




Amjid Khan

Lecturer, Department of Media Studies & Mass Communication, Faculty of Management & Social Sciences, Iqra National University Peshawar, Pakistan

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Social Responsibility Theory, Investigative Journalism, Media accountability, Qualitative research, Pakistan	The investigative journalism is crucial for revealing corruption and abuse in global sports, but it faces major legal, financial, and technological hurdles. Even though it holds global significance, situations in certain high-pressure regional areas are still not well explored. In this regard, study involved semi-structured interviews with 16 experienced sports journalists in Peshawar. It used manual thematic analysis to identify key challenges, motivators, and perceptions. The field has significant limitations. These include a lack of institutional resources and funding at 45%, fear of legal and professional consequences at 20%, and strict editorial policies due to corporate & legal pressures at 35%. Even though many believe in accountability journalism, low government support at 50% and lack of public awareness at 40% hold back investigative efforts. The financial incentives at 40% and professional recognition at 30% are vital motivators, showing a need for better support. Without systemic changes, such as better legal protections, investment in resources, training, and public engagement, investigative sports journalism in KP will continue to face challenges. This study provides a framework to support journalism as important check on power in commercial and political sports environment.
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Corresponding Author	Amjid Khan
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INTRODUCTION

The investigative journalism is vital tool for exposing institutional abuse, corruption, and unethical behavior in the international sports organizations. It has roots in historic cases like Hajo Seppelt's revelations about state-sponsored doping in Russian sports (Oltermann, 2014), Andrew Jennings's detailed investigation of widespread corruption in FIFA (Jennings, 2015b). These groundbreaking investigations empowered a generation of sports journalists to tackle sensitive issues like doping,

fraud & abuse without fear of retaliation. They contributed to significant judicial and institutional reforms (Numerato, 2009). These journalists set a standard, showing that even the most powerful sports organizations could be held accountable through careful scrutiny. In recent years, especially after 2020, the discipline has become more complex, technologically driven, as well as globally collaborative. Several major reports during this time have changed how international sports are governed and held accountable. For instance, the joint investigations by The Athletic and The Oregonian in 2021 uncovered the systemic sexual abuse and misconduct in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). Thus, these efforts led towards groundbreaking Yates Report (2022) and significant institutional changes, including franchise sales and lifetime bans (Linehan & Rueter, 2022; NFL, 2023).

The focus of these investigations has expanded beyond traditional corruption. The field has evolved to cover a broader range of ethical violations. Examples include inquiries into financial misconduct, such as the ongoing "Caso Negreira" involving FC Barcelona and Spanish referees (Garcia & Torres, 2023), and athlete welfare issues, as seen in the Whyte Review into British Gymnastics (1922). New digital forensic tools and global collaboration networks, like those highlighted in the Pandora and Cyprus Papers, are crucial for this new wave of reporting. They allow journalists to conduct in-depth analyses of illicit financial movements and complex, global power structures (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2021; IOC, 2023). The impact of this modern approach is increasingly evident. We see reforms in international federations (Taylor, 2023), criminal prosecutions for integrity violations (UNODC, 2021), notable institutional changes. Yet, significant and growing tactical and structural challenges hinder this progress. Sports organizations, which often have substantial financial and legal resources, are using strategic lawsuits against public participation frequently to intimidate & silence critical voices.

This creates a chilling effect on both sources and reporters (Ponsford, 2024). The financial stability and staffing of long-term investigative projects are under direct threat due to severe budget cuts in newsrooms amid economic crisis in media, driven by declining advertising revenue and changing audience habits (Franklin, 2024). Moreover, the ethical dilemmas this work presents have become more urgent. Thus, new safeguarding measures are needed to protect vulnerable whistleblowers' identities and jobs from online harassment and job loss, especially in cases of abuse (Lowe & Lauer, 2023). The journalists also face an environment of the increased digital surveillance and complex disinformation campaigns by organizations trying to protect their reputations (Posetti, 2020). Thus, modern investigative sports journalism faces a stark contradiction: its ability to create change is at an all-time high, yet environment in which it operates is gradually hostile and unstable. There has not been a thorough examination of the methods, cooperative models, and ethical issues that have emerged since 2020.

Problem Statement

Investigative sports journalism in Peshawar is limited & not well-developed. Journalists encounter challenges like a lack of resources, editorial pressure, fear of backlash, and minimal institutional support. Because of this, vital issues such as corruption and mismanagement in sports often remain

unreported. We need to know these challenges and find ways to improve investigative reporting in local sports media.

Significance of Study

By focusing on the investigative sports journalism in Peshawar, the study addresses an important knowledge gap. Thus, it also promotes greater accountability and transparency in this field by highlighting the issues and opportunities within the sports industry. This can help advance careers in the sports journalism by offering ways to overcome challenges and improve the effectiveness of investigative journalism.

Objective of Study

1. To look at the problems and challenges that journalist face when doing investigative sports journalism in Peshawar.
2. To find opportunities and recommend ways to improve investigative journalism in the sports sector/context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigative sports journalism has changed a lot, expanding to cover more complex international corruption and wrongdoing. The main reasons for this shift are rapid technology advancements, a growing public demand for accountability, and the complicated nature of modern sports scandals (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2021; Schibbye & Lundberg, 2024). The literature highlights significant global disparity and identifies several key themes that shape the current landscape. One major focus of investigative efforts is athlete welfare and systemic abuse, particularly concerning gender inequality. Investigations into the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) by The Athletic and The Oregonian revealed a culture of abusive coaches supported by institutional silence (Linehan & Rueter, 2022). The Yates Report (2022) highlighted systemic governance issues in American women's sports, reinforcing these findings. Turner (2020) uncovered the abuse of gymnasts in the UK disguised as elite training, creating the related narrative. These cases show how investigative journalism plays the crucial role in exposing the failure of powerful sports organizations to protect at-risk athletes.

At same time, financial corruption in sports has grown more complex, demanding more advanced investigative methods. It is clear that simple bribery has evolved into the sophisticated financial schemes. The 2023 "Caso Negreira" scandal, where FC Barcelona paid millions to a former referee, required the cross-border financial forensic analysis to unravel (Garcia & Torres, 2023). Similarly, during Percy's (2021) investigation into Derby County, use of shell companies to bypass financial regulations was uncovered. This indicates a natural progression in the field: journalistic methods need to evolve with the corruption tactics, moving beyond traditional source-based reporting to include financial data journalism and therefore discipline has become more complex, globally. The literature also explains that how mega-events and investments serve as tools for the state interests, revealing close ties between sports and broader geopolitical issues. In addition to labor exploitation in Qatar, Panja and Smith (2023) pointed out the "sports washing" strategy of autocratic regimes.

Rumsby's (2024) follow-up work further established that promised reforms often fall short, leaving exploitation intact.

This theme is deepened through the examination of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, where Lowe and Lauer (2023) reveal how SLAPP lawsuits suppress critical journalism, linking financial influence to the restriction of press freedom and free speech. Technology creates a dynamic push-and-pull effect documented in literature; it serves both as a driver of corruption and as a vital tool for exposing it. Ingle (2023) described how Hajo Seppelt documentary revealed manipulation of the anti-doping system at state level. Schibbye and Lundberg (2024) highlighted the use of AI to detect match-fixing & cyber-espionage targeting organizations like FIFA. This technological race has naturally led to changes in journalistic methods. International collaborative networks, such as ICIJ's "Sport Leaks" project, provide vital support by offering expertise and collective safety needed to tackle these global problems (Schibbye & Lundberg, 2024). Despite these advancements, the literature highlights significant challenges that threaten the success of investigative journalism. Sherwood and Nicholson (2021) note that SLAPPs and smear campaigns signify rising threats from powerful institutions.

Moreover, the funding landscape for extensive, resource-heavy investigations remains unstable. Despite these pressures, the field continues to grow, as seen in new areas like environmental impact of mega-events (The Guardian, 2024) and the athlete mental health crisis (Wilson & Duffy, 2023). As seen in the NWSL and gymnastics cases, the role of whistleblowers remains vital, yet protections for them are still inadequate, exposing journalists to increased risks (Lowe & Lauer, 2023). This broad global context highlights a significant research gap, contrasting sharply with situations in regions like South Asia, specifically KP, Pakistan. Studies by Afridi (2023) and Javed (2023) show that sports journalism in Peshawar is still superficial, focused on match reports and promotions. This oversimplification allows local corruption and athlete abuse to persist while the international field progresses. In contrast to elements aiding contemporary investigative journalism, like technology, collaboration, and public demand, the factors contributing to this gap, limited training, lack of institution support and political pressure (Feinstein, 2022; Khan, 2023) are completely misaligned with one another.

Theoretical Framework

In journalism studies, the Social Responsibility theory of journalism is a key concept. The book "Four Theories of the Press" by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm first introduced it. This theory provides context for ongoing discussions about media ownership, regulation, and ethics. It also supports calls for more accountability and transparency in the media industry. This viewpoint has significantly shaped our understanding of the public's duty to media and its role in society. It acknowledges that while journalism is for-profit industry, it serves as a social institution with social obligations. By recognizing that media must act in public interest, promote transparency, and hold institutions accountable, Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism sets a standard for ethical and responsible practice that impacts sports journalism. Investigative sports reporting can promote accountability, transparency, and uncover misconduct in sports industry. By exposing corruption, drug scandals,

match-fixing, and unethical practices that could undermine integrity of sports, journalists fulfill a part of their social duty.

The Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism highlights the importance of the Fourth Estate, which helps check and balance the power of the state and other institutions. In sports journalism, investigative reporting adds an extra layer of oversight in the industry. The study examines the opportunities and challenges of the investigative sports journalism in Peshawar, using the Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism as a framework. This theory helps to explore the role that investigative reporting plays in enhancing transparency and accountability in the sports industry. It looks at how government and media organizations can support sports investigative journalism. Media companies should provide investigative journalists with the necessary resources, safety, and training. Also, the government needs to create laws that protect investigative sports journalism and ensure reporters can work without fear of retaliation. This research uses the Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism to highlight importance of investigative reporting in sports and its potential social impact. It underscores the need for collaboration among the government, journalists, and media organizations to maintain the transparency, accountability, and the overall well-being of the sports industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach & Purposive Sampling

The appropriateness of a qualitative approach for studying complex, process-oriented phenomena in their natural settings supports the decision to use this methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method is particularly effective for examining "how" and "why" of social practices, making it ideal for details of investigative journalism. Purposive sampling is significant advantage in qualitative research since it allows researchers to selectively choose participants who have specific knowledge related to the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). Senior journalists with over fifteen years of experience were selected to ensure that the data was rich and came from professionals capable of reflecting on how the field has evolved over time. This is a key strategy for studying professional practices (Patton, 2015).

Semi-Structured Interviews and Protocol Development

The semi-structured interview provides a flexible yet focused way to gather detailed narratives, making it perfect tool for this study. This method balances the freedom to explore emerging themes, as vital for exploratory research, with need for comparable data across participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). A recommended practice that enhances the validity and clarity of research tool is the iterative process of developing interview protocol, that includes pilot testing and expert feedback (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This process ensures that questions resonate with participants and align with study goals.

Manual Thematic Analysis & Rigor

Manual analysis of data using thematic analysis is established and rigorous method for identifying, examining, and summarizing patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022).

The described process of open coding, continuous comparison, and theme classification follows the principles of the reflexive approach, where the researcher actively engages with the data to create a coherent interpretation. Choosing not to use specialized software (CAQDAS) is not a drawback; instead, manual coding is entirely suitable for smaller sample sizes and can foster a deeper, more intuitive connection to data (Gibbs, 2018). The methods used to ensure reliability and accuracy are essential in qualitative research. The credibility of interpretations is strengthened through member checking, results are shared with participants for confirmation (Birt et al., 2016). Peer debriefing with independent researchers helps minimize bias and provides an external check on the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constant comparison, a vital aspect of many qualitative methods, ensures that the analysis remains grounded in data by comparing each new piece of data to existing codes and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Maintaining detailed analytical memos boosts the confirmability of findings and creates a clear audit trail that records the decision-making process (Birks et al., 2008).

Ethical Considerations

The stringent ethical diverse guidelines, which include informed consent, confidentiality through pseudonyms, and procedures for withdrawal, align with current standards for ethical qualitative research, especially when dealing with sensitive topics (Israel & Hay, 2006). These measures are necessary to protect participants and build trust, both of which are critical for obtaining rich and truthful data.

Sample Size and Saturation

A qualitative study that strives for thematic saturation, point at which no new significant themes appear in data, should ideally include a sample size of sixteen (Hennink et al., 2017). In qualitative research, depth of information gathered from informed participants determine validity rather than numerical representation. A smaller, carefully selected sample is not only suitable but preferred (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1 Challenges faced by sports journalists in conducting investigative reporting

Theme	Percentage
Lack of resources	45%
Fear of repercussions	20%
Editorial pressures	15%
Unfamiliarity with I.R.	10%
Lack of support	10%

Respondents identified the lack of resources as biggest obstacle at 45%. This likely includes issues such as not having enough funds, time, or access to databases and investigative tools. This problem shows how sports media often underfunds investigative journalism. Interestingly, 20% of reporters expressed concerns about potential consequences. This suggests media environment where threats or professional risks arise in investigations. The challenges journalists face is also evident in 10% who

noted institutional disinterest and 15% who felt editorial pressures. The 10% who lack familiarity with investigative techniques points to skills gap, underscores need for training and professional development in this field.

Table 2 Importance of investigative reporting in sports journalism

Theme	Percentage
Transparency	40%
Accountability	30%
Public interest	15%
Ethics	10%
Other	5%

Most respondents believed that investigative reporting is crucial for keeping accountability (30%) and transparency (40%). This view supports the idea that it can help reveal wrongdoing in sports organizations. However, the much lower focus on ethics (10%) and public interest (15%) suggests that journalists might care more about the procedural outcomes than broader moral or democratic values. While this practical perspective seems reasonable in settings with limited resources, it may indicate that training and newsroom culture should highlight the ethical and civic responsibilities of the journalism.

Table 3 Role of editorial policies in discouraging investigative reporting

Theme	Percentage
Fear of legal action	35%
Lack of autonomy	20%
Corporate pressure	20%
Lack of resources	15%
Lack of interest	10%

Investigative work appears to be greatly discouraged by editorial policies. The main barrier, fear of legal action at 35%, suggests that defamation laws, insufficient legal protection hinder journalistic investigation. A lack of autonomy and corporate pressure makes up 40% of responses, showing how institutional interference and market-driven choices restrict journalists' ability to investigate the issues more comprehensively. In this connection, these findings reflect the deeper conflicts between organizational control and editorial independence, particularly in the politically or commercially sensitive situations.

Table 4 Satisfaction level of sports journalists with their current role

Theme	Percentage
Dissatisfied	50%
Satisfied	15%
Neutral	20%
No response	15%

The high percentage of the respondents, 50%, who reported being unhappy with sports journalism today likely stems from earlier mentioned issues. These include a lack of funding, editorial limits,

and insufficient support from institutions. Only 15% of respondents said they were satisfied, which suggests that some workers might feel frustrated or burned out in their roles. The 15% non-response rate could imply that some were hesitant to share their views, possibly due to survey fatigue or fear of backlash.

Table 5 Future of investigative reporting in sports journalism in Peshawar

Theme	Percentage
Bright	30%
Optimistic	35%
Neutral	15%
Pessimistic	10%
No comment	10%

Sixty-five percent of respondents expressed optimism or a positive outlook about the future of investigative sports journalism in Peshawar, even though many were unhappy with the current situation. This suggests a belief in chance for more professionalism or institutional change. However, there is some skepticism among the 25% who were either negative, neutral, or hesitant to comment. This uncertainty might stem from an understanding of the ongoing structural issues or from unmet expectations in past.

Table 6 Level of support sports journalists receive from their media organizations

Theme	Percentage
Poor	45%
Fair	25%
Good	20%
Excellent	10%

Nearly half of the journalists, 45%, rated the institutional support as poor. This shows a significant lack of support. The result aligns with the earlier findings about editorial interference and resource shortages. Strong organizational support for investigative work is rare. Only 10% of respondents thought the support was "excellent." Thus, these results suggest that the media often overlooks the investigative journalism.

Table 7 Incentives for sports journalists to engage in investigative reporting

Theme	Percentage
Monetary Compensation	40%
Recognition	30%
Career Advancement	15%
Training	10%
Other	5%

The most common motivators are financial incentives at 40% and recognition at 30%. This shows that journalists are driven by money and professional visibility. Still, only small number see training at 10% or long-term career growth at 15% as key motivators. This might stem from a lack of chances

for these chances or doubt about effectiveness. The low emphasis on altruistic, intrinsic motivations listed under "Other" suggests that investigative journalism should be redefined as both socially and professionally valuable.

Table 8 Resources needed to enhance investigative reporting in sports journalism

Theme	Percentage
Funding	45%
Access to Information	25%
Technology	20%
Networking	5%
Other	5%

Funding is the most common need at 45%. This confirms earlier concerns about a lack of resources. Technology at 20% and access to information at 25% are important. This shows that financial and infrastructure problems hold back investigative journalism. In this connection, the minimal focus on networking indicates that collaborative journalism is not a common practice or a top priority of the journalist in different circumstances. This points to a potential area for the professional growth and skill-building.

Table 9 Awareness level of the public on the importance of investigative reporting in sports

Theme	Percentage
Low	40%
Moderate	30%
High	20%
Very High	10%

Public awareness of investigative reporting in sports was considered low by a significant portion of survey respondents, with 40% rating it as such. Since public involvement and pressure are often crucial for reform, this lack of awareness may reduce the societal impact of the investigative work. There is a difference between what journalists intend and how the audience perceives it; only 30% of respondents believed that awareness was high or very high. These findings show the need for the media literacy programs and public education efforts to encourage demand for and appreciation of investigative content.

Table 10 Government support for investigative reporting in sports journalism

Theme	Percentage
Low	50%
Moderate	30%
High	15%
Very High	5%

Because there are no laws or protections for journalists, half of the respondents, 50%, believed that government did not support investigative journalism. The small number of respondents who rated support as "very high," only 5%, shows that government efforts, if they exist, are not well-known or

have little impact. In sports industry, where accountability is overlooked, these findings highlight the need for advocacy and changes in the law that ensure financial support and legal protection for investigative journalism.

DISCUSSION

With the Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism as a guide, this study examines how closely investigative sports journalism in Peshawar complies with the democratic standards of openness, responsibility, and moral behavior. According to the theory, the media must put society's welfare ahead of their own financial gain even though they operate in commercial settings ([Christians et al., 2009](#)). In addition to pointing out areas for reform, the study's findings highlight a number of institutional, structural, and cultural obstacles that stand in the way of this obligation. The lack of institution resources was cited by 45% of respondents as major challenge. This theme is frequently found in international research on decline of investigative capabilities in underfunded newsrooms ([Khan, 2023](#)). The access to digital forensics, secure communications, and data analysis tools are essential for investigative journalism, especially in digital age ([Data & Society Research Institute, 2024](#)). Journalists cannot carry out their watchdog function, which is a fundamental component of the Social Responsibility framework, without these. Inadequate media environments undermine democratic oversight in the sports industry by making it harder to hold the influential sporting organizations accountable.

Twenty percent of participants reported being afraid of the legal or physical retaliation, which is indicative of the increasingly unfriendly environment for investigative reporting. The increase in SLAPP (strategic lawsuit against public participation) lawsuits & violent threats against journalists worldwide is consistent with this worry ([International Press Institute, 2023](#)). Legal intimidation in sports journalism frequently originates from the influential clubs, sponsors, or institutional leaders, jeopardizing editorial independence. Thus, the lack of strong legal safeguards and journalist safety procedures erodes the media's institutional legitimacy and Fourth Estate function, claim [Lowe and Lauer \(2023\)](#). The role of corporate and editorial pressure in limiting investigative autonomy is equally concerning, with 35% citing legal concerns and 20% citing corporate interference. This supports [Panja and Smith's \(2024\)](#) claim that commercial influence undermines sports coverage's objectivity by frequently putting the brand relationships ahead of accountability journalism. To safeguard journalistic freedom and public interest reporting, editorial charters, media ethics codes, as well as independent oversight mechanisms are obviously necessary, in accordance with social responsibility theory.

The results indicate that financial compensation (40%) and professional recognition (30%) are the main motivators for journalists. However, lack of organizational investment in capacity-building is indicated by the low emphasis on career development (15%) and training (10%). The professional competence and ethical intentions are both necessary for socially conscious journalism. Training programs like created by [Thomson Reuters Foundation in Africa \(2023\)](#) show how investigative reporting standards can be raised through focused capacity-building. Similar frameworks could be implemented in Peshawar to fill in current knowledge gaps and promote long-term journalistic growth. Furthermore, according to data, there is a gap between public awareness and journalistic

efforts, with 40% of respondents thinking that the general public is unaware of the importance of investigative journalism in sports. This is problematic because, according to [McQuail \(2010\)](#), Theory places a strong emphasis on informing, educating, and engaging the public in addition to reporting facts. Investigative journalism can influence public opinion and lead to institutional change, as demonstrated by recent studies likewise the (NWSL) abuse scandal in the United States ([Linehan & Rueter, 2022](#)).

Similar community-focused strategies can boost community involvement and demand for openness in sports governance in Peshawar. Notwithstanding these obstacles, 65% of reporters said they were hopeful or believed that investigative reporting would have a bright future. This is consistent with the findings of [Schibbye and Lundberg \(2024\)](#) regarding the ability of journalists to persevere under duress, wherein regional consortia & collective support networks have enabled continuation of the investigative work in underprivileged settings. The study's minor but noteworthy focus on networking (5%) indicates that Peshawar journalists are receptive to collaborative models. Finally, 50% of respondents rated government support as low, indicating structural neglect. The theory holds that the government can foster ethical and free journalism by establishing legal protections, providing information access, encouraging journalistic independence, rather than by censoring or controlling press ([Siebert et al, 1956](#)). Positive international models that offer practical templates that could be modified for Peshawar to create a more secure and inspiring environment for sports journalism include the UNODC's integrity reporting framework ([UNODC, 2023](#)) and Kenya's laws protecting journalists.

CONCLUSION

Using the Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism as a guide, this study looked into the state, challenges, and future of the investigative sports journalism in Peshawar. The results show that investigative reporting in the region's sports media is significantly hindered by structural problems. These include a lack of funding, editorial interference, fear of repercussions, insufficient training, and minimal institutional support. These issues create a media environment that favors the surface-level reporting and examination instead of thorough, accountability-focused work. However, the views of the experienced reporters reveal some optimism for the future of investigative practices in sports journalism. Many respondents believe that investigative reporting promote accountability, boost transparency, and serve the public's interest. These perspectives align with the core ideas of the Social Responsibility Theory, which highlights journalism's role in the democratic progress and institutional oversight.

The data also suggests that to support the growth of investigative sports journalism, media outlets, academic institutions and lawmakers must cooperate closely. Investing in editorial independence, legal protections, journalist training, and access to resources is vital to bridge existing gaps. Also, fostering a culture of support from institutions and the government can help promote journalism that informs the public and challenges the norm in the sports sector. Creating cross-organizational alliances may improve resource sharing and increase the effectiveness of investigations. This study adds to the broader discussion on journalism in emerging media systems by focusing on the specific context of Peshawar. It highlights importance of investigative journalism as a means for professional

growth, public service, and social accountability, along with the need for localized approaches to the media reform.

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