journalism’ without the author identifying beforehand the particular Walkley category to which they belonged. This ensured that stories that won the ‘investigative’ Walkley category were not favoured inadvertently when tested to see whether or not the story possessed the hallmarks of investigative journalism.

6. The longitudinal study did not examine the Herald’s contribution in the 1950s, because this content analysis began at 1971.

7. The original series of stories was in the Melbourne Truth. This extract was reprinted a few years later for Man magazine, and was also recognised with a Walkley award.

8. The Courier Mail was a broadsheet at this time (until 2006).


10. In 1966, Fairfax acquired a minority stake in the paper owned by David Syme and Co., and in 1972 Fairfax bought a controlling interest. It bought out the remaining shares in 1983. For the purposes here, The Age is considered a Fairfax masthead. In late 2018, Fairfax merged with Channel Nine.

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Six Decades of Investigative Journalism


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with a drop in the diversity of investigative story genres over time, particularly in the Australian context where news media ownership is very concentrated and there are fewer outlets. Collaboration is also associated with higher levels of syndication, which has the dual outcomes of increasing story reach but simultaneously decreasing media diversity. The shift in investigative practice from a more pluralistic investigative journalism marked by rivalry between single outlets towards larger-scale, cross-outlet, and transnational collaborative work potentially brings with it a drop in inter-media competition, although the diversity of winners represented across the three national awards examined here to date suggests a healthy breadth of quality investigative work. Local investigation might also come at the expense of national and transnational investigations as watchdog reporting scales up. Yet, despite these actual or potential drawbacks to the rise in collaborative investigate journalism, the findings in this chapter demonstrate that collaboration provides a novel way for news media to negate challenging structural changes within the industry, while still producing detailed and valuable journalism in the public interest. Further, the Australian data signalled a small but detectable rise in single-issue investigations, perhaps at the expense of systemic inquiry, and collaboration is a way forward to negate this regressive trend. Indeed, the slight rise in the total number of investigative winners across the time period under examination further indicates that investigative journalism continues to be produced and celebrated into the digital age. It also shows, as theoretically argued in Chapter 3, and as Hamilton (2016) has identified, the public interest function of journalism and its political economic objectives need not be mutually exclusive. Collaboration represents a useful tool for journalists to continue to do investigative work that serves as a critical aspect of their normative functions and supports their ‘quality’ branding claims. This chapter finds that while digital disruption has led to formidable challenges for newsrooms and the public sphere, particularly in the form of revenue losses and fake news, it also heralds unprecedented opportunities for large-scale collaborative investigative journalism. The next chapter explores in more detail the role of data in journalism and use of digital technologies that assist collaboration, and how these developments can mitigate some of the challenges to media freedom in democracies in contemporary times.

Notes
1. This chapter was based on a journal article: Andrea Carson & Kate Farhall (2018) Understanding Collaborative Investigative Journalism in a ‘Post-Truth’ Age, *Journalism Studies*, 19:13, 1899–1911, https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1494515. It has been revised and updated and presented here with the permission of the co-author and publisher.
2. In 2017, the Press Awards had 30 categories and averages 600 entries (print and online). The Walkley Awards offered 34 categories (across all media) and
averaged 1,400 entries. The Pulitzers had 14 journalism awards (print and online) and averaged 1,100 entries.

3. Further data were gathered from the year 2000 for the Pulitzers and since the inception of the Walkleys in 1956. This larger database is useful for understanding benchmarks for reporting trends over time and is used in this chapter as a reference tool.

4. The British Journalism Awards—established in 2012 in response to the Leveson Inquiry—were not studied here but the awards did honour the BBC and The Guardian in 2017 for its reporting of the Panama Papers.

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in journalism did not rapidly develop until the second decade of this century. The mass collaborations required professional journalists and their media organisations working together with data specialists using digital technologies to unveil the secrets contained in the data. In an era of politicians attacking media reporting as ‘fake news’, global investigative journalism has emerged as a counter example, whereby information is verified and localised by individual journalists and its audience impact is leveraged through the institutional authority of established media organisations. This model is able to produce investigative journalism that bridges the local and global nexus to provide evidence-based public interest stories that ‘could not be easily ignored,’ as alluded to earlier by Downie and Schudson (2009, p. 11).

Certainly, investigative journalism has other challenges this century. Political and legal obstacles include governments restricting media freedoms in the name of national security, and with a propensity to ‘conceal rather than reveal’ information. And established media businesses have lost significant revenues as advertising has shifted online.

Yet, the new forms of global collaborative investigative journalism that have emerged are disruptive to established political, economic, and social orders. Some examples of this disruption have been positive, while others, such as the Russian and WikiLeaks data dumps during an election campaign, arguably have not. The impact of the Panama Papers has been well documented, with billions of dollars in lost taxes recouped, criminal charges laid, and notable political and elite figures losing their professional roles and status in society. The NSA leaks and the WikiLeaks war logs revealed the extent of the surveillance state in democracies and the number of civilian deaths owed to war, respectively. These examples show that the news ‘fit to print’ can no longer be fully controlled by political elites or those with vast capital. But, they also illuminate the need to marry this power with responsibility, particularly in some of the WikiLeaks’ examples. They underscore the democratising power of data and the technology-driven dissolution of spatial boundaries to engender an emergent global public sphere to highlight global problems. Large-scale collaborative investigative reporting has indeed shown the power of numbers to tell human stories of global significance in new ways.

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New York Times was among the first to receive more income from digital subscriptions than advertising after it implemented its metered paywall.

Smaller news organisations, however, have been disadvantaged by the paywall model because they have struggled to attract enough subscribers. Diversification of revenue is likely to be critical for their survival. In such cases, a combination of various revenue streams may include native advertising, events, new media products, client-based studio work, micropayments, crowdfunding, and philanthropic support. For nonprofits, the rise of polarised politics with the election of US President Trump has seen a lift in donations to outlets that do investigative reporting. This suggests that audiences, including philanthropists, value quality investigations and will pay for it.

In the age of social media, it is likely that newspapers’ proportion of total global advertising share will shrink further as technology giants like Facebook and Google continue to impress advertisers with their global reach, sophisticated algorithms, and capacity to use data to target consumers. In some countries this has prompted governments and their agencies to reconsider competition and tax laws to limit the impact of Google and Facebook on news providers. A hybrid funding model is one means for news outlets to guard against Marshall McLuhan’s dark prophecy.

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pluralism, and rethinking these as existing on a continuum with capacity for overlap to explain media outlets’ incentives for pursuing investigative journalism. While motivations might vary, it is within this space that newsrooms of different types, commercial and otherwise, are inclined to pursue investigative reporting. This chapter finds that while digital disruption has led to formidable challenges for newsrooms, particularly in the form of revenue losses and the erosion of public trust exacerbated through the phenomenon of ‘fake news’, predictions about watchdog journalism’s demise in democracies are unfounded. Rather, this study provides strong cause for optimism about the future of investigative journalism. This matters because, in the words of Brant Houston (2016, interview with the author, 23 September), when all other means of redressing injustice fail, investigative journalism is the ‘court of last resort’.

References


Conclusion


