

Towards A Scientific Methodology for Arab Investigative Journalism: An in-depth Analysis of Interviews with Ten Arab Journalists

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Abstract

This study aimed to build an applied model on the methodology of investigative journalism in the Arab world. To achieve this goal, this study followed the methodology of in-depth analysis of interviews via e-mail with ten Arab journalists interested in investigative journalism, whether those who practiced investigative reporting or received training in this field. This study is significant because it draws the attention of researchers and academics to the need for adopting a scientific methodology for investigative journalism. In addition, it could be turned into a part of a broader research track to develop Arab investigative journalism methodology. Based on the analysis of the interviewees' answers, these steps can be listed as follows: Finding an original idea, writing the hypothesis, preparing a solid systematic action plan to prove the hypothesis of the investigation, conducting field work, producing the investigative report whether written or televised, and finally publishing the report.

Keywords: investigative journalism, reporting plans, reporting hypothesis, reporting ideas, Arab investigative journalism methodology

1. Introduction

Investigative journalism has been gaining the attention of media elites and journalism institutions which look forwards to achieving excellence and leadership over the globe, especially the Arab world. Many major press institutions have become known for their successive productions of televised and written investigative works that are published through the outlets of these institutions or digital platforms and new media platforms (Nedjm Eddin, 2019). For example, Aljazeera Network launched in 2016 a simultaneous set of six investigative programs that are still being produced and published today (Aljazeera, 2016). Other Arab journalist institutions specialized in producing and publishing investigative media content have also emerged, such as Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism Network (ARIJ), which, according to *Maharat* (2020), produced and published more than 600 investigative reports in 20 Arab countries in the period between 2005 and 2015.

1.1 Problem Statement

Investigative journalism was late in reaching the Arab world to the extent that it is still described as having started timidly and that it is still growing and developing timidly (Saraih, 2023). While it is still growing in the Arab media, the need to adopt a scientific methodology for investigative journalism is remarkably increasing. Such a methodology should take into consideration the characteristics of investigations and the media context in the Arab world in terms of political environment and professional and informational competence of journalists (Abu Elhamam, 2014) who are generally suffering from the dominance of political systems that do not allow a wide range of freedoms to access sources or uncover hidden secrets (Bebawi, 2016). The challenging political environment may have contributed to delaying the arrival of Arab journalists to defining a consistent scientific methodology that is used as a reference to determine the nature of investigative journalism (Abu Yousuf et al., 2016).

Historically, the first and most famous individual Arab attempt in investigative work was the journalistic investigation carried out by the famous Egyptian writer Ihsan Abdel Quddous in 1949, in which he revealed the scandal of corrupt weapons that were supplied to the Egyptian army during its war with Israel in 1948 (Abdulghafour, 2022). During the past two decades, a number of Arab researchers have made important attempts to build applied curricula for teaching

investigative journalism based on scientific principles, including Azzam Abu Elhamam (2014), which adopted eight steps to prepare an investigative report, and Bushra Alsangri (2020) which focused on five stages of preparing the televised investigative report. In addition, the website of An-Najah National University in Palestine has identified three general procedures for investigative journalism methodology. Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) presented a methodological guide that helps journalists and reporters to verify and prepare investigative reports through eight steps related to the basics of investigative journalism (Lbaz, 2018). Moreover, *The Investigative Journalism Handbook* issued by Aljazeera Media Institute in 2020 suggested five detailed methodological elements, while Abu Yousuf et al. (2016) identified 11 stages for the production of investigative journalistic work, and Alakili (2016) set up nine stages of investigative reporting methodology.

The efforts exerted in the abovementioned works have several common denominators in the stages or steps of the general methodological preparation of the investigative report in its broad lines, such as proposing the hypothesis and searching for information. However, they differ in detailing these stages and singling them out independently or merging them together. They also differ in their determination of the number and order of these stages as well as the stage's level of importance compared to the rest of stages.

This contrast in the perception of investigative journalism methodology grants journalists the flexibility required for dealing with issues under investigation based on the principal that there is no one right way for the journalistic work (Roberts, 2018). However, on the other hand, it requires raising the level of knowledge and theoretical awareness of these aspects which increases the need to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework for setting up investigative journalism curricula in the Arab world. Thus, building up a standardized methodology represents one of the criteria for defining investigative journalism. For example, David Kaplan defined investigative journalism from a methodological point of view as "The in-depth systematic use of original research and reporting" (Riaz, 2023). In general, investigative journalism is mainly defined as disclosing hidden information, whether accidentally or intentionally from being accessed by the public (Hunter et al., 2011), through systematic research methods (Kaplan, 2013) based on frequent documentation (Mansour, 2019).

Several years ago, some of journalism and media faculties in universities of Arab countries such as Yemen started to include investigative journalism courses in their educational curricula based on educational ready-made guides provided by institutions interested in investigative journalism, which do not meet teachers' needs. Merging investigative courses with the educational system have been negatively affecting the knowledge that students receive about the curricula of investigative journalism (Saraih, 2023) which is characterized by searching for deep hidden information and disclosing causes and those hidden details behind news, events and phenomena under investigation. Thus, investigative reporting is not just a process of collecting the findings and information of others, but it is also about conducting original research by journalists based on comprehensive interviews, comparisons of facts and figures, and the discovery of facts and disclosed relationships. Investigative reporting always focuses on aspects of defects, shortcomings, deviations, or negligence about which much information and irrefutable evidence have not yet been published. Hence, the investigative journalist, in particular, needs to accumulate evidence, data and documents (Ghali, 2018).

In general, the practice of investigative journalism is associated with the concepts of needs and gratifications because it is described as the most satisfying, exciting, time- and hard-working journalism. It often leads to real changes that affect people's lives, such as amending laws, achieving justice, and correcting wrongs (Alakili, 2016). Achieving this effect is consistent with realizing the essence of the concept of investigative journalism as a purely systematic and institutional behavior, based on research and scrutiny (Alhamadani, 2021). Interestingly, this necessarily means that investigative journalism requires a scientific methodology that involves procedures; that defines the right and wrong; and that explains implementation mechanisms and stages. This is because investigative journalism is a systematic journalistic work that journalists practice it on their owns after being unsatisfied with the information that is published and leaked from official authorities (Yakhluf, 2021).

The need to develop a comprehensive scientific methodology that frames investigative journalism stems from considering it as a type of journalism that is based on: a solid methodology, heavy reliance on original sources, hypothesis development and testing, and the use of an elaborate system for verification, i.e., organized long-term pursuit of information (Hassan, 2018). This is consistent with the understanding of the general framework of methodology as a concept defined by Hraiz (2021) as a set of precise procedures and methods that are adopted in work in order to reach a result.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The definition of methodology varies from one scientific field of research to another; but in general, it is used as a synonym for curricula. In the field of education, the educational curriculum is defined as the path taken by the teacher and the student to achieve the desired goals. In light of modern educational trends, the methodology is defined as the sum of educational experiences intended and planned by the school to bring about the comprehensive growth of students in all aspects (Husseini, 2021). This is consistent with Chris (2021)'s definition of research methodology as the

way that describes how the research was conducted.

This study takes Abu Elhamam (2014) as a theoretical framework because it was allocated for setting the methodology specifically for Arab investigative journalism; and, for its detailed steps and stages in the production of investigative journalistic work.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to come up with a model that can be developed into a theoretical framework for the methodology of investigative journalism in the Arab world through further research that could include interviewing larger numbers of journalists, researchers, and critics who are specialized in investigative reporting. The main question of this research paper is what is the appropriate methodology for investigative journalism in the Arab world?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it draws the attention of researchers and academics to the need for adopting a scientific methodology for investigative journalism. In addition, it could be turned into a part of a broader research track to develop Arab investigative journalism methodology. It also provides investigative reporters with information that they can use in carrying out their journalistic investigations.

2. Literature Review

In *The Scientific Method of Investigative Journalism*, Abu Elhamam (2014) summarizes the stages of preparing the investigative report in eight steps, which are quite similar to scientific research methods: Detecting or feeling carouse about an issue, asking related questions, defining research questions and hypotheses, clearly defining the objectives of the investigative work, developing an action plan along with its procedural steps, collecting data, drawing conclusions and writing a report or directing a story, and making sure that the six WH questions are answered in the investigation. Although the methodology of Abu Elhamam (2014) has a comprehensive general vision, there are other absent elements in his model which were highlighted by other Arab researchers. One of the most important of these elements is the echo-feedback tracking expressed by Abu Yousuf et al. (2016) as a follow-up to the post-publication report where the feedback on the investigative work is one of the most important criteria for evaluating the work.

Basically, Abu Elhamam's steps intersect with the stages of investigative reporting contained in *Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook* (2020) which also considers the methodology of investigative journalism similar to the methodology of scientific research. The guide discusses in detail the procedure of preparing the investigative material put in five stages: Constructing the hypothesis, defining the facts, developing a systematic work plan that includes choosing the questions and the sources that provide answers to the plan questions (human and non-human explanations), defining a special work methodology that is commensurate with the subject of the investigative work, and finally defining the standards that can be used for evidence acceptance. *The Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook* (2020) focuses on the procedural details of conducting investigative report, but it did not include important elements that some researchers listed such as questions, results, and answers; even though the guide has devoted special chapters for explanations and clarifications.

In turn, Alsangri (2020) summarizes the stages of preparing the investigative TV report in five stages: Presenting ideas, building up the hypotheses, conducting general documentation, doing fieldwork, and finally, reviewing and evaluating information. Yet, some elements were missing in Alsangri (2020) methodology such as those mentioned in Abu Elhamam's study: Defining goals and information. It also lacks other elements such as the action plan that Abu Elhamam (2014) and the *Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook* (2020) discussed. *On the path of truth: ARJ's guide to investigative journalism* summarizes the methodology of investigative journalism in eight phases: Subject discovery, hypothesis, public information collection, identification of human resources, information systems, narration and story composition, story quality control, and publication (Hunter et al., 2009).

Moreover, the official website of An-Najah National University in Palestine claimed, in a report published in 2023, that investigative reporting goes through a process of theory of hypothesis development that needs to be conducted by the investigative journalist similarly to police investigations. The website report considers that defining the theory or hypothesis represents the most difficult stage in the investigative research journey because it depends on a thorough reading of phenomena and events, analyzing documents and data, tracing events pathways, revealing ambiguous information related to the case under study (whether confidential or hidden information), and finally putting all those efforts into a framework of justice in order to achieve social responsibility. In fact, this proposition is broadly comprehensive in terms of addressing the broad lines of investigative reports without delving into the fine details related to the stages of work such as Alsangri (2020) elements of investigative reporting methodology which involves preparing ideas, conducting field work, and reviewing and evaluating information.

Abu Yousuf et al. (2016) explored the steps of investigative reporting: Identifying an idea as the topic of the

investigative report, collecting information, testing the idea, formulating the hypothesis and the main question, fragmenting the hypothesis, determining the methods of investigation, analyzing and organizing the material, telling the journalistic story, reviewing the investigative material, publishing the article, and following up the report after posting. These stages are very consistent with the objectives of the study on Abu Youssef et al. (2016) in the context of the role of investigative journalism in community development. However, some elements that are significant in building up an investigative report were missed, such as questions (Abu Elhamam, 2014) and the action plan (Abu Elhamam, 2014 & Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook, 2020).

According to Alakili (2016), investigative material synthesis consists of exploring the topic, putting forward the hypothesis, obtaining information from a declared source to verify the hypothesis, building a communication map to access human sources, collecting and organizing information, building the database of information, preparing the narrative formulation of the press story, monitoring the quality of the data (information verification), publishing the report, supporting and defending the report story. However, other parts of the methodological elements mentioned in other studies are absent from the suggested methodology of Alakili (2016) such as raising questions about the subject being investigated, as stated in Abu Elhamam (2014). It also overlooks dealing with the action plan, which was discussed thoroughly by both Abu Elhamam (2014) and *Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook* (2020). The fieldwork stage that Alsangri (2020) dealt with as a stage of the investigative reporting is also missed out.

A further review of what those interested in investigative journalism wrote about its methodology reveals more differences in the stages of conducting an investigative report. For example, Ghali (2018) wrote that investigative reporting requires searching for documents, collecting and investigating information, arranging, scheduling, and organizing materials, capturing details related to the case, collecting hidden and unrevealed facts, gathering evidence supporting facts, uncovering previously unknown relationships. As in the previous cases, these stages lack other elements mentioned by other authors on investigative journalism methodology. Hence, Ghali's (2018) stages are overlooking essential elements needed for the preparation of the investigative report such as identifying the topic or idea as highlighted in four of the other studies: Abu Elhamam (2014), Alsangri (2020), Abu Youssef. et al (2016) and Alakili (2016). Ghali's (2018) methodology also did not focus on hypothesis details which were addressed by five other approaches: Abu Elhamam (2014), *Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook* (2020), Alsangri (2020), Abu Youssef. et al (2016), and Alakili (2016).

Table 1. The most important elements that make up the investigative reporting methodology according to the seven outputs of investigative journalism methodology

	Source	Methodology
1	Abu Elhamam (2014)	Topic, questions, hypothesis, objectives, workplan, information, results, and answers.
2	Aljazeera's Investigative Journalism Handbook (2020)	Hypothesis, facts, work plan, methodology, acceptance criteria.
3	Alsangri (2020)	Ideas, hypotheses, documentation, field work, information review and evaluation
4	An-Najah National University Website (2023)	Data analysis, disclose information, social responsibility
5	Abu Youssef. et al (2016)	Idea, data, testing, hypothesis segmentation, defining and analysis, organization telling, review, publishing, post-publication.
6	Alakili (2016)	Topic, hypothesis, data, sources, database, narration, report verification and post-publication follow up
7	Ghali (2018)	Documents, verification, information gathering, evidence arranging and organizing, finding hidden relationships.
8	Hunter et al., 2009	Subject discovery, hypothesis, public information collection, identification of human resources, information systems, narration and story composition, story quality control, and publication.

Table 1 clearly shows that there are general elements present in most of the methodological stages adopted by Arab researchers and writers in the field of investigative journalism. For example, starting from the topic or the idea that the journalist aspires to investigate in his report were highlighted in Abu Elhamam (2014), Alsangri (2020), Abu Youssef. et al (2016), Hunter et al., (2009) and Alakili (2016).

3. Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study adopts qualitative methodology following an in-depth analysis of investigative reporting methodology in the Arab journalistic work based on conducting in-depth interviews with ten Arab journalists interested in investigative journalism who have either worked in the field of investigative journalism or received training to practice media investigations.

In-depth interviews are a common strategy for collecting qualitative data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The importance of in-depth interviews lies in their great effectiveness in collecting primary data by revealing opinions, experiences, and values related to the study (Mack et al., 2005). Moreover, in-depth interview has always been a goal-oriented technique as it is directed toward the informants (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Technically, in-depth interviews are highly effective because they can be conducted over the phone, Skype, E-mail, or via various other forms of internet and telephone devices without meeting the interviewers face-to-face. In addition, in-depth interviews help reveal more detailed and in-depth information compared to other data collection methods (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). It is often conducted with a small number of respondents (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020).

3.2 Data Collection & Sampling

A total number of ten journalists ($n = 10$) were selected as informants of this research from six Arab countries, namely Yemen, Syria, Morocco, Iraq, Palestine, and Tunisia, according to homogeneous sample strategy. The ten interviewees meet Boyce (2006)'s criterion of information saturation. There are some studies such as Roller & Lavarkas (2020) that set the appropriate number for in-depth interview studies to be in the range between ten and 15 interviewees.

All of the ten interviewees were recruited for the interviews of this study by tracking their posts on social media accounts over Arab digital platforms that are specialized in investigative journalism. This technique is used to ensure approaching journalists interested in Arab investigative journalism who achieve two criteria: Working in the field of journalism for more than seven years and working particularly in the field of investigative journalism or having received training to practice investigative journalism. The interviews were conducted via e-mail between May and July 2023 (because communication via e-mail contributes to reaching a number of journalists who are unable to be met face to face). The ten interviewees were asked two questions: What are the stages or steps of preparing the investigative report? And how do you prepare an investigative report?

3.3 Data Analysis

The results were analyzed by following the methodology of Knott et al. (2022) of thematic analysis as a method of coding data, which relies on six iterative stages: Firstly, data preparation by reading the informants' answers several times and checking them in terms of their depth, their response to the required questions, their level of consistency with the research objectives, and then translating them from Arabic into English. Secondly, immersing the answers by re-reading carefully for several times to digest the answers. Thirdly, coding data by developing labels (codes) for the collected data. Fourthly, interpreting codes. Fifthly, synthesizing and taking notes of the data through making clusters of intersecting groups of answers by identifying the elements of intersection between the codes that resulted from in-depth interviews with journalists and adopting them as elements that represent the stages of the methodology of the production of the investigative report. Sixthly, writing the results.

4. Results & Discussion

Technically, the investigative reporting is a long-term journalistic work (Houston, 2010 & Thomas, 2013) that involves several steps and multiple aspects that differ from one media school to another (Wilding, et al., 2018). However, there are a number of milestones that many journalism schools agree upon as fixed steps to be followed by investigative journalists in order to conduct a high-quality media investigation (Fleeson, 2012).

Based on the analysis of the interviewees' answers, these steps can be listed as follows: Finding an original idea, writing the hypothesis, preparing a solid systematic action plan to prove the hypothesis of the investigation, conducting field work, producing the investigative report whether written or televised, and finally publishing the report.

Muhammad Abu Shahma, a Palestinian investigative journalist, opines that "investigative journalism is similar to scientific research in terms of using tools and setting a hypothesis for investigation as well as using documents to prove this hypothesis". According to him, the journalist begins to collect information and do preliminary research about an idea of investigation, then writes the hypothesis of this investigation, and works to prove this hypothesis by using various tools, such as questionnaires, documents, interviews, or case simulation. *Abu Shahma* suggested that "the investigation begins with collecting information, followed by writing the hypothesis, then writing the investigation, in case of written investigation". However, in the case of televised investigation, he said: "The journalist begins with

making a montage of the investigation, followed by making sure that the information in his possession is correct and that it is not false or misleading". He continued, "This verification is very important to discover if someone wanted to trap the journalist". "Confrontation with the party targeted by the investigation, whether it is a minister, a ministry or private companies" was also included in *Abu Shamma's* stages of preparing the investigative report before finding a way for disclosing the gathered data.

Aseel Saraih, a Yemeni media investigations specialist and trainer who worked as an investigative producer and supervisor at ARIJ, AL-Arabi TV, and Aljazeera, proposes interesting clarifications about some of these steps. For instance, he said that if the idea of the report has been previously presented on media, then the journalist who wants to produce a new investigative report on the same topic must provide another new angle that was not originally explored. He opines that some schools of Western journalism do not adopt hypothesis writing, adding that "but we resort to this method because it is simple and suites the Arab journalist". He also argued that detecting the primary and secondary sources and deciding whether the investigative reporting requires open or closed sources are other major responsibilities of the investigative journalist.

Said Eminzade, the Syrian journalist and program producer in Al-Hiwar TV added another step to the procedure of making an investigative reporting which is "creating materials suitable for the report topic such as photos, videos and re-enacted or simulated scenes when the real documents about the case of the investigative reporting cannot be accessed". Some journalists of the interviewees focused on the presence of a well-done plan for conducting the investigative reporting. For instance, *Sanae Elkouiti*, the Moroccan reporter for Aljazeera Net website suggested that the investigative report is implemented by four steps: developing an exploratory plan to prove the hypothesis, answering questions such as what happened, how, why and who is the beneficiary and the victim, then developing a list of human and open sources, and finally seeking to prove the hypothesis through sources, data and witnesses. As for *Mohamed Ben Salem*, the Tunisian journalist and program presenter on Al-Hiwar TV, he summarized the stages of conducting the investigative report in "creating a deep and important idea for the audience, then the assumption behind the information that everyone knows about it, after that comes verification of the validity of the hypothesis by searching for documents and conducting interviews that provide evidence of the validity of the journalist assumption, then producing the report, whether written or visual, and finally publishing this report in the media".

Moreover, *Adel Abdulmughni* the Yemeni freelance investigative journalist said that in order to implement the investigative report, there must be a clear and tidy plan of action, a starting and ending point, in-depth research processes, and reliance on a list of reliable sources to collect the largest number of facts and to draw conclusions from them. Furthermore, *Suhaib Al-Falahi*, the Iraqi senior journalism editor discussed the need of planning for conducting investigative reporting in detail; he argued that investigative work should be started with obtaining the approval of the editorial body or management of the media institution "which must realize the consequences and risks of each report". He described this step as a very important starting point to keep the journalist away from any expected pressure that might be put on him and to save his life and his professional future from any danger that may result from any confrontation with the targets of the report, which sometimes be governments and official authorities. According to *Al-Falahi*, once the editorial management "decides to conduct the investigation, it begins with coordinating with the journalist following common procedures". These procedures include a brief preparation of a case file, its details and justifications then moving on to field work through which audio, camera, and other equipment are used for evidence collection.

Considering the high level of interrelated procedures within the investigative reporting preparation plan, it is necessary to pay attention to the special and distinctive skills that should be possessed by investigative journalists. *Adel Abdulmughni* believes that the journalist must work "with a deep breath" in preparing the investigative reporting and he must not be restricted by the procedures of traditional reporting. *Abdulmughni* also mentioned some basic skills that the investigative journalist must have, including: "Building the investigation hypothesis, passing through advanced research methods, story building, narration methods, obtaining sources and checking documents, producing good results and revealing new facts, as well as maintain linguistic coherence and beauty of formulation, and commitment to the values and principles of the profession". He also advised the investigative journalist to learn and master the use of modern electronic tools.

Mustafa Swelim, a researcher and former lecturer at the Media Department at the Palestinian Birzeit University, opines that the investigative report is mainly using "the journalist's feeling that a problem lies behind a specific event or phenomenon". He said, "This feeling is what generates the idea for the investigative journalist, who has to look at things with an unconventional detective sense". According to *Swelim*, the investigative journalist then assumes backgrounds that are not visible to the public, but that are logically related to the justifications for the subject he decided to investigate. He continued: "After that, the journalist has to prepare an action plan based on scenarios to exclude hypotheses that are illogical or that cannot be proven, and then the journalist has to set out in the work phase to collect

documents, data and information that may not be visible, but that can prove the validity of his hypothesis". *Swelim* entered the field of investigative journalism ethics by saying that the journalist should ensure the reliability of the information and data he collects in his work plan, and then produce his investigative material, before publishing it in the appropriate media.

For his part, *Zahir Beyoglu*, a Turkish-Arab journalist who works in the field of investigative reporting for Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, starts his own methodology in the investigative reports that he usually prepares by searching for the idea of investigation through "coexistence and observation". He said that, to him, WhatsApp groups in particular represent the biggest source of ideas because they grab his attention to "the facts and events under discussion". The second stage begins with ascertaining the presence of an "investigative angle" in the information the journalist wants to work on. He clarified: "From my experience, I often find an excellent idea for an investigative report, but when I start searching for the axes of this idea, I realize that I may not reach an investigative conclusion, and accordingly, assume that I may not reveal anything new". He justified this assumption by saying that "sometimes, the event would not constitute a phenomenon, even though it was remarkable. Therefore, it becomes outside of the scope of the investigative report, which makes it more suitable for producing a traditional journalistic report, not an investigative one". *Beyoglu* considered the planning process as the third stage of the implementation of the investigation, stating that it includes "preparing the axes, determining the expected number of words and how to organize the report's structure to include an introduction (about 300 words), the body text (about 800 words), and the conclusion (300-400 words)".

Beyoglu categorizes the sources from which he obtains information in two types: human and inhuman or materialistic sources whereas human sources represent the human beings he interviews including "ordinary people who are included within the phenomenon under investigation, those people who suffered from or confronted that phenomenon, government agencies, technical specialists, professional experts, and former employees who have the freedom to speak out loud comfortably". Inhuman sources include "reports, laws, and studies on the subject of investigation, information, official data, as well as statistics and figures". In the fifth stage, *Beyoglu* moves to the formulation of the investigation report, and he said: "In my personal experience, I always start from a true story of a person who lived, suffered, or faced the phenomenon, and this gives the topic its strength, then I mix stories, different entities, sources, numbers, and relevant statistics until I reach a conclusion to clarify who is behind the phenomenon, then I present the methods of treatment from the proposals of the entities I interviewed". In the sixth stage, *Beyoglu* re-reads the investigation report, a final reading that includes "condensing the information". He said, "this is important in order to abandon the many digressions, without prejudice to the meaning or the information". The seventh and final stage is publishing the report. *Beyoglu* emphasized that "the written investigation, whether electronically or in print, requires real photos, testimonies, papers and documents from the authorities associated with the investigation, photos and text messages".

In turn, *Omar Fayyad*, a Turkish-Arab journalist and PhD candidate in journalism from Ataturk University in Turkey, believes that the investigative report also begins with defining the topic that "must be characterized by ambiguity and direct contact with the public's desire for knowledge". He opines that the second stage is the stage of collecting information through studying and examining all documents related to the case in a systematic plan. The third stage, in his opinion, is represented in "repairing any deficiency in documents" through interviews with persons who "can provide inferences that lead to building the investigation hypothesis". He stated that the fourth stage, which is the "most serious", lies in "constructing the hypothesis of the investigation," which must be "subject to the logical sequence in the narratives and sequence of events". After that, the journalist works, according to *Fayyad*, "in the fifth stage, to prepare his report narratively, taking into account the elements of drafting, influences, and arranging the facts chronologically". Sixth, the journalist reaches the last stage, which is "publishing the investigation, by a media institution whether based on pre-production agreement or based on post-production agreement, or even by the institution for which the investigative journalist works".

Based on the above discussion, the stages of investigative reporting methodology can be represented by the following illustrative figure which represents the model of investigative reporting methodology in Arab journalism:

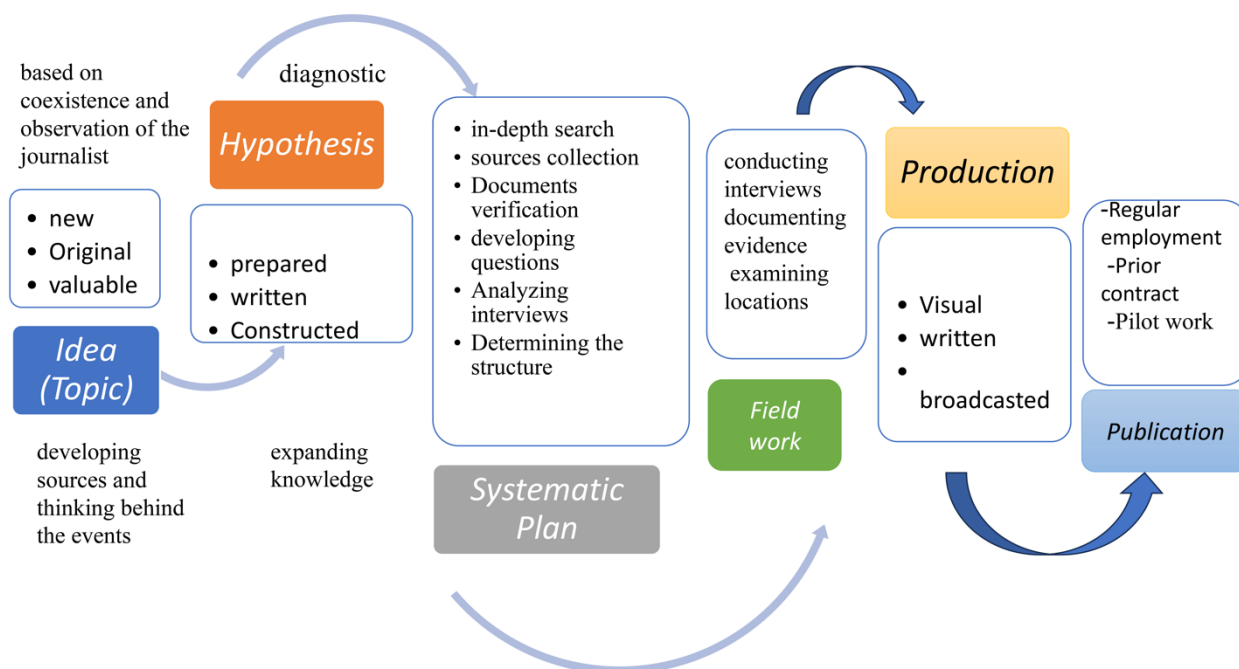


Figure 1. The developed model of investigative reporting methodology in Arab journalism

As illustrated in figure 1, investigative reporting methodology in the Arab media is composed of five main stages: Finding a new and original idea, writing the hypothesis, preparing a solid systematic plan of action to prove the hypothesis of the investigation, producing the investigative reporting whether written or televised, and publishing the report.

4.1 Finding a New and Original Idea

This study showed that starting from the idea represents the basis on which the process of preparing the investigative report is built. In this context, it is possible to link investigative journalism as an initiative journalism with the agenda-building process in the activities of journalists (Wuergler & Cancela, 2022). The subject of an investigative report deals with an issue of reasonable interest to the reader or viewer in the areas of politics, economics, and social affairs. It is an issue that some parties are trying to keep hidden from the public in order to serve interests related to corruption and abuse of power (Ismail, Ahmad, & Mustaffa, 2014).

Eight out of ten interviewees affirmed that the investigation stems from finding a new, original and profound idea or angle that was not previously discussed in a topic that was mainly covered in the media. The idea for conducting any media investigation stems from the journalist’s sense of the existence of a problem or his feeling of a lack of information or its absence on a specific issue based on coexistence and observation. Initiating the idea or the topic of the investigation is the basis on which the rest of the steps and procedures in preparing the report are built (AbuElhamam, 2014). The development of sources and thinking behind the events and their backgrounds help to create valuable ideas and move towards topics that require investigative investigations (Alsangri, 2020). It is a work that requires a special skill from the investigative journalist in selecting topics that deserve investigation, based on valuable real information, away from deception, lies and fictitious stories (Abu Yousuf et al., 2016). That is, the idea stems from observing a change in the journalist's surrounding environment, which requires him to research his background and circumstances (Alakili, 2014).

4.2 Writing the Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the investigative report is generated from the idea that the journalist forms about the event that he studies and investigates. It is reinforced by expanding his knowledge of the primary sources and his review of the data, as the journalist cannot establish his hypothesis from nothing (Abu Yusuf et al., 2016). According to *Aljazeera Investigative Journalism Handbook* (2020), a hypothesis is a proposal that diagnoses a problem or issue that is put forward for research and investigation with the aim of reaching the truth. Interestingly, seven out of ten informants of this study considered building the hypothesis an essential and serious stage in the methodology of preparing the investigative report. It is true that they differed in expressing whether the hypothesis was prepared, written, or even constructed, but they all considered it a pillar of the investigation, sometimes based directly on the observations of the

journalist and his extrapolation of what is behind the information or news and arises at other times after the expansion of reading and access and the intensification of the review of the sources of information. The hypothesis relies heavily on supporting data to validate the hypothesis, in some cases this data can lead report makers to change or modify the hypothesis at an early stage of the investigative work (Kunia & Othman, 2019).

4.3 Preparing a Solid Systematic Plan of Action to Prove the Hypothesis of the Investigation

A systematic work plan is a roadmap for preparing an investigative report because it includes many of the basic procedures of searching for information that confirms or denies the hypothesis of an investigation. Investigative journalism is characterized by producing new information or secrets that were unknown. It is also known as multi-source journalism of a deep nature that requires large staff, a long time, and knowledgeable human resources (Dyikuk, 2017). For these reasons, developing a solid action plan is critical to producing a high-quality investigative report.

In this regard, six out of ten of the interviewees found out that proving the hypothesis of investigative work requires developing a systematic work plan that includes seven basic pillars: thoroughly searching for information, data and documents, collecting and sorting of sources related to the subject of the researched case, verifying the authenticity of the documents and information collected, bridging the gap in the information that the journalist wants to reveal by developing the appropriate questions, conducting interviews with people related to the subject of the investigation, analyzing and sorting interview results, and determining the form and structure of the journalistic material to be prepared by the journalist. This great diversity in the elements of the investigative work plan requires the journalist to master the skills of combining the means, skills, and methods that he needs to use in the various stages of his plan (AbuElhamam, 2014). It also requires him to conduct a general documentation of the data he collects as part of his plan (Alsangri, 2020) and to be aware of the need to capture additional and hidden information that could constitute evidence supporting his hypothesis (Ghali, 2018).

4.4 Field Work.

The interviews showed that working in the field of investigative journalism includes examining the locations of the events that the journalist is investigating. It also includes documenting evidence with photos and scanning documents. In addition to carrying out the interviews that he had planned in the previous stage and record observations that support or deny the hypothesis of the investigative work he is preparing. It may also include the preparation of representative scenes that simulate the event covered by the investigative report.

In the difficult field of work, where human sources tend to stay out of the camera's eye and hide their information, the journalist may have to use impersonation and ambush techniques to collect data (Mustapha-Koiki & Ayedun-Aluma, 2013). The Verification Guide for Investigative Journalism: A First Step (2016) indicated that the investigative work was based on field research, where the journalist digs up documents using traditional means. In the era of rapid information and current digital platforms, many sources are available, especially on social networking sites, which are filled with many news, photos and videos. However, the abundance of these sources made the task of the journalist difficult to verify the authenticity of these sources on the one hand, and to confront the huge flow of information that sometimes exceeds the ability of the journalist to link and analyze in order to reach convincing results, on the other hand.

4.5 Producing the Investigative Report whether Written or Televised

This is a compulsory stage in the investigative journalism methodology as there is no investigation unless its results appear publicly as journalistic material presented to the people. All the interviewees in this study agreed that the preparation of the investigative report, regardless of its type, whether visual, written or broadcast, represents an essential stage in the methodology of investigative journalism. It is also the stage of reaping the fruits of the investigative effort, according to AbuElhamam (2014) which demonstrates that the journalist is not restricted to following a specific scientific method in his search for the truth in the investigative report. This argumentation explains the difference in the structure of journalistic reports depending on different topics, journalists (producers) or publications, and even the targeted audience. The investigative reporter faces difficulties that emerged in the recent era of this type of journalism, which were systematically uncommon in the Arab region until very recently, yet with differences from one country to another (Alhamadani, 2021).

4.6 Publishing the Report

The process of report publication is the last stage of the investigative reporting methodology. The development of new media platforms that facilitated the process of tracking reactions to published journalistic works has led to increased interest in tracking the echo of published media reports and the audience's interaction with them as both of Abu Youssef et al (2016) and Alakili (2016) considered post-publication one stage of investigative reporting. However, very few

interviews showed the interest of the informants in this research in tracking the post-report publication as a stage in the investigative journalism methodology. Here, it is worth noting that this paper presents mechanisms for publishing investigative reports, including: publish in a media institution for which the investigative journalist works on a regular basis, publishing in a media institution with which the investigative journalist has previously held a contract to produce a specific report, and publishing the report in one of the various media institutions after being prepared by the journalist on his own responsibility.

In conclusion, this study has shown that the practice of investigative reporting is a huge subject to the journalist's inclinations and professional orientation. Thus, the methodology of Arab investigative journalism can be described as multi-sectarian and subject to various schools of thought. However, it was found out in this study that there are basic elements that cannot be dispensed with for being fixed pillars of investigative reporting, compared to other elements which may not have the same importance, based on the evaluation of the investigative journalist. Accordingly, this study recommends adopting a flexible methodology for the work of Arab investigative journalists in consistence with the model that was mentioned above.

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