

## THE FUTURE OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN PALESTINIAN MEDIA IN LIGHT OF OBSTACLES AND REALITY

### *O FUTURO DO JORNALISMO INVESTIGATIVO NA MÍDIA PALESTINA DIANTE DOS OBSTÁCULOS E DA REALIDADE*

Article received on: 11/24/2025

Article accepted on: 2/23/2026

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

#### **Abstract**

This study aims at identifying the ways of developing investigative journalism in the Palestinian media in light of its reality and constraints. The study is a descriptive one having the survey method which relies on practice techniques. The study uses in-depth observation and interview as tools. The results reveal a scarcity in using investigative journalism in the Palestinian media due to several constraints associated with the legal status, the environmental conditions of the Palestinian society, and the media institutions' policies towards the investigative journalism; other constraints are related to the nature of the Palestinian journalist. The researcher suggests that there should be legal conditions that support the investigative journalism, and media institutions should also adopt such crucial journalistic art. Furthermore, cultural awareness should be disseminated in the Palestinian community to help accept such journalistic investigative notion. In addition, it is necessary to upgrade the competences of journalists who are practicing the investigative journalism in the Palestinian media.

**Keywords:** Investigative Journalism. Palestinian Media. Legal Restrictions. Media Organizations. Journalistic Practices.

#### **Resumo**

*Este estudo tem como objetivo identificar as formas de desenvolver o jornalismo investigativo na mídia palestina, tendo em conta sua realidade e suas limitações. Trata-se de um estudo descritivo que utiliza o método de pesquisa baseado em técnicas práticas. O estudo emprega a observação aprofundada e a entrevista como ferramentas. Os resultados revelam uma escassez no uso do jornalismo investigativo na mídia palestina devido a várias restrições associadas ao status jurídico, às condições ambientais da sociedade palestina e às políticas das instituições de mídia em relação ao jornalismo investigativo; outras restrições estão relacionadas à natureza do jornalista palestino. O pesquisador sugere que devem existir condições legais que apoiem o jornalismo investigativo, e que as instituições de mídia também devem adotar essa arte jornalística crucial. Além disso, deve-se disseminar a conscientização cultural na comunidade palestina para ajudar a aceitar tal noção de jornalismo investigativo. Adicionalmente, é necessário aprimorar as competências dos jornalistas que praticam o jornalismo investigativo na mídia palestina.*

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo Investigativo. Mídia Palestina. Restrições Legais. Instituições de Mídia. Práticas Jornalísticas.



## 1 STUDY SUMMARY

The study aimed to identify ways to develop investigative journalism in Palestinian media in light of the reality and obstacles. The study belonged to descriptive research, including the survey method, and through it, it relied on the method of practice methods. The study relied on observation and in-depth interview tools. Among its most important results: the scarcity of investigative journalism in Palestinian media due to several obstacles related to the legal situation, the environmental conditions of Palestinian society, the policies of media institutions towards investigative journalism, and obstacles related to the nature of the Palestinian journalist. The study put forward a large number of proposals, including: the necessity of a legal situation that supports investigative journalism, the adoption of this important journalistic art by institutions, spreading a societal culture to accept investigative journalistic thinking, and the necessity of improving the capabilities of journalists who practice investigative journalism in Palestinian media.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Investigative journalism is an advanced professional practice that reflects the development and progress of journalistic work in a particular country. It is in-depth journalism that delves into facts and information, rather than simply reporting news and observing events. In this type of journalism, the investigative team is an investigative team, not a mere conduit for news. Through investigative journalism, journalists can combat corruption and injustice, as well as expose crimes, thus deterring corrupt individuals and criminals from such vices. Palestinian journalism has gradually developed and recently joined the ranks of investigative journalism. The establishment of Arab networks supporting investigative journalism has played a significant role in advancing investigative journalism in Palestine and progressing towards this advanced professional practice. (1) In these studies, the researchers attempt to present a set of opinions and proposals aimed at developing this evolving media art form in light of the realities and obstacles facing Palestinian media outlets of all types.

## 2.1 First: key previous studies

The researchers ensured that previous studies were directly and accurately related to investigative journalism in Palestinian media, in order to achieve direct results on the topic of the current study. They found several such studies, including:

1. Abu Hashish's study entitled "The Impact of Digital Media Use on Investigative Journalism Practice: A Field Study on a Sample of Palestinian Investigative Journalists, 2021." This study aimed to achieve several objectives, most importantly identifying the advantages and disadvantages of Palestinian investigative journalists' use of digital media platforms. The study was a survey-based approach, employing observation, interviews, and questionnaires. It was conducted on a purposive convenience sample due to the opaque and fluid nature of the investigative journalism community in Palestine. The study revealed several advantages and disadvantages of the study sample's use of digital media platforms, whether in idea selection, investigative procedures, publication, or evaluation. Therefore, the study concluded with a set of recommendations to enhance the advantages and mitigate the disadvantages(2) .
2. Abu Hashish's study entitled "A Proposed Vision for Investigative Journalism in Light of the Reality of Palestinian Investigative Journalist Practice, 2020." The aim of this study was to develop a proposed framework for the ethics of investigative journalism in the Palestinian Authority territories, based on the actual practices of Palestinian investigative journalists. The study falls within the framework of exploratory research and relied on observation and interviews. It was based on the social responsibility and gatekeeper theories. The proposed framework is summarized in the following points: the ends do not justify the means; success cannot be achieved through ethical violations; freedom is limited by social responsibility; the accuracy of information and the professionalism of reporting are essential; legal awareness is crucial; the specificities of Palestinian society must be considered; the objectives of foreign media organizations must be respected; partisan affiliation must be avoided; and deliberate security manipulation must be avoided(3) .

3. Farwana's study, titled "Palestinian Journalists' Attitudes Towards the Ethics of Investigative Journalism" (2018), aims to identify journalists' attitudes towards the ethics of investigative journalism in Palestine. This descriptive study employed a survey methodology, utilizing a practice survey approach. The researcher relied on the social responsibility theory and collected data using survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. One of its most important findings was the strong agreement among journalists regarding investigative journalists using undercover to obtain information and achieve their goals(4) .
4. Sununu's study: entitled: The Reality of Investigative Journalism on Palestinian Websites, 2016. This study aimed to identify the extent to which journalists on websites use investigative reporting, their perspectives on related issues, the factors influencing their use, the obstacles they face, and ways to improve it. This study is descriptive research, employing a survey methodology. The researcher used content analysis, media studies surveys, and interrelationship analysis. The researcher also used agenda-setting theory and communicator theory. The tools used in the study were a content analysis form, a survey questionnaire, and interviews. Among its most important findings was that the difficulty in obtaining information was the primary obstacle to investigative journalism, followed by the need to provide a supportive environment for producing investigative reports through the adoption of encouraging policies by media outlets(5) .
5. Al-Sharafi's study entitled "The Reality of Investigative Journalism in Palestinian Newspapers: A Comparative Analytical and Field Study," 2015. This study aimed to monitor the reality of investigative journalism practice in Palestinian newspapers and to identify the problems facing investigative journalists in their investigative work. This study belongs to the category of descriptive research, as it used the survey methodology, within which two methods were employed: content analysis and a survey of practice methods, as well as the interrelationship method. Data was collected through three tools: a content analysis form, an investigative report, and interviews. Among its most important findings: the problems facing investigative journalism in Palestine included a shortage of journalistic personnel, weak financial resources, the state of political division, and the absence of legal legislation that affirms the right to access information (6).

## **2.2 Second: the problem and its perception**

The researchers identified the problem through their extensive experience in Palestinian journalism, having worked in the field professionally and academically for 30 years. This experience included conducting investigative journalism, teaching investigative journalism courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and observing the reality of investigative journalism in some Palestinian media outlets while noting its absence in the majority. This observation necessitated a scholarly investigation into the matter from the researchers' perspective.

Accordingly, the study problem was defined as identifying the obstacles facing investigative journalism institutions in all types of Palestinian media—print, electronic, audio, and visual—and exploring ways to address and develop these obstacles through the opinions of media experts and investigative journalists.

## **2.3 Third: significance**

The study derives its significance from several factors, most notably:

1. The importance of investigative journalism in addressing the complex Palestinian reality.
2. The role of investigative journalism in shaping public opinion on all issues.
3. The necessity for Palestinian media outlets and journalists to embrace the philosophy of investigative journalism as a progressive approach.

## **2.4 Fourth: study objectives**

This study aims to achieve several objectives, including:

1. Identifying the extent of investigative journalism in each type of Palestinian media.
2. Identifying the obstacles related to Palestinian journalists themselves.
3. Clarifying the obstacles related to Palestinian media outlets.
4. Identifying the obstacles related to the general Palestinian environment.

5. Proposing suggestions for developing investigative journalism in Palestinian media.

### **2.5 Fifth: research questions**

This study answers the following questions:

1. To what extent does investigative journalism exist in Palestinian print, electronic, visual, and audio media?
2. What are the most significant obstacles facing investigative journalism in Palestinian media?
3. What are the ways to develop investigative journalism in Palestinian media?

### **2.6 Sixth: study type and methodology**

This study falls under the category of descriptive research. It employs survey research, a method used to accurately describe the current state of the phenomenon, precisely identify its characteristics, and determine the means to improve its existing condition. (7) The study also utilizes a practical methodology.

### **2.7 Seventh: study population and sample**

The study surveyed the Palestinian media landscape in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, encompassing print, electronic, audio, and visual media. This community, numbering in the dozens, is extensive, large, and constantly evolving.

Therefore, the researchers used a purposive sampling method, observing media outlets that exhibit investigative journalism and conducting interviews with their officials. A follow-up sample of journalists and experts.

### **2.8 Eighth: research tools**

The researchers used the following tools in their study:

1. Observation: Both researchers are from the media field and have previously conducted investigative reports and supervised some media outlets in this area. They are also from the academic media field, where they teach investigative reporting to undergraduate and graduate students. Field observation is a scientific method used to define the research objective and to help explain and describe phenomena, rather than simply measuring and enumerating them(8) .
2. In-depth Interviews: These were used to interview officials in various Palestinian media institutions, as well as experts and investigative journalists, to identify obstacles and areas for improvement. The in-depth and intensive interview: The researcher's primary task in this type of interview is to focus the interviewee's attention on a specific issue or topic. The researcher is aware from the outset of the type of topic and the various aspects they aim to cover in the interview. This type of interview is conducted with a small sample(9) .

## **2.9 Ninth: study structure**

The study is divided into an introduction that includes the methodological procedures and three sections:

- Section One: This section covers the reality of investigative journalism in Palestinian media institutions.
- Section Two: This section covers the most significant obstacles related to the journalist, the media institution, and the social environment.
- Section Three: This section covers ways to develop investigative journalism in Palestinian media.

Conclusion:

This section includes the most important findings of the study. The study concludes with a list of references used by the researchers.

### 3 SECTION ONE

#### The Reality of Investigative Journalism in Palestinian Media

Palestinian media outlets have recently embraced investigative journalism, but its reach and impact remain limited. The following points will examine the presence of investigative journalism in various Palestinian media outlets:

1. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida Newspaper: Al-Hayat Al-Jadida newspaper pays relative attention to investigative reports, dedicating some pages to them in its print edition and creating a section on its website where these investigations are published. Several investigations were also published in the weekly Hayat Souq supplement, which focused on people's lives and their economic realities. However, due to funding shortages, this supplement ceased publication. Some of the newspaper's social investigations also garnered significant attention(10) .
2. Falastin Newspaper: Falastin newspaper prioritized investigative journalism, publishing several investigations that generated considerable public discussion in Palestine. The newspaper's investigations covered a range of topics, including economic, political, and social issues. However, the role of investigative journalism in the newspaper has now declined to almost nothing(11) .
3. Al-Risala Newspaper: Al-Risala is considered one of the most prominent Palestinian newspapers that focused on investigative journalism. It published weekly investigative reports and maintained a regular publication schedule for these reports, except in emergency situations. Most of the investigations produced by Al-Risala were significant and resonated with the Palestinian public. Furthermore, the newspaper had a dedicated department, reporting directly to the editor-in-chief, responsible for overseeing investigative reports. This department remains operational despite the cessation of the print edition and the newspaper's reliance solely on its website.(12)
4. Al-Istiqlal Newspaper: The newspaper does not have a dedicated investigative journalism department. While it has published some investigative reports at infrequent intervals, due to the prevailing political climate, the difficulty in obtaining information, and the lack of cooperation from various entities with journalists, it has not allocated sufficient space to investigative reporting(13) .

5. Al-Ayyam Newspaper: Al-Ayyam Newspaper was interested in journalistic investigations and devoted a considerable amount of space to them from the first moments of the newspaper's establishment. However, over time, the newspaper began to reduce these investigations for various reasons. There is no section in the newspaper dedicated to investigative reports, and what is published is the work of some journalists working in the newspaper(14) .
6. Al-Quds Newspaper: Researchers who reviewed the pages of Al-Quds newspaper found a significant deficiency in investigative journalism. It can be said that investigative journalism in Al-Quds is almost nonexistent, as political news, advertisements, sports, and economic news dominate the newspaper's pages. However, journalist Mahmoud Abu Awad emphasized the importance the newspaper places on investigative journalism, despite the absence of a dedicated investigative department. He pointed out that the scarcity of investigative reports stems from the considerable effort and time required, which could potentially create unnecessary problems for the newspaper(15) .
7. Al-Saada Magazine: Al-Saada magazine is one of the Palestinian magazines that has given special attention to investigative journalism by addressing numerous pressing issues, particularly social ones. The magazine's editor-in-chief, Marihan Abu Laban, confirms that the magazine has a dedicated investigative journalism department whose function is to produce numerous investigations. These investigations are published sporadically in some issues of the magazine, not regularly, due to the difficult financial situation, especially since producing such investigations requires a specialized team and substantial funds(16) .
8. Al-Bayader Al-Siyasi Magazine: Al-Bayader Al-Siyasi is considered one of the oldest Palestinian magazines, but it did not focus on investigative journalism for several reasons. The magazine's editor-in-chief, Muhammad Al-Madhoun, attributes this to a shortage of staff and the financial resources required for such investigations. Currently, the magazine has no presence in the media landscape . (17)
9. Palestinian Satellite Channels: A large number of Palestinian satellite channels have been launched both inside and outside Palestine over the past three decades. Observation, viewing, and review of their programming have revealed a lack of

interest in investigative journalism, a fact confirmed by some channel officials .  
(18)

10. Websites: The Palestinian media landscape has witnessed the establishment of dozens of websites, which have engaged with investigative journalism in various ways. Some websites produce their own investigations, though these are very rare. Among the most prominent are Watan, Safa, and Al-Risala. Others republish investigations produced by others, while some do not engage with investigative journalism at all. (19)

## 4 SECTION TWO

### Obstacles to Investigative Journalism in Palestinian Media

The first section of this study reveals that Palestinian investigative journalism faces numerous obstacles and challenges that hinder its work. These include legal issues, challenges related to the institutional and societal environment, and challenges stemming from the individual journalist. These obstacles impede its growth and development, resulting in a slow pace of progress and a lack of sufficient organization and professionalism. Understanding these challenges is crucial for identifying avenues for development and advancement. Therefore, this section outlines the most significant obstacles as follows:

#### 4.1 First: legal obstacles (20)

Among the most prominent legal obstacles faced by investigative journalists are the following:

1. The Palestinian Basic Law does not explicitly address the right to access information. While this right is important, it can be implicitly understood from Article 19 of the Basic Law. This right is recognized as a fundamental principle upon which the right to freedom of opinion and expression in Palestinian society is based. However, the problem lies in the difficulty of obtaining official information, which is not explicitly addressed in the Basic Law. The need for

legislation regulating this right in accordance with international standards is also highlighted.

2. The provisions of the 1995 Press and Publications Law, currently in force in Palestine, pertaining to press freedoms and penalties, contain vague, undefined, and open-ended language.
3. Journalists lack the legal awareness necessary to conduct investigative journalism and understand legal obstacles such as violations of personal privacy and the potential for relying on inaccurate information, which can lead to erroneous conclusions. There is also a shortage of legal advisors specializing in journalism.
4. The inadequacy and weakness of the judicial system, which is responsible for monitoring the concerns, problems, and corruption exposed by investigative journalism, has led to frustration, ineffectiveness, and a lack of impact.

#### **4.2 Second: objective obstacles (21)**

Objective challenges stem from the surrounding environment, including the press institutions, relevant official and professional bodies, and the prevailing political, cultural, and social climate in Palestinian society. Among the most significant of these are:

1. The restrictive policies of media institutions regarding investigative journalism and their reluctance to rely on it as a primary approach. Palestinian media outlets tend to focus on news reporting, seeking to avoid the problems that investigative journalism can cause.
2. The absence of a specialized investigative journalism department in Palestinian media outlets, lacking the necessary human resources and experienced journalists to conduct investigative reporting, as well as the financial resources and budgets allocated for such work.
3. The lack of a clear media vision in Palestinian media, which negatively impacts media performance, particularly investigative reporting.
4. The insufficient number of investigative journalism specialists to teach the subject to students and researchers.
5. The failure to provide journalists with the information they need for investigative reporting. Palestinian journalists suffer from a severe shortage of

information sources, which responsible institutions often conceal for various reasons.

6. The security and political situation that restricts journalists' freedom of movement between areas of events, given the reality of the division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Israeli-imposed fragmentation of West Bank cities, which makes it extremely difficult for journalists to move around and conduct high-quality investigative reporting.
7. The absence of democracy and freedom of opinion and expression, which are essential for the growth and spread of this art form, hinders the work and limits opportunities for producing high-quality investigative reports.
7. The dominance of partisan politics in media institutions makes them hesitant to delve into many issues that conflict with the party's interests or affect its exercise of power. This is compounded by attempts to use journalism, including investigative journalism, as a tool in political squabbles, thus emptying investigative journalism of its substance.
8. The absence and duplication of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate's role on the Palestinian scene. A single, strong syndicate would protect journalists from the overreach of the ruling authority when conducting investigative reports on issues such as corruption. This alone would encourage journalists to pursue investigative journalism.

#### **4.3 Third: internal obstacles (22)**

Internal obstacles refer to those related to journalists practicing journalism in general, and investigative journalists in particular. Among the most prominent of these obstacles are:

1. Lack of professional training for journalists. Media institutions and training centers suffer from a clear shortage of training courses in investigative journalism, in addition to a shortage of Palestinian personnel specializing in this field. Furthermore, investigative journalists are unable to keep pace with developments and participate in external training courses in their field due to the occupation in the West Bank and the closure of crossings in the Gaza Strip.

2. Fear of accountability from security and judicial authorities, and of personal risks during work, especially when investigations fail to produce results or information, or when they fail to influence public opinion after publication. This discourages them from repeating their experiences.
3. The tendency of some Palestinian journalists to work individually rather than collaboratively, while investigative journalism requires teamwork, cooperative effort, and experienced journalists to achieve accuracy.
4. Low wages for Palestinian journalists: Palestinian journalists suffer from a severe wage crisis, which gradually discourages them from investigative journalism and prevents them from engaging in investigations that require significant time and effort. This often forces them to work for multiple media outlets simultaneously, making it difficult for them to dedicate themselves fully to investigative reporting.

The researchers observe a lack of genuine interest from Palestinian media outlets in systematically establishing this type of work. The efforts that have emerged are largely individual initiatives by some institutions or even individual journalists. This underscores the urgent need to develop this art form, given its crucial role in shaping Palestinian public opinion. This will be addressed in the third section of this study.

#### **4.4 Section three**

##### **The Future of Investigative Journalism in Palestinian Media**

Based on the findings of the first and second sections, the issue of the future and advancement of investigative journalism in Palestinian media has become crucial and urgent. This leads us to discuss the most important ways to develop investigative journalism in Palestinian media, which are as follows(23) :

1. Palestinian media outlets must focus on this art by providing journalists with training courses in investigative journalism and encouraging those involved in it. Coordination among media institutions is also essential to focus on corruption issues and work towards disseminating information about them within the framework of addressing them.
2. Palestinian media outlets must prioritize investigative journalism by establishing dedicated investigative reporting departments. Media leaders must be aware of the

mission of investigative journalism, and funding sources must be independent to guarantee freedom in choosing the issues covered.

3. Media legislation is necessary to protect journalists working in investigative journalism and safeguard their rights and responsibilities.
4. The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate must play a more active role in supporting investigative journalists.
5. The capabilities of media professionals must be developed by increasing the emphasis placed on teaching investigative journalism academically in universities, in line with contemporary standards.
6. Providing financial and moral support for investigative journalism from media institutions and decision-makers. It is well known that for investigative work to achieve the desired success, it needs all the necessary resources, both material and otherwise. For example, some investigations related to health or goods require laboratory testing, which also requires funding. If investigative work involves major issues with far-reaching implications and multiple locations, it necessitates travel to conduct interviews with relevant individuals, which also requires funding from the sponsoring organization.
7. Developing training courses for investigative journalists, supervised by experts and academics with practical experience, to enhance their ethical and technical skills, as well as familiarize them with the laws related to investigative work.
8. Facilitating the exchange of investigative journalists working in Palestinian media outlets to gain international experience, learn about new approaches to investigative journalism, and diversify investigative work.
9. Providing legal advisors to Palestinian media outlets and conducting legal training courses to ensure investigative journalists are always informed and knowledgeable about the legal aspects and articles related to investigative work, thus preventing them from exposing themselves to legal repercussions after the investigation is completed.
9. The necessity of selecting investigative journalism topics that are relevant to daily life issues and that meet the aspirations of individuals in society, such as social, health, economic, and service-related topics, among others.
10. The necessity for investigative journalists to be familiar with the customs, traditions, norms, and cultures of their communities, and to know what is

permissible and impermissible in the surrounding society. A journalist does not work in isolation from their social environment, and they must also be knowledgeable about the legal aspects and articles related to investigative work to avoid legal errors and placing themselves in unnecessary situations.

11. The investigative journalist must thoroughly research the topic under investigation and verify the hypothesis they have formulated. This prevents them from having to abandon the investigation after investing time in it, which would represent a loss in multiple ways.
12. The investigative journalist must be objective, credible, and impartial in presenting the topic, avoiding favoring one side over another and maintaining a fair distance between all parties involved in the investigation.
13. The investigative journalist must possess a network of contacts to enable them to organize their information, fill their investigation with vital and essential elements, and avoid topics that include rumors or unsubstantiated claims.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

**How to cite this article (APA)**

Hashish, H. M. A., & Al-Mana'ma, W. A.-R. (2026). THE FUTURE OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN PALESTINIAN MEDIA IN LIGHT OF OBSTACLES AND REALITY. *Veredas Do Direito*, 23(5), e235521. <https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.5521>