

THE FACE OF INVESTIGATIVE NEWS: A MIXED-METHOD ANALYSIS OF LOCAL
TELEVISION INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM CONTENT, PERCEPTIONS, AND
INFLUENCES

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ABSTRACT

JESSE ABDENOUR: The Face of Investigative News: A Mixed-Method Analysis of Local Television Investigative Journalism Content, Perceptions and Influences
(Under the direction of Daniel Riffe)

Investigative journalism is seen as the most important form of news reporting, but many fear it has declined because of economic considerations. This dissertation addresses gaps in the literature by empirically analyzing the quantity and quality of investigative journalism production within the most popular news format, local television. The project also examines organizational and market factors that influence investigative productivity.

A content analysis of local TV newscasts showed that investigative quantity and quality were generally low. Of the long-form stories coded (N=398), about one in five was presented as investigative by the producing station, and approximately one in nine was actually investigative by definition (less than half the stories presented as investigative were investigative by definition). In addition, a majority of the stations sampled (N=80) produced no investigative journalism of any kind during the sample week of newscasts. However, an accompanying survey showed that more than half of local television investigative reporters thought investigative production was increasing at their stations.

Ownership of a station by a publicly traded corporation was strongly associated with higher investigative productivity; corporate stations produced more news that was presented as investigative and placed greater perceived emphasis on investigative reporting compared to

privately owned stations. This finding is in stark contrast to literature touting the negative effect of corporations on news, and has ramifications for future study of news organizations.

A station's perceived emphasis on profit predicted less perceived station emphasis on investigative reporting, but profit emphasis was not related to stations' actual investigative productivity in the content analysis. Larger news staffs also predicted greater investigative emphasis, but staff size was not related to actual investigative productivity. Market size and competition level did not significantly predict investigative productivity or investigative emphasis.

This dissertation provides support to those who charge that local television is providing little quality “watchdog” reporting, but also indicates that investigative journalists are optimistic about their craft, which has borne the brunt of newsroom cutbacks in recent years. It also uncovers clues that could help researchers determine the particular circumstances under which investigative journalism is produced at the local level.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Locally televised investigative journalism has helped countless communities learn the truth about their leaders. Investigators at local TV stations have taken on every aspect of society – from government and politics to education and sports – and their stories often help create positive change (Downie, 2012). The significance of local investigations can be felt in Cincinnati, where last year WCPO revealed that 9-1-1 operators were putting lives at risk by working without proper medical training (RTDNA, 2014); in Tampa, where WFTS showed that state workers were declaring elderly people “incapacitated” so officials could sell their homes for big profits; in smaller markets like Columbia, SC, where WLTX found widespread negligence in the department of social services that coincided with the death of one foster child (duPont Award Winners, 2015); and in Wilmington, NC, where last year WECT discovered that county prosecutors were dismissing almost half of their DWI cases, often putting dangerous repeat offenders back on the road (Evans, 2014). These investigative stories, like many others, led to firings, resignations, policy changes, new laws, trials, and convictions.

In addition to their propensity for impact, investigative stories help democracies function effectively because they inform citizens about their leaders (Blasi, 1977; Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Journalism professor and former Washington Post editor Leonard Downie, Jr., said, “No matter how unpopular the news media may sometimes be, there has been, ever since

Watergate, an expectation that the press would hold accountable those with power and influence over the rest of us” (Downie, 2012). The “watchdog” ethos that investigative news represents is extremely important to consumers (Jones, 2013; Rowe, 2011), journalists (Willnat & Weaver, 2014), and news managers (Jones, 2013). It is seen as the standard for excellence in American journalism, against which all other reporting is judged (Aucoin, 1997).

Local television investigations in particular have great potential for impact, due to the medium’s popularity. Local TV is the top news source for adults in America, reaching the broadest audience in terms of size, diversity, and socioeconomic status (“Local News Interest,” 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013; Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013; Waldman, 2011). Audiences turn to local television first for local political news (Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Purcell, & Rainie, 2011), and often trust local TV presenters more than print journalists (Graber & Dunaway, 2015).

But many fear investigative journalism has declined sharply because of the recent economic downturn and profit considerations (Coronel, 2013; Lozano, 2010; Walton, 2010; Waldman, 2011). Though journalists and news managers highly value investigations, most think their news outlets are not getting the proper resources to conduct them (Jones, 2013; Holcomb, Mitchell, & Purcell, 2015). Scholars (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013), media critics (Downie, 2012; Lewis, 2014), and even television news directors (Jessell, 2012) think local TV investigative reporters are doing a poor job. Former investigative television reporter Joe Bergantino said investigative cutbacks at local stations deprive citizens of valuable information: “they’re not getting the kind of information they need from television news to hold the government accountable, and the powerful accountable, and to be informed citizens in a democracy” (Waldman, 2011, p. 88).

The apparently tenuous status of investigative journalism on local television raises certain questions: first, how much investigative journalism is being produced on local TV? Second, what is the quality of that journalism? And third, of the investigative reporting that is being done, what factors contribute to its production? These are empirical questions that largely have not been answered. The current project addresses these gaps in the literature by analyzing the amount and quality of investigative journalism at local television stations across the U.S., and how certain ownership and market variables affect investigative productivity. This examination utilizes a survey of investigative reporters, a content analysis of local TV newscasts, and a market and organizational analysis to address these issues.

The second chapter of this dissertation explains why investigative journalism is particularly useful to society and democracy, examining definitions of investigative journalism and larger trends in its production. The third chapter looks at the investigative news process through the prism of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of news influences, predicting how various micro- and macro-level dynamics might constrain investigative news. While an organizational emphasis on profit might limit investigative journalism, organizational structure and size might encourage its production. Additionally, exogenous factors like competition and market size may stimulate investigative reporting. The fourth chapter lists the project's specific research questions and hypotheses, and the fifth chapter describes the methods of analysis. Chapter six presents analysis results, and chapter seven discusses these results along with final conclusions and recommendations for researchers and journalists.

Because there is a limited body of academic knowledge concerning television news, especially television investigative news, several studies of print and online journalism are included in the literature review to provide context. While TV is undoubtedly a different medium

with different demands and routines, commercial television stations face many of the same constraints as commercial print and online outlets. In addition, older seminal works about television production and investigative journalism are cited because of their importance to the field, and also because of a limited amount of recent relevant scholarly material in this area. Many of the same issues, attitudes, and work practices in local TV news from twenty years ago are still relevant today (see, e.g., Baran, 2011; Belt & Just, 2008; Graber & Dunaway, 2015; Jurkowitz et al., 2013).

CHAPTER TWO

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Definition and Classification

Investigative news provides surveillance of powerful interests, including public entities, such as governments, and private entities, such as corporations (de Burgh, 2008; Protess, Cook, Doppelt, Ettema, Gordon, Leff, & Miller, 1991). It embodies the traditional “watchdog” function of the press integral to the First Amendment (Blasi, 1977). The Founding Fathers sought to establish the press as an independent entity capable of providing a “check” on government forces (Blasi, 1977; McManus, 1990; Siebert et al., 1956). The press’ primary duty was to be the “watchdog over the workings of democracy, ever vigilant to spot and expose any arbitrary or authoritarian practice” (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 56). Legal scholar Vincent Blasi (1977) said speech that “checks” the abuse of official power, such as investigative journalism, is the most valuable form of free expression and should receive the highest legal protection.

Investigative reporting often provides useful information about government officials, helping citizens make reasonable choices and sustain democracy (Blasi, 1977; Siebert et al., 1956). Consumption of political news and access to local reporting are associated with greater political participation, including voting (Filla & Johnson, 2010; Hamilton, 2004). Investigative journalism, in particular, has the potential to mobilize public opinion and generate government action (de Burgh, 2008; Downie, 2012; Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Protess et al., 1991).

Investigative reporters often seek to enact political or social change through their reporting (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Protess et al., 1991).

Good investigative journalism “afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted” (Houston, 2009; Kovach, Rosenstiel, & Kohut, 2001), and its reporters are often guided by an ethical duty to expose wrongdoing (Aucoin, 2006; Houston, 2009). Driven by moral “outrage” (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Protess et al., 1991), investigative reporters “champion the weak” and “accuse the guilty” (de Burgh, 2008, p. 19). Ettema and Glasser (1998) identified three properties of successful investigative journalism: “publicity,” whereby reporters bring an issue to light with the intent of fixing the problem; “accountability,” in which those responsible for the problem are held accountable and given an opportunity to reply; and “solidarity,” in which the reporter establishes an empathetic link between the “victim” of the story and the media consumer (p. 189).

Most official definitions of investigative journalism are variations on a description written in 1983 by Robert Greene, former assistant managing editor of *Newsday*:

“The reporting, through one’s own work product and initiative, of matters of importance which some persons or organizations wish to keep secret. The three basic elements are that the investigation be the work of the reporter, not a report of an investigation made by someone else; that the subject of the story involves something of reasonable importance to the reader or viewer; and that others are attempting to hide these matters from the public” (Ullmann & Honeyman, 1983, pp. vii-viii).

Those three themes (original work, public importance, and concealed information) have been used frequently in subsequent definitions of investigative reporting (see, e.g., Aucoin, 2006; Bernt & Greenwald, 2000; Blevens, 1997). Ullmann (1995) called Greene's definition the "best" description of investigative journalism (p. 2), and a similar definition is used today by the Investigative Reporters and Editors organization: "The reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, of matters of importance to readers, viewers or listeners. In many cases, the subjects of the reporting wish the matters under scrutiny to remain undisclosed" (Investigative Reporters and Editors, 2015). Each of Greene's three themes is described in detail in the following section.

Original Work. Many scholars take this to mean that the reporter did his or her own "digging" to get the story (Cordell, 2009; Houston, 2009; Ullman, 1995). Aucoin (2006) held that investigative reporting reveals information "through the original, time-consuming 'digging' of the reporter for the purposes of inspiring reform" (p. 91). Inherent in this process is that the reporter did not simply accept information offered through the typical authoritative channels; he or she went beyond allegation or denial to establish facts that either substantiate or refute official claims (Blevens, 1997; de Burgh, 2008; Knight, 2007; Protess et al., 1991; Spark, 1999; Williams, 1978). Ettema and Glasser (1998) postulated that it is the investigative journalist's job to "look beyond what is conventionally acceptable, behind the interpretations of events provided for us by authorities and the authoritative" (p. 3). An example of this would be an investigative reporter's interviewing of enlisted men and women to establish that rape and sexual harassment within the armed forces is tolerated, despite denials by military officials.

Concealed Information. The second commonly held aspect of Greene's definition is that the information revealed through the reporter's initiative was concealed from the public (Aucoin,

2006; Cordell, 2009; Houston, 2009; Ullman & Honeyman, 1983). Benjaminson and Anderson (1990) declared that concealed information is the *sine qua non* of investigative reporting; without this element, reporting is not investigative. Greene's definition specified that someone must be actively trying to hide the information that is revealed (Ullman & Honeyman, 1983). This requirement of deliberate suppression is also stipulated by Williams (1978) and de Burgh (2008), but has mostly fallen out of favor with researchers. A more common and less strict definition of the "concealed information" characteristic is that the information was hidden from the public, but was not necessarily suppressed (Blevens, 1997; Knight, 2007). Several investigative scholars have held that the revelation of concealed information could be from a reporter's original discovery of patterns in complex records or public data (Bernt & Greenwald, 2000; Defleur, 1997; Knight, 2007). An example of this would be an investigative reporter looking through hundreds of hours of police dashboard camera videos in order to establish a pattern of racial profiling (Berry, 2009).

Public Interest. The third aspect of Greene's investigative definition, that the story topic must be important to audiences, is nearly universal (see, e.g. Aucoin, 2006; de Burgh, 2008; DeFleur, 1997; Cordell, 2009; Houston, 2009; Protess et al., 1991) but is the toughest to define. Gaber (2008) claimed that substantive investigative journalism must be in the "public interest," drawing a difference between stories that are merely interesting and stories that are in the public's interest to make known (p. 245). For example, a story about life inside a private prison might be interesting, but not necessarily in the public interest. On the other hand, a story about a large drug company distorting trial results to conceal a drug's link to teen suicide would be in the public's interest (Gaber, 2008).

Investigative reports that are important to audiences almost always involve harm – the reporter reveals that the “villain,” or “target,” of the story has caused harm to a “victim” (Bernt & Greenwald, 2000; de Burgh, 2008; Protess et al., 1991; Ruehlman, 1977; Ullman 1995). Truly investigative stories involve villains who are in authoritative positions and have abused that authority (Northmore, 1996; Protess et al., 1991). Conflicts between individuals are usually not investigative, whereas conflicts between individuals and the state often are (Northmore, 1996). An example of the former is a consumer-centered story, such as when a small company charges a customer for services not rendered. Northmore (1996) maintains that individual conflicts often result in “trite foot-in-the-door TV investigations,” and that truly investigative reporting should be “a little alarming to anyone in power” (pp. 10-11). Impactful investigations can also be alarming to the news outlets that produce them because of potential lawsuits (Ullman, 1995).

Investigative villains can be public entities such as government officials who misuse taxpayer money, or private entities such as large companies that manufacture dangerous toys (de Burgh, 2008; Gaber, 2008; Protess et al., 1991). De Burgh (2008) held that it is the “quality of the target” that distinguishes investigative journalism (p. 15). For example, an athlete arrested for marijuana possession is a low-quality target; a legislator who accepted bribes in order to promote a bill in Congress is a high-quality target. Ettema and Glasser (1998) found that “an investigative journalist will choose stories that transcend the facts of a particular case and illustrate a broader trend or failure of a system” (p. 3). However, Cordell (2009), de Burgh (2008), and Houston (2009) all maintained that villains can be singular (e.g., a rogue city official) or collective (e.g., the city government system). Similarly, victims can be singular (e.g., one man sent to prison for a crime he didn’t commit) or collective (e.g., taxpayers who saw their money wasted by a corrupt official).

Building from the preceding literature, the present project defines an investigative news story as one that: a) is a piece of original work by the presenting news organization; b) reveals information that was either purposely suppressed, concealed by law, or was public but was compiled by the reporter in a way that exposes a widespread pattern; and c) is in the public's interest because a powerful entity caused harm to a citizen or citizens.

The State of Investigative Journalism

Because this dissertation looks for clues in determining the state of local television investigative journalism, trends associated with this type of reporting are analyzed. The following section looks at broad patterns in local television news, investigative journalism, and the related "hard" news genre.

Local TV Trends. Local television is the number one news source for Americans ("How Americans Get", 2014; Lewis, 2014; "Local News Interest," 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Olmstead et al., 2013; Waldman, 2011). About 90% of U.S. adults watch local TV news at least occasionally (Mitchell, 2014), more than 70% watch it over the course of a month (Olmstead et al., 2013), and about 50% watch it regularly ("In Changing News," 2012). When polled last year, 82% of adults said they had watched local television in the past week – more than any other news source ("How Americans Get", 2014). Local TV viewership declined steadily from 2009 to 2012 (Mitchell, 2014), but has increased each of the past two years (Matsa, 2015). As a comparison, only 20 to 30% of the U.S. population has access to an all-news cable channel (Lewis, 2014).

Despite local television's popularity, many stations slashed their budgets during the past decade (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Waldman 2011). Local TV news pre-tax profits fell by 50% from 1998 to 2008, with stations in smaller towns seeing the largest decline (Waldman, 2011). However, budgets have bounced back because of strong commercial sales. Total on-air ad

revenue for local stations (including advertisements for news shows and non-news shows) reached \$20 billion in 2014, up 7% from the year before (Matsa, 2015). News shows generate the lion's share of that money. In 1994, the typical local TV station got about 16% of its revenue from sales of commercials that aired during newscasts (McManus, 1994). By 2014, that number had more than tripled; Papper (2014b) reported that the average station got 50% of its revenue from news, the highest percentage ever recorded in the yearly RTDNA/Hofstra University survey. Additionally, the number of local stations that experienced news budget increases went from 38% in 2012 to 52% in 2014 (Papper 2014b).

News content has increased along with news revenue. Local TV news now produces a large amount of content on a variety of platforms (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013; Reinardy & Bacon, 2014). In 2014, the number of U.S. stations producing original local news increased from the previous year for the first time in a decade, and the amount of local news produced per station had increased to five hours on an average weekday (Papper, 2014a). Additionally, the percentage of local TV news directors who expected news staff increases went from 43% in 2013 to 52% in 2014 (Papper, 2014b).

Hard News Trends in Local TV. But does more TV news mean more quality news, and by extension, more “hard” and investigative news? Some scholars (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2004; Higgins-Dobney, 2013) believe the opposite: that more television news equals more “soft” news. In contrast to hard news, which takes more effort and is more socially and politically relevant (Belt & Just, 2008; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2012), soft news often takes less effort, is cheaper to produce, and typically includes sensational aspects (Belt & Just, 2008; Jacobs, 1990; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994, 2009). Examples of hard news include stories on

government action and politics, while soft news examples include stories on celebrities and leisure activities.

In its early stages, television news was generally of the hard variety. News programs were a way for stations to fulfill Federal Communications Commission (FCC) performance regulations requiring fair and balanced coverage of issues of public importance. Newscasts were seen as “loss leaders,” generating prestige but little revenue (Westin, 2000, p. 3; see also, Barnouw, 1993; Friendly, 1967). Beginning in the 1970s, however, television managers realized that local news could be highly profitable if sensational and visual stories were highlighted, often at the expense of public service reporting (Jacobs, 1990; McManus, 1994; Westin, 2000). By the 1980s, broadcast deregulation had stripped the FCC’s “public service” mandate of much of its power, although its ethos still pervades the profession (Baran, 2011; Graber & Dunaway, 2015).

A large body of research in the past 20 years indicates that hard news on local TV has been in decline (see, e.g., Coulson, Riffe, Lacy, & St. Cyr, 2001; Hamilton, 2004; “Informing Communities,” 2009; Jurkowitz et al., 2013; Lacy, Wildman, Fico, Bergan, Baldwin, & Zube, 2013; McManus, 1994; Riffe & Abdenour, 2015; Riffe & Holm, 1999). Waldman (2011) said TV coverage of local elections is weak, and posited that a lack of local accountability reporting could cause a deterioration of local communities: “The independent watchdog function that the Founding Fathers envisioned for journalism—going so far as to call it crucial to a healthy democracy—is in some cases at risk at the local level” (p. 5). A decline in hard news on local TV would be significant because of the medium’s popularity as a source for public affairs information (Belt & Just, 2008). While newspaper is the most popular medium for civic news topics such as local government, community events, and social services, local television is the most relied-upon medium for local political news (Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Purcell, & Rainie, 2011).

In an analysis of local TV newscasts in 2002, Yanich (2012) concluded that the amount of public affairs coverage was small across the board; just 8-12% of stories involved government or politics (Yanich, 2012). Jurkowitz et al. (2013) reported a 50% decrease in local TV coverage of politics and government during an eight-year span – in 2005, those topics constituted 6% of local TV news airtime; by 2013, that number was 3%. During the same time period, local TV coverage of weather, traffic, sports, accidents and disasters increased. If hard news is indeed declining, local television investigative journalism, which is mostly hard news, may be suffering as well.

However, Belt and Just (2008) found that local TV news was not entirely the “vast wasteland” critics assumed it to be (p. 200). About 25% of stories in their national sample were considered “important,” focusing on significant political and community issues. The authors also found local news to be “very local,” with more than 60% of TV stories being relevant to their respective communities (Belt & Just, 2008, p. 200). Although Waldman (2011) cited an overall lack of substance in local television news, he did acknowledge that a few stations were still producing high-quality journalism of “tremendous value” to their communities, including, for example, WFAA in Dallas and WKRN in Nashville (p. 79).

Investigative Trends in Local TV. Similar to hard news trends, numerous researchers and practitioners indicate that investigative journalism has been on a steady decline in the past decade due to profit pressures (see, e.g., Cordell, 2009; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Ide & Vashisht, 2006; Jessell, 2012; Poitras & Sutter, 2009; Waldman, 2011). Sandy Rowe (2011), former editor of the Portland *Oregonian* newspaper, said local journalists in television and print “do not produce enough accountability reporting to fully engage and empower citizens,”

jeopardizing the public's ability to hold government, business and civic leaders accountable (pp. 2-3).

A 1991 survey of more than 900 print and television investigative journalists showed that a majority thought the news media had become less committed to investigative journalism (Protess et al., 1991). Membership in the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) organization dropped more than 30% from 2003 (5,391) to 2009 (3,695), although the organization now claims to have more than 5,000 members ("Job Listings," 2015). This year, 88% of IRE members listed decreasing newsroom resources as their number-one concern (Holcomb et al., 2015).

Many point to the recent emergence of "nonprofit muckraking organizations" such as ProPublica or the New England Center for Investigative Reporting as proof that investigative journalism in traditional media has declined (Coronel, 2013; Jurkowitz, 2014; Graber & Dunaway, 2015; Rowe, 2011). These nonprofit online outfits help fill the investigative void when budgets are cut, but are less sustainable than commercial outlets because they generate less revenue (Waldman, 2011). In the newspaper realm, Ide and Vashisht (2006) found that investigative staffing was very low; more than 60% of newspapers had no investigative editor and almost 40% had no full-time investigative reporters.

Investigative journalism on local TV has also shown signs of deterioration. In a survey of local TV news directors, Just, Levine, Regan, and Dean (2002) reported a five-year decline in investigative television reporting: 25% of news stations did no investigative work whatsoever, and only one of every 150 stories contained original "watchdog" reporting. Waldman (2011) surmised that profit pressures had severely reduced the number of in-depth "watchdog" stories at local TV stations, and Jessell (2012) reported that 82% of local TV news directors said their

stations did an “average” or “poor” job of investigative journalism. More than 80% of news directors said that criticism of local TV investigative reporting was “fair,” and less than 40% expected to see more investigative work at their stations in the next three to five years (Jessell, 2012).

A study by Jurkowitz et al. (2013) suggested a recent dip in local television enterprise journalism (high-effort reporting that can be similar to investigative work). Local TV airtime dedicated to pre-edited “package” stories, which take more effort and tend to be longer, decreased by 20% from 2005 to 2012, and the proportion of stories lasting more than a minute dropped from 31% in 2002 to 20% in 2012 (Jurkowitz et al., 2013). Scott, Gobetz, and Chanslor (2008) determined that the amount of local news produced was an indicator of quality; thus, a drop in the length of local stories could mean a drop in quality.

One reason stories might be getting shorter is because stations have to do more with fewer reporters (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Jurkowitz et al., 2013). The amount of TV news has increased, while staffing has remained largely the same or decreased slightly in recent years (Papper, 2014b). Shorter stories and overworked staffs are not conducive to investigative reports, which tend to be long and take time to build (Houston, 2009). Higgins-Dobney and Sussman (2013) found lack of staffing to be a major problem for investigative reporting at television stations in Portland, OR. In what the authors believed to be a nationwide trend, executives had slashed station budgets, consolidated news operations, and increased demands on reporters. Many investigative journalists had to double as general assignment reporters and were expected to produce stories daily: “there is little or no time permitted to investigate stories in-depth or add creativity to storytelling...often, what passes for investigative reporting involves nothing more than making a few phone calls” (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013, p. 857).

Barnhurst (2011) found that the time crunch had hit television news especially hard, “where competitive pressures to go live have left journalists without time to investigate or even edit their work” (p. 99).

However, there is hope for investigative journalism, which is highly valued by audiences, journalists, and news managers (Jones, 2013; Rowe, 2011; Willnat & Weaver, 2014). A 2013 national poll found that news consumers ranked investigative reporting as the second-most important of 15 news categories (Jones, 2013). More than half the consumers in the survey had a “high interest” in investigative journalism. In the same study, a majority of news executives said their organizations were “very committed” to investigative reports (Jones, 2013). Several top local television ownership groups, including Gannett, Post-Newsweek, and Raycom Media, have publicly stated the importance of investigative reporting (Waldman, 2011).

Willnat and Weaver’s (2014) latest *American Journalist* survey found that journalists valued the government “watchdog” role more than ever. When asked about the importance of different media roles, 78% of journalists said “investigating government claims” was extremely important, which was the highest level of perceived importance for that role since the surveys began 40 years ago (Willnat & Weaver, 2014, p. 14). Many journalists realize their strengths lie in providing investigative reports, especially now that they are competing with online sources that can distribute information instantly (Willnat and Weaver, 2014). Marci Burdick, an executive at Schurz Communications, which owns several local TV stations, said her company has retained many of its award-winning investigative units because they provide information people can’t get anywhere else: “companies covering car wrecks and traffic accidents are kidding themselves if they think they are going to survive in the Internet Age because that information can be gotten by anyone with an iPhone” (Waldman, 2011, p. 83). If managers are

responding to consumer demand for investigative journalism, and if journalists are “rediscovering” their investigative strengths, local television newsrooms could be increasing their investigative productivity.

CHAPTER THREE

INVESTIGATIVE INFLUENCES

Berkowitz (2007) described investigative reporting as an illustration of the tension between different news influences, including professional values, community values, and business demands. One way to view these influences is through the prism of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchical model. The model describes how individual differences, professional routines, organizational factors, social institutions, and social systems affect news production. In explaining the model, the authors acknowledged that media phenomena have a variety of causes, and that all five levels help explain the creative process (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Their approach chiefly examines the interplay between structure and agency – between “the actions people take and the conditions under which they act that are not of their own making” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 10-11). Thus, the hierarchy is useful in explaining the relative influence of micro- and macro-level factors. For the purposes of this project, three of the hierarchical levels of influence on investigative journalism will be examined – routines, organizations, and social institutions. It is likely that characteristics such as organizational emphasis on profit, ownership structure, station size, market size, and market competition affect the production of local television investigative news.

Routines

Most organizations want to increase income and decrease expenses — in other words, they want to make a profit. This leads firms to create and enforce processes, or routines, that make the organization more efficient. The routines of the news worker often take the form of unwritten rules prescribed by the organization's work environment and culture (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Television news routines enforce efficiency to facilitate the production of quick, short stories (Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994, 2009), but these routines serve to limit time-intensive investigative reporting. The following section looks at how the three routine stages of news production (discovery, selection, and reporting) affect television investigations.

Discovery. This is a news station's "surveillance" activity, during which journalists search for story ideas. It is the most important production stage because subsequent news production steps can come only after an idea is discovered (McManus, 1990, 1994). It is especially important in investigative journalism, which provides "watchdog" surveillance of powerful figures. If a journalist's search routines involve a low level of effort, surveillance of the environment suffers and many important stories could fall by the wayside (McManus, 1990, 1994).

"Passive" discovery describes a low-effort process in which reporters search for stories from within the newsroom, often taking what is handed to them. This discovery method shifts power into the hands of those most adept at getting the media's attention (i.e., powerful interests with skilled public relations departments), thus weakening the traditional media "watchdog" function (McManus, 1990, 1994). Conversely, "active" discoverers take more time to develop story sources and meet face-to-face with them outside the newsroom, attend public meetings, follow up with viewer tips, and generally try harder to find interesting stories (McManus, 1994).

Active discovery is a key component in investigative journalism because the most significant investigative stories are hard to find. Often, powerful people want these stories to remain hidden (de Burgh, 2008; Ullman & Honeyman, 1983). Therefore, discovering a worthwhile story is frequently the most time-consuming activity in the investigative process (Houston, 2009).

Unfortunately, time is often lacking in the day-to-day routines of television journalists (Barnhurst, 2011; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994). In a landmark study, McManus (1994) found that passive discovery dominated active discovery in four local television newsrooms. Both McManus (1994) and Kaniss (1991) found that much of the discovery power in local TV newsrooms lay in the hands of the assignment editor, who had a number of “go-to” passive story sources: police and fire scanners, calls to government departments, tips from viewers, pre-planned events, and other news media. A large portion of TV stories came from these passive sources, diminishing the prospect of investigative “digging,” although the largest station in McManus’ (1994) study had an investigative unit and was slightly more active than the smaller stations. Passive discovery in local television, which is still common (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Lewis, 2014), has the potential to negatively affect investigative journalism.

Additionally, most TV reporters do not have assigned “beats” because television staffs are often smaller than their newspaper counterparts (Dunaway, 2008; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994; Waldman, 2011). Instead, most television journalists are “general assignment” reporters, meaning that the context, background information, and general knowledge that come with a beat are absent (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994). Because of this, TV reporters come up with their own story ideas less than newspaper reporters do, in many cases gleaning them from assignment editors (Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994) or other news media.

Coulson and Lacy (2003) found that 75% of local TV reporters said newspaper competition prompted them to cover city hall stories they otherwise would have missed. Because ideas for investigative journalism often come from beat assignments (Houston, 2009; Williams, 1978), a lack of beats could limit television investigations.

Selection. Once potential stories are uncovered, a limited number are selected for inclusion in a newscast. News management has a tendency to value stories with entertaining, visual and emotional aspects (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Jacobs, 1990; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994, 2009). These elements take on even more prominence during “sweeps” ratings periods, when advertising prices are set for the coming fiscal quarter, and business managers are likelier to dictate story selection (Jacobs, 1990). Stories involving sensational elements such as accidents, crimes, fires, and disasters are often preferred during sweeps (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013). Jacobs (1990) recalls a particularly callous local television promotion of a story called the “Million Dollar Martini.” After a prominent actor who was drinking at a party lost two limbs in a subsequent motorcycle accident, there were calls for tougher penalties for anyone serving alcohol to a DUI motorist; the station previewed the story by saying, “serving alcohol can cost you an arm and a leg!”

Belt and Just (2008) theorized that most local TV news managers think viewers want low-quality, sensational, tabloid news. Visual elements take center stage in television news for obvious reasons, but several scholars believe that a heavy emphasis on video de-emphasizes important issues (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994). For instance, phone interviews are virtually off-limits, even if they are instrumental to a story, because they are not visually pleasing. Many suggest that television news managers emphasize visual and sensational stories over socially relevant stories because the former are cheaper to

produce and are thought to be popular (Belt & Just, 2008; Coulson et al., 2001; Hamilton, 2004; Kaniss, 1991; Waldman, 2011). McManus (1994) concluded that local TV news directors value quickly paced and highly visual newscasts because they believe viewers have short attention spans. This idea seems to have gained traction, with local television stories getting shorter during the past decade (Jurkowitz et al., 2013). Investigative reports often contain story elements that are seen as less entertaining, such as document analysis (Bernt & Greenwald, 2000; DeFleur, 1997; Houston, 2009), and are lengthy, which could limit their selection potential.

Reporting. In addition to conducting interviews and writing a story, a television journalist typically must drive to a location to deliver multiple “live” reports (Barnhurst, 2011; Jacobs, 1990; McManus, 1994). Television reporters often write and edit stories for several newscasts in the same day, and because of budget cutbacks, it is increasingly common for reporters to shoot their own stories (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013). In addition, broadcast journalists must write web versions of their stories for station websites and post links and previews of their stories on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Thus, a TV reporter’s particular technical and logistical duties can diminish time that might otherwise be spent on background activities such as source development and document analysis (Barnhurst, 2011; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994). In general, TV reporters appear to have less time than they once did for in-depth journalism, including investigative reporting (Barnhurst, 2011; Waldman, 2011).

Many news routines are enforced by private consulting companies, which are hired by news organizations to help draw audiences (Berkowitz, Allen, & Beeson, 1996). Consultants are sometimes referred to as an “invisible tier of bosses” that journalists *actually* report to because consultants are so instrumental in news decisions (Jacobs, 1990, p. 54). They are seen as people

who represent business concerns and emphasize entertaining aspects such as sensationalism and “tabloid” news rather than more traditional journalistic content. Further, many newscasts look the same because stations use the same consulting companies (Jacobs, 1990; McManus, 1994).

Consultants stress the importance of on-air personalities, who ostensibly can increase audience loyalty to a certain station (Jacobs, 1990; Kaniss, 1991). Thus, television managers tend to focus on news anchors, at the expense of local policy issues. The more a station pays its anchors, the less it has to pay the people who actually generate the news, such as producers, reporters, and assignment editors (Jacobs, 1990; Kaniss, 1991). In these situations, quality news, such as investigative journalism, might suffer because of an emphasis on superficial elements.

The daily routines that are prominent in local television newsrooms can provide an environment in which investigative journalism is not valued (Barnhurst, 2011; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; McManus, 1994, 2009). Therefore, a case could be made that news routines limit investigative news. However, television newsrooms are heavily influenced by organizational priorities, and routines often change in response to upper management pressure (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In addition, the investment necessary to conduct proper investigative journalism is dependent on management support. Thus, organizational structure and priorities appear to be more influential than routines are in the production of investigative journalism.

Organizations

News reporters work within social structures. As these structures become more complicated, the reporter’s specific situational choices become less influential and the end product is more dependent on organizational configuration. Larger structures can be both constraining and enabling; thus, journalists “participate in a conversation that began before they

arrived” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 11). The effects of media ownership deserve special attention because of increased concern about news consolidation and corporatization (Grimes, 2014; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Mitchell, 2014; Smith, 2009). Despite these concerns, there has been little research on how media ownership affects news content (Dunaway, 2008). This section shows how attributes such as corporate governance and organizational emphasis on profit might affect television investigative journalism.

Profit Emphasis. The primary motive of most organizations is profit, and local TV news is a highly profitable business. In recent years, news organizations have faced intense pressure to make a profit due to the recession and an increased desire for news to be profitable (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In this environment, media managers might not see investigative reporting as a profitable enterprise.

Local television news is governed by a unique economic structure. Because they compete in four markets simultaneously, TV stations are beholden to but also positioned to take advantage of their marketplace, which consists of the stock market, the source market, the audience market, and the advertising market (McManus, 1994). First, many news outlets are owned by public corporations, which are in turn owned by stockholders. Most stockholders are driven by the desire for profit, which weighs into news decisions (Dunaway, 2008; Hamilton, 2004). Secondly, news organizations are in the market for sources, which exchange information for publicity (McManus, 1994). Third, news organizations need audiences. This means stations are in the market for viewers’ attention (i.e., ratings). TV stations then sell that attention in a fourth market, to advertisers. Local television is especially dependent on this fourth market because, unlike newspapers, stations do not receive fees directly from consumers. The heavy reliance on advertising tends to degrade news quality because sponsors desire content that will

garner the greatest exposure for ads, instead of content that is high in quality (McManus, 1994; Hamilton, 2004). If the most important criterion for news selection is popularity, citizens are likely to receive less information for democratic self-governance because public affairs news often has lower entertainment value. Thus, television's dependence on advertisers can produce negative societal outcomes, such as an ill-informed electorate (McManus, 1994; Hamilton, 2004).

Business concerns and journalistic concerns are often seen as dueling forces within a news organization (see, e.g., Belt & Just, 2008, Berkowitz, 2007; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; McManus, 1994, 2009). Most local TV network affiliates are private firms that must provide a return on their investments, but they also conduct business by using airwaves owned by the public (Hamilton, 2004; Yanich, 2012). A market-driven news model recommends delivering news that produces the highest possible ratings at the lowest possible cost, with the least amount of harm to sponsors. Alternatively, the journalistic model recommends disseminating the greatest amount of significant knowledge and learning possible to the most people, regardless of cost (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994). Yanich (2012) describes this tension as the “perennial balancing act” between what will sell and what the public needs (p. 339).

Several empirical studies support the idea that business concerns outweigh journalistic considerations at local TV stations (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2004; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994, 2009; Scott & Gobetz, 1992; Yanich, 2012). TV managers often tailor their news to a perceived audience demand for cheap content at the expense of more significant news. Berkowitz (1991) found that resource constraints were often the number one factor in local television news selection. In other words, having the resources necessary to

produce a story was seen as more important than whether a story was newsworthy. McManus (1994) showed that business concerns dominated journalistic concerns throughout the TV newsgathering process, and concluded that the local TV product he witnessed was not news, but “an illusion,” corrupted by regard for profit (p. 164). Similarly, Kaniss (1991) discovered that Philadelphia TV newscasts emphasized inexpensive stories with commercial appeal such as isolated crimes and accidents, and de-emphasized local government stories. In a national study of local television stories from 2002, Yanich (2012) discovered that stations overwhelmingly chose less expensive stories and concluded that “news selection and presentation processes have become increasingly a struggle to achieve economies of scale” (p. 340).

There is perhaps no form of journalism as dependent on newsroom resources as is investigative journalism. Investigative reporters must be curious and persistent, so they need time to conduct their work properly, but time is not always available (Barnhurst, 2011; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Houston, 2009). In general, investigative reporters spend more time poring over documents, meeting with sources, researching, and generally thinking about a story, as compared to daily journalists (de Burgh, 2008; Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Houston, 2009). Investigative reporter Jonathon Calvert described the time commitment this way: “some stories you make five calls on, some twenty. When you are making a hundred, that’s investigative journalism” (de Burgh, 2008, p. 17). In Houston’s (2009) *The Investigative Reporter’s Handbook*, the author mentions veteran Paul Williams’ 11 steps of investigative reporting, which include story conception, background research, a study of the story’s feasibility, possible legal hurdles, writing, re-writing, and producing follow-up stories. Properly executed investigations can take weeks, months, or even years (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Houston, 2009; Ide & Vashisht, 2006; Osnos, 2013). During this long process, investigative reporters often do not add stories to

the daily news cycle, limiting a firm's daily production. Thus, reports that are truly investigative tend to go against the normal TV news workflow, in which reporters are expected to turn short stories each day (Dunaway, 2008; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; McManus, 1994; Waldman, 2011).

In addition to being a time-intensive endeavor, investigative journalism is expensive. Osnos (2013) reported that the online investigative news outlet ProPublica spent at least \$750,000 and two years working on a story about the dangers of acetaminophen. Investigations can be costly for legal reasons as well; some stations pay lawyers to vet each investigative story for potential libel (Westin, 2000). Finally, investigative journalism that angers sponsors can cost money in lost advertising dollars; a nationwide study found that about half of local television news directors had been pressured by sponsors to avoid certain investigative stories (Just et al., 2002).

For these reasons, investigative journalism is frequently viewed as not profitable (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; McManus, 1994, 2009). Raphael (2005) posits that the quest for profitability has caused a steady decline in investigative journalism at the network television level for decades. Jones (2013) found that 70% of media executives said they were highly committed to investigative journalism, and that it was a big part of their organizations' future. But about half of the 76 executives who were polled also said their organizational leaders weren't supporting investigative journalism as much as they could have. In other words, many news outlets had the desire to conduct investigations, but lacked the economic means to do so properly (Jones, 2013). Berkowitz (2007) similarly discovered that reporters at smaller newspapers thought economic concerns prevented them from conducting investigative journalism.

However, higher quality, expensive news has been linked to larger audiences (Belt & Just, 2008; Enda & Mitchell, 2013; Patterson, 2000). Newspapers that emphasize profit publish more investigative journalism (Beam 2003), and local TV stations that produce more investigative reporting get higher ratings (Belt and Just, 2008). Despite these findings, local television managers often think investigative reporting is not worth the investment (Belt & Just, 2008; McManus, 1994). Investigative journalists are often the highest paid reporters in the newsroom, and are the first to get fired when organizations reduce their budgets (Anderson, 2010; Graber & Dunaway, 2015; Waldman, 2011). In their ominously titled study, “The Growth of TV News, the Demise of the Journalism Profession,” Higgins-Dobney and Sussman (2013) concluded that most TV reporters have little time for investigative reporting because profit-minded news organizations have severely cut back on station resources. Veteran news executive Fred Young said local television investigative units are not financially feasible: “investigative people, in the eyes of some of the people who looked at the bottom line of (certain) stations, were not as productive as the reporters turning a story a day. Investigative has suffered” (Waldman, 2011, p. 87). Based on the preceding literature, it seems likely that a local television station that places a high emphasis on profit will not highly emphasize investigative reporting.

Corporate Governance Influence. Ownership structure can influence the goals and daily operations of organizations (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Because shareholders, who own publicly traded corporations, have limited ability to interfere with the day-to-day management of the firm, there is a separation between ownership and control (Barney & Hesterly, 2006; Scott & Davis, 2007). Absent any other preferences, profit is assumed to be the unifying goal of diverse shareholders within one company. Therefore, news critics often assume that publicly traded news organizations place profit above all else, and that a private owner can more easily affect the day-

to-day news operation of the firm (Dunaway, 2008, 2013; Hamilton, 2004). Compared to corporate bosses, private news owners are viewed as more likely having journalistic goals that compete with economic goals (Bagdikian, 2004; Baker, 2007; Dunaway, 2008, 2013). Hamilton (2004) assumed profit maximization was the primary motive of local television news outlets because of widespread corporate ownership, which has increased in recent years (Matsa, 2015; Mitchell, 2014).

According to what Demers (1996) called the “critical model,” corporate owners, who do not live near their news outlets, will replace valuable local reporting with cheaper news that is of lower quality and is less useful to the public (Bagdikian, 2004; Baker, 2007; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Meyer, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Critics fear public corporations might also tamp down views that are critical of business for fear of alienating sponsors (Bagdikian, 2004; Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994, 2009). Brant Houston (2006), speaking about a decline in investigative journalism, said, “When it comes to quality public service journalism or profits at a corporation, profits come first” (p. 4).

Several studies support the critical model. Corporate ownership has been associated with smaller news staffs (Baker, 2007; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Lacy & Blanchard, 2003), which can in turn decrease news quality (Beam, 2008; McManus, 1994). Dunaway (2008) found evidence that corporations limit public affairs reporting at the local level. In a study of political coverage in two markets, corporate-owned local TV stations and newspapers were significantly less likely to cover relevant political issues useful to the public, when compared to privately owned news outlets. Scott, Gobetz, and Chanslor (2008) concluded that a Tulsa television station owned by a public corporation produced less local news, less local video, and fewer stories featuring local reporters, compared to a small, privately-owned station in the same market. These

analyses suggest that public corporations hurt journalism quality. If this is the case, corporations might also limit investigative reporting, which is generally seen as high quality (Aucoin, 1997; Berkowitz, 2007).

However, other research suggests corporations might have a positive effect on journalism quality. Demers (1996) pointed out that corporate news outlets are often located in complex communities with greater diversity, and thus they are more critical of established groups and elites. According to Demers (1996), the very nature of the corporate structure that is supposed to harm local news is actually a benefit. With news corporation heads far from the newsroom, middle-management news directors and editors are freer to conduct time-intensive, quality news without being watched closely by an executive. Thus, they have more editorial freedom to produce substantive local news and challenge the status quo (Demers, 1996; Kim, 2009), as investigative journalism often does.

The journalistic benefits of decentralization are supported by the bureaucracy theory of organizations. As firms get bigger, power and decision-making become decentralized. This gives more power to middle managers (e.g., TV news directors) to conduct business as they see fit (Donaldson, 2001). Thus, larger, often publicly traded, corporations might actually provide news editors with more autonomy. Kaniss (1991) maintains that local television advertisers hold more sway over local news owners, as opposed to non-local owners. Non-local corporate owners would theoretically be more isolated from the influence of local advertisers, and therefore freer to allow a station to conduct public service journalism with less commercial interference. Proponents of bureaucracy theory also predict that increased organizational size leads to increasing specialization at lower levels (Donaldson, 2001). In television news, this specialization could take the form of investigative news teams. If ownership by shareholders

provides for more journalistic freedom and more specialization, investigative reporting at local TV stations owned by publicly traded corporations could benefit.

Several studies show a link between corporate governance and higher-quality journalism (see, e.g., Akhavan-Majid & Boudreau, 1995; Akhavan-Majid, Rife, & Gopinath, 1991; Demers, 1996, 1998; Kim, 2009). Publicly traded corporations that own news properties often own multiple local stations, and Hamilton (2004) found that group TV ownership was associated with increased local mayoral coverage. On the print side, newspapers that exhibit more “corporate” characteristics often are more critical of government and power structures, publish more local content, and emphasize quality journalism more than profit (Demers, 1996, 1998; Kim, 2009). Beam (2008) reported that newspapers owned by publicly traded corporations covered local civic stories slightly more than privately owned newspapers did, and Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor (1989) found that corporate newspaper ownership did not increase advertising pressure at the expense of news.

Kim (2009) suggested that the growth of corporate media in the 20th century helped create social change by fostering a news environment that challenged the status quo. If this is true, corporate ownership may promote the kind of investigative journalism that challenges those in power. Publicly owned newspapers are less likely to be neutral in tone (Dunaway, 2013), and more likely to contain critical, activist, analytical, and investigative reporting, compared to privately owned newspapers (Akhavan-Majid & Boudreau, 1995; Akhavan-Majid, Rife, & Gopinath, 1991; Demers, 1996, 1998; Kim, 2009). Akhavan-Majid and Boudreau (1995) reported that large group-owned newspapers were associated with a more interpretive and critical role for journalists, compared to independent newspapers. Further, journalists who work for large corporations tend to be more satisfied with their jobs (Weaver et al., 2007), and satisfaction

levels are higher if reporters believe their organizations place a high emphasis on journalism (Beam, 2006; Stamm & Underwood, 1993; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). Therefore, television stations owned by publicly traded companies might be placing a higher value on critical, investigative reporting.

Although there is evidence that corporations are hurting news quality because of a higher emphasis on profit, there is also evidence that corporations help create a news environment in which journalists are freer to pursue critical and investigative reporting. Thus, investigative journalism might be particularly suited to the corporate news environment.

Social Institutions

The social institutional perspective focuses on how media are affected by institutional power centers in society, and sees journalism largely as a homogenous social practice in which news outlets have similar concerns about legitimacy and commercial success (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). Within this realm, competitive factors in television markets are likely to influence the quantity and quality of investigative journalism that is produced.

Television Markets and Competition. The characteristics of a news market, including market size and competition level, can shape news content (see, e.g., Coulson & Lacy, 2003; Dunaway, 2008, 2013; Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994; Powers, 1993; Wang, 2012). U.S. local television markets are unique because they have traditionally functioned as oligopolies – they have had a low number of competitors, high barriers to entry, stable market shares, and easily achievable price coordination (Litman, 1980; Powers, 1990, 2001). The main barrier to entry is the granting of exclusive and mandatory FCC licenses, which are high in demand and low in supply (“How to Apply,” 2013). The FCC grants licenses to only one affiliate for each network (e.g., NBC or CBS) per market, so the number of competitors is limited. TV news ratings in local

markets often do not fluctuate rapidly, making market shares fairly stable. Finally, with a small number of competitors, firms can agree on a general fee for TV advertising, and price coordination is easily achieved (Litman, 1980; Powers, 1990).

But starting in the 1980s, competition changed the oligopolistic nature of local television markets (Powers, 1990; 1993; 2001). According to microeconomic theory, competition causes an oligopoly to move closer to a state of monopolistic competition, in which there are a large number of sellers with differentiated products (Nicholson 1979; Powers, 1990). Thirty years ago, the popularity of the VCR and cable news channels gave local TV viewers more choices and weakened the traditional oligopolistic structure (Powers, 1990). More recently, the Internet has caused an explosion of video alternatives for consumers, so it is likely that media competition in local markets is currently at an all-time high (Jurkowitz, 2014; Powers, 2001; Waldman, 2011).

Local television competition has been linked to improved news quality and quantity (see, e.g., Belt & Just, 2008; Napoli & Yan, 2007; Yan & Napoli, 2006). Yan and Napoli (2006) examined on-air content in 2003 from a random sample of 285 U.S. local television stations and concluded that as the number of stations in a local TV market increased, there was an increased likelihood that a station would provide quality local public affairs programming. However, there was no connection between competition and the amount of quality public affairs programming at each station. Using the same data set, Napoli and Yan (2007) found a connection between the number of commercial TV stations in a market and the amount of local news produced, ascertaining that each additional commercial station in a market translated into an average of 1.3 more hours of local news for each station in the market. In a comprehensive five-year national study of local television content, Belt and Just (2008) showed that stations in more competitive markets produced higher-quality lead stories, although competition did not affect overall story

quality. Competition has also been shown to increase news budgets (Coulson & Lacy, 2003), which could theoretically lead to improved quality if that money is spent on personnel. However, Powers (1990) found that competition did not lead to larger news staffs.

Powers (1990, 1993, 2001) showed that local TV competition was associated with newscast differentiation – newscasts became longer, stories became longer, and more newscasts were implemented, especially in larger markets. It is possible that in a competitive market, stations might look to differentiate themselves by producing longer, unique, “exclusive” investigative pieces. If competition increases the amount of local news, the quality of news, the length of stories, and news budgets, then competitive markets might allow for more and better investigative stories, which tend to be longer, more expensive, and of higher quality.

In contrast, Dominick and Moffett (1993) found that competition caused national TV news networks to become standardized, instead of differentiated. Entman (1985) studied a sample of newspapers and found that competition created more similarity, and did not create a diversity of ideas as expected. Other studies of various media markets suggest competition serves to lower news quality and increase sensationalism (Arnold, 2004; Dunaway, 2008; Entman, 1985; Wang, 2012; Zaller, 1999). The pressure to expand audiences may cause news outlets to produce popular fare that lacks substance (Dunaway, 2013; McManus, 1994, 2009). According to Arnold (2004), “fires, protests and car chases appear to be the comparative advantage of local TV stations that prefer great visuals to (talking) heads” (p. 220). Zaller (1999) discovered that as local television competition increased over time, quality decreased. Hamilton (2004) believes that television news competition creates a “race to the bottom,” in which all competitors in a single market decrease news quality to appeal to more viewers (p. 22). In his spatial model of news production location, Hamilton (2004) speculated that as more competitors enter a TV

market, news outlets “position” themselves to serve the most possible consumers. Because more viewers prefer soft news to hard news, and because advertisers prefer soft news (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994, 2009), TV stations will meet this demand by producing more soft news. Thus, according to Hamilton (2004), smaller audiences that prefer public affairs reporting will not be served in a competitive market. This reduces the amount of relevant public affairs information available to citizens. But Hamilton’s (2004) spatial model received only minimal support in his analysis of newscasts in the top 50 local TV markets; stations in more competitive markets produced more soft news, but also produced more hard news, including more stories about state and local officials. Therefore, competition was associated with higher-quality local hard news, but increased the overall story count, likely causing stations to run shorter stories on average (Hamilton, 2004). If competition lowers quality, as some suggest, then competitive markets may restrict investigative production.

Institutionalism and Investigative Journalism. The institutionalist theory of organizations has been used to explain how news outlets behave in competitive environments (Lowrey, 2005; Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Institutionalism emphasizes that an organization’s environment limits the strategic choices managers can make, and focuses on the power of symbolic environmental forces, including shared values, beliefs, norms, and rules (Scott, 2014; Scott & Davis, 2007).

In uncertain environments, such as a highly competitive media market, an accurate rational assessment of the environment becomes more difficult, so firms make decisions based on perceptions of their competitive environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Lowrey, 2005). These decisions often are made to improve a firm’s legitimacy, rather than efficiency (DiMaggio

& Powell, 1983; Lowrey, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). According to Scott (2014), legitimacy is like “oxygen” for an organization: it is necessary for social survival (p. 72).

Even though local television is the top news source in America (Lewis, 2014; “Local News Interest,” 2015; Mitchell, 2014), the TV news business as a whole is uncertain because Internet sources have taken away market shares from television stations, and young adults are increasingly turning away from television news (“In Changing News”, 2012; Jurkowitz, 2014; Lowrey & Woo, 2010; Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013). Highly competitive news markets add to this environmental uncertainty (Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Because organizations are more likely to seek legitimacy in unstable environments, TV stations in competitive markets may seek legitimacy through increased production of investigative journalism.

An organization in an unstable environment is more likely to become “loosely coupled,” allowing for gaps between formal work structures and actual work practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). These gaps can detract from an organization’s efficiency, but may improve credibility, allowing a firm to maintain access to needed resources that enhance survival prospects. Loose coupling takes focus away from the end result and allows a company to focus more on ambiguous goals (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For instance, a hospital might ignore data on how many patients it cures, focusing instead on how many patients it treats. Likewise, a television station in a competitive market might focus less on the economic efficiency of its reports, and more on simply churning out investigative stories that increase legitimacy.

Investigative reporting potentially decreases short-term efficiency due to its expense (Anderson, 2010; Osnos, 2013), yet it is seen as a high-quality news product (Berkowitz, 2007; Curtin, 1995). It is perceived as having a positive impact on society and democracy (Berkowitz, 2007; Blasi, 1977; Protess et al., 1991), and is popular among consumers (Jones, 2013; Rowe,

2011). Graber and Dunaway (2015) argue that investigative pieces have the potential to achieve three major news objectives: they appeal to audiences, they trigger political action, and they gain praise from fellow journalists. From an institutionalist standpoint, firms that are more in sync with their institutional environments become more dependent on outside assessments of their credibility (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). One form of assessment in journalism is awards, which often go to investigative stories (Downie, 2012). Many TV stations tout the awards they have won, so it is likely that news managers desire the credibility that comes from award-winning investigative pieces.

Investigative stories are also “exclusives,” meaning that no other outlet has the same story. Exclusives provide competitive value, meaning that they make the reporting outlet look reputable in comparison to competitors (McManus, 1994). Stations can thus use teams of investigative reporters as branding tools, helping viewers associate investigative reporters with station quality. From an economic perspective, news is a “credence good,” meaning that consumers cannot easily decipher the value of the product and must rely on reputation (McManus, 1994). Therefore, the branding associated with investigative journalism could be crucial in helping consumers assess news quality. Indeed, Waldman (2011) reported that, despite recent cutbacks, several stations preserved their investigative teams because investigative news was “important to their brand” (p. 83). Further, Meyer and Rowan (1977) pointed out that in highly institutionalized environments, business leaders devote more time to their organizations’ images.

Competition might also cause a television station to brand a story as “investigative,” even if it is not truly investigative by definition. Organizations in uncertain situations become “isomorphic” with their institutional environments, modeling themselves after firms that appear

legitimate, professional, and successful (Lowrey, 2005; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For example, news outlets in competitive situations have been found to imitate credible journalism organizations (Lowrey, 2005; Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Lowrey (2005) discovered that news managers pursued partnerships between newspapers and television stations not because there was a need for it, but because credible rival organizations were doing it. Lowrey and Woo (2010) showed that competition predicted imitation of online news content; rather than responding to audience demand, newspaper managers in competitive markets sought to improve their online legitimacy through mimicry of other papers' websites. In the same way, television news mimicry could take the form of reports that at first appear investigative, and are promoted as such, but do not meet the high standard required for these types of stories.

Media critics have pointed out the overall proliferation of “fluff,” or “soft,” investigative pieces on television, a medium that generally has a weaker reputation for investigative and public affairs news compared to print sources (Kaniss, 1991; Kovach et al., 2001; McManus, 1994; Waldman, 2011). In a national sample, Just et al. (2002) found that about one-third of local TV stations were producing stories on “soft” investigative topics such as illegal silicone injections at parties and dangerous garage doors. Waldman (2011) highlighted the widespread practice of local television stations applying the “investigative” label on “increasingly frivolous exposes” (p. 87). Higgins-Dobney and Sussman (2013) found that at some local television outlets, journalists defined investigative reporting as “taking more than an hour to investigate something” (p. 857).

An example of “soft” investigative news came from Cleveland CBS affiliate WOIO this year when a reporter “investigated” the validity of expiration dates by tasting expired food on the air. In another example, Denver station KMGH last year “investigated” the dangers of edible

marijuana by asking children if they could tell the difference between pot brownies and regular brownies (Marchetta & Shelley, 2014). Veteran television investigative reporter Joe Bergantino said superficial investigations such as these have hurt the practice's reputation (Waldman, 2011). "They are using 'investigative reporting' more as a label rather than a real thing," Bergantino said. "The trend is that stations call promotable stories 'investigative,' while shrinking or disbanding their investigative units. Serious, in-depth investigative reporting happens on rare occasions in local television news" (Waldman, 2011, p. 87-88). These "fluff" investigations might improve a station's credibility with audiences because reporters appear to be working hard to uncover the truth. Although the subject material may be superficial and not truly investigative, consumers often cannot tell the difference between high-quality and low-quality news (McManus, 1994). Therefore, news managers could believe that these stories will transmit an "air of legitimacy."

In summary, there is evidence suggesting that competition lowers news quality because managers will respond by increasing production of popular content that is often superficial. Conversely, competition has been shown to increase news quality and news differentiation. Further, competitive environments increase the need for legitimacy, which can be satisfied by investigative journalism. For these reasons, television station managers in markets with high levels of competition might increase their investigative productivity, but might also increase the production of investigative news that is lower in quality.

Measuring Competition. Lacy and Vermeer (1995) called news competition a "complex concept," and held that some measures of competition are more appropriate than others depending on the situation (p. 58). Compared to newspaper competition, television news competition is harder to measure because local TV markets are more complicated and often have

a greater number of sellers. Television news competition is likely even more complex in today's media environment due to Internet news choices (Jurkowitz, 2014; Lowrey & Woo, 2010) and an increasing number of news-producing stations (Papper, 2014a).

The two most oft-used competition measures for local TV are the number of stations in a market (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2004; Napoli & Yan, 2007; Yan & Napoli, 2006) and similarity in market share among competitors (see, e.g., Dominick & Moffett, 1993; Powers, 1990, 2001). Using the number of stations in a market as an operationalization of competition has several advantages: it is simple and obtainable, it accounts for differences in the number of firms within a market, and it is preferable to nominal measures of competition (Lacy & Vermeer, 1995). On the other hand, it treats all firms equally, failing to distinguish between stations that compete for news audiences and stations that do not. Further, it does not account for the fact that some stations have larger market shares than others. In a meta-analysis of competition measurement, Lacy and Vermeer (1995) found that the number of stations in a market did not correlate well with other competition measures, such as those that measured market share. Thus, the number of stations measure may not be appropriate for some studies. Nonetheless, this measure has been used extensively as a proxy for television competition, especially in more recent studies (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2004; Napoli & Yan, 2007; Wang, 2012; Yan & Napoli, 2006). In her study of political coverage, Dunaway (2008) used a combined measure of competition that accounted for the number of television stations in a market and potential television households in each market.

Alternatively, researchers have measured competition through market share similarity among competitors (Belt & Just, 2008; Dominick & Moffett, 1993; Lacy, Atwater, & Qin, 1989; Powers, 1990; 1993; 2001). This “competition index,” or “competition intensity” measure, is calculated by subtracting a particular station's share of viewers (often represented by Nielsen

shares) from the leading competitor's share: 0 would represent a station's perfect competition with the leading firm, and 100 would represent a complete lack of competition with the leading firm (Lacy & Vermeer, 1995; Powers, 1993). For example, if a station's market share were 30, compared to a share of 50 for the leading competitor, that station's competition index number would be 20. Belt and Just (2008) used a similar concept that measured the standard deviation of market shares for all stations in the market; in their study, a lower standard deviation indicated a more competitive market.

Measuring market share similarities has several benefits: it uses interval data, and it takes into account a manager's perspective, i.e., how managers might respond to the level of competition they are facing (Lacy & Vermeer, 1995). However, there are several disadvantages. One drawback is that the competition index might not work well in markets with three or more competitors, which is very common in local TV. Additionally, similar market share does not necessarily mean that the products produced by two stations are similar (Lacy & Vermeer, 1995). Finally, recent Nielsen ratings for local TV stations are expensive and difficult to obtain.

Because of the relative advantages detailed in the preceding literature, the current project will use the number of commercial stations in a television market to measure competition.

Station Size. The size of a local television news station has been measured by the number of newsroom employees (see, e.g., Baker, 2007; Dunaway, 2008; Lacy & Blanchard, 2003), but is more often measured by the size of the market in which it is located (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994; Powers, 1990, 2001). Market size has been shown to play a part in the amount of hard news produced (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994; Yanich, 2012) and the amount of local news produced (Carroll, 1985; 1989; Coulson et al., 2001; Lacy et al., 2008). Therefore, because investigative journalism is typically hard news (de Burgh, 2008; Gaber,

2008), and because news investigations at local stations mostly focus on local events, the size of a television station could relate to the amount and type of investigative reporting produced.

Many studies found that smaller television markets produced more hard news, along with more local news (see, e.g., Carroll, 1985; 1989; Coulson et al., 2001; Hamilton, 2004; Yanich, 2012). Carroll (1989) found that enterprise stories in small markets were more likely to feature hard news elements, and thus were more “legitimately enterprising,” compared to enterprise stories in medium and large television markets (p. 56). Hamilton (2004) found that at local TV stations, national news and local hard news both decreased significantly as market size increased. Yanich (2012) analyzed local television content from 2002 and found that larger stations focused less on local government and politics, and more on crime. Smaller market stations also placed more emphasis on public interest issues such as health, education, housing and the economy. Other studies, however, found that local television market size had little or no effect on news quality (Belt & Just, 2008; Reinardy & Bacon, 2014). McManus (1994) postulated that TV news stations in large markets produce more hard news because consumer demand is great enough to make it marketable to advertisers. In other words, good journalism “pays” in big markets. McManus (1990, 1994) found that reporters at larger local TV stations were more enterprising and produced more investigative journalism.

News quality has been positively linked to the number of journalists employed in several studies (see, e.g., Baker, 2007; Dunaway, 2008; Lacy & Blanchard, 2003). Weaver et al. (2007) concluded that journalists at larger organizations are more comfortable espousing a “watchdog” attitude because of the relative safety of these outlets. Larger news operations can ostensibly insulate reporters from harm, including lawsuits, because of greater resources. In a similar vein, Gade (2008) showed that newspaper size was positively correlated with an editor’s perceived

influence within the organization. Editors at larger papers have been shown to place higher value on “editorial courage,” “editorial independence,” “staff enterprise,” and “news interpretation” (Gladney, 1990, p. 67-68), all of which can be components of investigative journalism. Akhavan-Majid and Boudreau (1995) discovered that editors of larger newspapers were significantly more likely to subscribe to “activist” editorial values, emphasizing an “active, interpretive, investigative, and critical role for the press” (p. 864). Berkowitz (2007) found that reporters at small newspapers were less likely to conduct investigative journalism because of newsroom cultures, economic pressure and community orientation. The preceding literature suggests that news organizations with bigger staffs in bigger markets emphasize investigative reporting more than organizations with smaller news staffs in smaller markets.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Literature indicates an overall decrease in local television investigative journalism in recent years (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Jessell, 2012), but investigative reporting is highly valued by reporters (Willnat & Weaver, 2014), news managers, and news consumers (Jones, 2013). Absent directional hypotheses, the following research questions are proposed regarding investigative quantity and quality:

RQ1: Based on a content analysis of local television newscasts, how much investigative journalism is being done?

RQ2: Based on a content analysis of local television newscasts, what is the overall quality of the investigative journalism being done?

Conventional wisdom and empirical studies suggest that a news organization that emphasizes profit will provide less support for investigative journalism, which is often seen as financially inefficient (Graber & Dunaway, 2015; Osnos, 2013; Waldman, 2011). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Taking other ownership and market variables into account, a television station's perceived profit emphasis will negatively predict that station's investigative: **(a)** quantity, **(b)** quality, and **(c)** emphasis.

Several studies show a link between staff size and quality (Dunaway, 2008; Lacy & Blanchard, 2003). Because investigative journalism is seen as a high-quality product (Berkowitz, 2007; Curtin, 1995), and because larger news organizations are often more critical and investigative (Akhavan-Majid & Boudreau, 1995; Gladney, 1990), size should relate positively to investigative production. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Taking other ownership and market variables into account, a television station's newsroom staff size will positively predict that station's investigative: **(a)** quantity, **(b)** quality, and **(c)** emphasis.

Although some literature suggests that stations in smaller markets produce more hard news (Hamilton, 2004; Yanich, 2012), investigative news, which can be critical of those in power, appears to have more of a home in larger markets, where news managers often have more editorial independence and are more critical (Akhavan-Majid and Boudreau, 1995; Berkowitz, 2007; Gade, 2008; Weaver et al., 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Taking other ownership and market variables into account, the size of the market in which a television station is located will positively predict that station's investigative: **(a)** quantity, **(b)** quality, and **(c)** emphasis.

Some research suggests that competition decreases news quality (Dunaway, 2008; Hamilton, 2004). However, scholars have shown that competition is also related to improved story quality, newscast differentiation, and larger news budgets (Lacy & Coulson, 2003; Powers, 1990, 2001), all of which can be conducive to investigative journalism. Although it might not increase efficiency, investigative journalism can help a station's image through awards, a recognizable brand, and the appearance of legitimacy, which is crucial to organizational survival in uncertain environments brought on by increased competition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Taking other ownership and market variables into account, the competition level of the market in which a television station is located will positively predict that station's investigative: (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis.

Several studies suggest that news outlets owned by publicly traded corporations are associated with lower news quality (Dunaway, 2008; Scott et al., 2008), but other research indicates that journalists who work for corporations are allowed to be more investigative, critical, and analytical in their work (Akhavan-Majid & Boudreau, 1995; Demers, 1996, 1998; Kim, 2009). Because investigative reporting is often critical and analytical, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Taking other ownership and market variables into account, a station's ownership status as a publicly traded company will positively predict that station's investigative: (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis.

To determine which factor has the greatest influence on investigative productivity, the following research question is proposed:

RQ3: Of the five ownership and market variables (profit emphasis, ownership by a publicly traded company, newsroom staff size, market size, and competition level), which is the strongest predictor of a station's investigative: **(a)** quantity, **(b)** quality, and **(c)** emphasis?

Competition encourages news managers to copy their rivals in a quest for legitimacy (Lowrey, 2005; Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Because investigative journalism is seen as a high-quality news product (Berkowitz, 2007), managers in a competitive environment might brand stories as “investigative” to appear legitimate, even if the stories are not investigative by traditional definition. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: The proportion of a station's branded investigative stories that are “non-investigative” will increase as the market in which that station is located becomes more competitive.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODS

To explore the project's research questions and hypotheses, several methods of inquiry were used. First, a survey of investigative television journalists was designed to measure individual perceptions of investigative work at local television stations across the country. Second, a content analysis was designed to measure the actual investigative content produced by those stations. Third, secondary data regarding the organizational structure of television news outfits and their markets were gathered to explore connections between these factors and investigative productivity. A triangulation of multiple research methods is often appropriate for large-scale assessments such as this one because each method has strengths and weaknesses, and data from each method reflect the particular method of inquiry (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). In the following section, the study designs of the survey and content analysis data collection phases are described, followed by discussion of the variables measured in each. Finally, organizational and market data are described.

Survey

Assessing journalists' perceptions of their work environment and their work activity can be an effective way to measure newsroom trends, including the amount and quality of the news journalists produce (Coulson et al., 2001). To establish a sampling frame for this project's survey, two affiliates from the four major networks (NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox) were randomly

selected from each of the 210 U.S. local TV markets, allowing for greater representation of the industry as a whole (Coulson et al., 2001). Stations were chosen from the *Complete Television, Radio & Cable Industry Directory* (2014) and then cross-referenced with individual station websites and TVJobs.com. Calls to station employees confirmed the presence of a newsroom. If a selected affiliate did not have an active newsroom, the next station in the pre-determined order of affiliates was selected. If a television market contained only one active newsroom, that station was automatically selected. This process yielded 397 stations. As a point of comparison, last year 719 U.S. stations produced original local news (Papper, 2014a). Phone calls generated the name of the lead investigative reporter at each station, who then became the target of the survey. Stations without investigative reporters were excluded from the study.

The final sample thus consisted of the names of 253 investigative journalists, each at a different station. In fall 2013 and winter 2014, a four-contact mail survey was employed as recommended by Dillman, Christian, and Smyth (2009): a paper questionnaire was mailed to reporters' television stations, followed by a postcard, a replacement questionnaire, and a reminder phone call. A total of 165 questionnaires were returned for a 65% response rate. All respondents confirmed on the questionnaires that at least "some" of their reporting was investigative. Phone calls to individual stations determined that 66% of respondents in the final sample were full-time investigative reporters. The remaining 34% were general assignment reporters who were the most likely to produce investigative stories. Nearly a third of the stations in the final sample (30.3%) had two or more full-time investigative reporters, more than a third (35.8%) had one full-time investigative reporter; and the remaining third (33.9%) had zero full-time investigative reporters ($M=1.21$; $SD=1.25$). In terms of affiliation, 49 respondents worked for NBC stations, 49 for ABC stations, 50 for CBS stations, and 26 for Fox stations (the affiliate

total was greater than 165 because several respondents' newsrooms provided newscasts for multiple affiliates).

The survey questionnaire contained a number of Likert-style items (e.g., 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly agree) and open-ended questions. The questions sought information about respondents' perceptions of investigative work at their stations, their work environment, characteristics of their organizations, and demographics. Some items were modified from previous studies to fit the present survey (Beam, 2006; Coulson et al., 2001; Protess et al., 1991). The sampling error for this survey, calculated at a 95% level of confidence with 165 respondents and a .25 level of variation, was +/- 7.6%. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire.

More than a third (36%) of respondents were female, a proportion similar to that found in Willnat and Weaver's (2014) national survey of journalists, and 15% were non-white, nearly double the minority proportion among all U.S. news media (8.5%). However, higher representation of minority reporters is typical in television (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). Tenure as an investigative reporter averaged 9.61 years ($SD=8.77$), and the mean age was 40.11 ($SD=12.41$), seven years younger than the average age for journalists in all media (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). The median yearly salary was between \$60,000 and \$74,999.

Survey Measures

Of the interval-level survey measures listed below, all but one had 1% or fewer missing values; one variable had 4% missing values. Linear interpolation in SPSS was used to address missing data. This method uses ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to predict missing values and impute them; the last valid value before the missing value and the first valid value after the missing value are used for the interpolation ("Estimation Methods," 2013). Linear interpolation is often seen as preferable to other options, including mean imputation ("Replace Missing

Values,” 2014). An alternative method, pairwise deletion, was not used to address missing values because it can introduce bias and can reduce comparability between variables (Bethlehem, Cobben, & Schouten, 2011; Newman & Cottrell, 2015).

The following measures were from the investigative journalist questionnaire:

Profit Emphasis. Respondents were asked their level of agreement (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) with the statement, “My news organization places a great deal of importance on earning high, above-average profits” ($M=3.80$, $SD=1.09$).

Staff Size. Respondents were asked to write down how many “full-time news employees” worked at their stations ($M=53.60$, $SD=39.54$). The largest reported news staff was at KPNX in Phoenix, AZ (300 employees); the smallest was at KXGN in Glendive, MT (1 employee).

Investigative Emphasis. Respondents indicated the perceived level of investigative productivity at their stations by answering a number of survey items. Thirteen survey items, along with one item gathered through phone conversations with station managers, were used to measure how much a station emphasized investigative reporting. Eleven survey items asked respondents’ level of agreement (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) with the following statements:

“During the past year or so, the quality of investigative news at my station has improved.”

“During the past year or so, the amount of time I spend on investigative journalism, in comparison to other news stories, has increased.”

“During the past year or so, airtime devoted to investigative news at my station has increased.”

“During the past year or so, the number of investigative projects I’ve worked on that took longer than two months to prepare has increased.”

“During the past year or so, the total number of staff members at my station assigned to work on investigative projects has increased.”

“Reporters at my station are given adequate time to cover investigative news stories.”

“My station routinely allows air time for thorough investigative news coverage.”

“Reporters in my newsroom think investigative reporting is the most important assignment at my station.”

“My news director thinks investigative reporting is the most important assignment at my station.”

“Investigative news routinely is given prominent air time at my station.”

“I spend most of my time working on investigative reports, in comparison to other forms of journalism.”

Of the remaining three items, one survey question asked how the amount of investigative news at a respondent’s station had been trending in the past year or so (1=Significantly Decreased, 5=Significantly Increased), and another asked respondents how much of their work over the past year or so had been investigative (1=None of My Reporting is Investigative, 5=All of My Reporting is Investigative). The final item, gathered through phone calls, measured the number of full-time investigative reporters at each station.

A factor analysis was used to determine underlying dimensions of and variation among the 14 variables (DeVellis, 2012). Because it was desirable to reduce these variables into one

measure representing a station's perceived investigative "emphasis," a principal component analysis (PCA) was used with Varimax rotation for interpretation. PCA is helpful in eliminating statistical redundancy (Kambhatla & Leen, 1997), and PCA with Varimax rotation is appropriate for analyzing exploratory variables, such as those in the present project (Dess & Beard, 1984).

Table 1 shows that the 14 measures revealed three different dimensions of investigative productivity. Eight survey items (overall investigative increase at respondents' stations in the past year, "The quality of investigative news at my station has improved," "The amount of time I spend on investigative journalism has increased," "Airtime devoted to investigative news at my station has increased," "The number of investigative projects I've worked on that took longer than two months has increased," "The number of investigative staff members at my station has increased," "Reporters at my station are given adequate time to cover investigative news stories," and "My station allows air time for thorough investigative news coverage") loaded onto the first dimension and explained the highest proportion of the variation (32.7%). This factor was called "Investigative Emphasis." Although two variables in the first factor ("Airtime increased," "Station allows time for thorough coverage") were somewhat correlated with those in the second factor, the highest loadings for these two measures were in Factor 1, and thus for the purposes of this project they were retained in the first factor.

Three survey items ("Reporters think investigative reporting is important," "News directors think investigative reporting is important," and "Investigative news is given prominent airtime") loaded onto the second factor and explained 18.5% of the variation. This dimension was called "Investigative Awareness." Three items ("I spend most of my time on investigative reporting," the amount of a respondent's work that is investigative, and the number of investigative reporters at a station) loaded onto the third factor and explained 17.3% of the

variation. This dimension was called “Personal Productivity/Staff.” Because the first dimension explained the most variance and contained items that more thoroughly addressed issues of investigative quantity and quality, the eight measures were combined into a summed variable to allow for further analyses ($M=3.13$, $SD=1.08$). An internal consistency test indicated acceptable reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.91$) among the eight items (Nunnally, 1978).

Biggest Investigative Obstacle. The final item on the survey was an open-ended question asking reporters to elaborate on the “biggest obstacle” facing investigative journalism at their stations.

Content Analysis

To compare reporters’ perceptions to actual investigative content, a content analysis of local television newscasts in fall 2014 and winter 2015 was conducted to help determine the quantity and quality of investigative journalism at survey respondents’ stations. The 165 stations represented in the investigative journalist survey were used as a sampling frame. Twenty stations were randomly drawn from each of four market rank categories used by Tuggle and Huffman (1999): markets 1-20, 21-50, 51-100, and 101-210. Some markets in the sampling frame were represented by two stations. This produced a total of 80 stations selected for coding. In terms of affiliation, 20 stations were ABC affiliates, 29 were CBS, 24 were NBC, and 13 were Fox (the affiliate total was greater than 80 because several newsrooms provided newscasts for multiple affiliates).

A constructed week (one randomly selected Monday, one randomly selected Tuesday, etc.) of newscasts was then generated for each selected station from within the sweeps ratings period of October 30 to November 26, 2014. Each year, television station managers plan sweeps stories in advance, and thus organizational behavior during sweeps becomes a routinized pattern

(Gauthier, 2011a; Jacobs, 1990; Kaniss, 1991). Because of this, newsroom environments and investigative productivity at stations in November 2014 would likely be similar to November 2013, when the survey was administered, even though there was a year between time periods. Sweeps newscasts were selected for coding because it is likely that many stations have higher investigative productivity during these ratings periods, and thus more stories would be available for examination (Gauthier, 2011a; Niederpruem, 2014). The constructed week in 2014 that was randomly selected was Monday, November 24, Tuesday, November 18, Wednesday, November 12, Thursday, November 20, and Friday, November 21. This produced a sample of 400 newscasts.

Coders used an online streaming service, Metro Monitor, Inc., to view newscasts. Late-in-the-day (e.g., 11 p.m.) newscasts are the most popular local TV news programs overall (Olmstead et al., 2013), so coders were instructed to analyze the latest available newscast on each day. Because Metro Monitor, Inc. stores newscasts for a limited amount of time, newscasts that had expired by the time of coding were replaced by newscasts from the subsequent sweeps period (January 29 to February 25, 2015) on the corresponding day of the week. The replacement week in 2015 that was randomly selected was Monday, February 2, Tuesday, February 10, Wednesday, February 11, Thursday, February 12, and Friday, February 13. For example, if a station's latest newscast on Thursday, November 20, had expired, the latest newscast on Thursday, February 12, was chosen as a replacement. Six total newscasts from three stations were not coded because the stations' November and February newscasts had both expired: KVUE in Austin, TX (two total newscasts were coded), WTVC in Chattanooga, TN (three total newscasts were coded), and KCRA in Sacramento, CA (four total newscasts were coded). Thus, the final sample consisted of 394 newscasts from 80 stations.

For logistical reasons, only the first 15 minutes of each newscast was coded. Late local TV newscasts usually last one half-hour and are structured similarly, with the most important stories toward the beginning (Tuggle, Carr, & Huffman, 2014); thus, it was likely that stations either aired or previewed all investigative pieces within the first 15 minutes. Coders were instructed to analyze every local “package” story that began within the first 15 minutes, was a full two minutes in length, and was an original, locally produced story. Local packages were defined as stories featuring the recorded voice of a local reporter.

Coders were also instructed to analyze any package that was introduced or “teased” (previewed) as “investigative” within the first 15 minutes, even if the story was fewer than two minutes, and even if the full story aired after the 15-minute mark. For a story to be branded as investigative, it had to be introduced or previewed using some form of the word “investigate” (e.g., “investigation,” “I-Team,” “Channel 6 investigates,” “News 4 investigator”). The investigative word or phrase needed to refer to the station’s activity, and not the activity of an outside party. For instance, mention of a police “investigation” did not qualify. Coders indicated the presence or absence of investigative branding to help identify investigative stories, and also to draw a distinction between true investigative pieces and those that were merely presented as investigative. See Appendix B for the full coding protocol.

Coders examined a total of 398 stories from 394 newscasts. Of those, 262 stories (65.8%) aired during the November 2014 sweeps period, and 136 stories (34.2%) aired during the February 2015 sweeps period. Regarding newscast times, 220 stories (55.3%) were part of an 11 p.m. newscast, 170 stories (42.7%) were part of a 10 p.m. newscast, 3 stories (.8%) were part of a 9 p.m. newscast, and 5 stories (1.3%) were from a 6 p.m. newscast.

Reliability. To improve the accuracy of the content analysis measurement instrument, several steps were taken to bolster reliability, a term defined as the extent to which measurement error is absent from an analysis (Alwin, 2007). Reliability helps a study's validity and replicability (Nunnally, 1978) and is crucial in content analyses (Riffe, Fico, & Lacy, 2005). Measurement from just one person elicits questions of subjectivity; thus, it is necessary to use multiple coders for a reliability assessment (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). For the present project, three coders were used: the principal investigator and two graduate students. Coders were trained extensively in order to improve reliability.

Training was done initially through assessments of content separate from, but similar to, the main population of units (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2010). The principal investigator developed a protocol and familiarized coders with the protocol during training (see Appendix B for the full protocol). To help ensure that content and not human bias dictated coding choices, coding categories in the protocol were mutually exclusive, and every effort was taken to explain them clearly (Riffe et al., 2005). After receiving training, coders in a group setting informally analyzed a small sample of newscasts containing investigative stories that were outside of the main sample. Once this informal assessment indicated acceptable reliability, pilot studies were conducted, during which trainees coded on their own (Lombard et al., 2010). To minimize human error and prevent fatigue, coders were strongly encouraged to read the coding protocol before each coding session (Riffe et al., 2005) and to limit coding to four hours per day (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). During the pilot testing stage, coder differences were settled through refinement of the protocol and further training.

To formally test reliability, 53 newscasts (13.5%) were drawn from the main sample of 394 newscasts; this subsample, which each coder analyzed, was large enough to properly

estimate agreement (Lombard et al., 2010; Riffe et al., 2005; Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). The remaining 347 newscasts were divided among the three coders. Krippendorff's Alpha (α) measured agreement among coders; this measure is seen as preferable because it controls for chance agreement and estimates how content might be distributed in a larger population (Krippendorff, 2004; Riffe et al., 2005). Further, Krippendorff's Alpha can estimate reliability among three coders and for nominal, interval, and ratio data, making it appropriate for this analysis. Four of the five content analysis variables met Krippendorff's (2004) .80 minimum reliability threshold and Lombard et al.'s (2010) and Neuendorf's (2002) .70 minimum threshold for exploratory variables (the measures section below lists individual reliability scores). After reliability was established, the principal investigator resolved disagreements among coders and incorporated the reliability subsample into the main coding sample (Lombard et al., 2010).

Content Analysis Measures

The following measures were from the content analysis of local television stations:

Investigative Branding. Of the 398 total stories coded, 86 stories (21.6%) were branded as investigative, and 312 stories (78.4%) were not (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .92$). Branding was seen as an indicator of commitment to producing investigative journalism.

Length. Story length is seen as a representation of station commitment (Scott et al., 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Coders measured each of the 398 stories in total seconds ($M=161.78$, $SD=55.51$). Seconds were measured by marking the point in the newscast at which the story started and subtracting it from the point in the newscast at which the story ended. The resulting time was then converted to total seconds. For example, a story starting at the 12:00 mark in a newscast and ending at 15:00 would be coded as having a length of 180. Coders used the time displays provided by Metro Monitor, Inc. on each streaming newscast to measure

length. The beginning of a story was defined as when a reporter started talking or the beginning of a package – whichever came first. The end of a story was defined as when the reporter finished talking or the end of a package – whichever came last. Including the anchor introduction in a story's overall length would have produced a greater number of two-minute stories in the data set, but it is likely that many of these additional pieces would not have been investigative. Data from the content analysis supported the idea that investigative stories by themselves are two minutes or longer: 85% of coded stories that were branded as investigative were more than two minutes, and 93.5% of stories that were investigative by definition (see below) were more than two minutes. Additionally, stories that were investigative by definition had an average length of 3 minutes, 41 seconds. The shortest story coded in the sample was 77 minutes; the longest was 441 minutes (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .99$).

Story Count. The total number of stories coded from within each of the 394 newscasts ($M=1.01$, $SD=.70$). This measure provided a basis from which to draw conclusions about what percentage of a station's stories were investigative. The most stories coded during a newscast was four; the fewest was zero (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .90$).

Concealed Information. Coders indicated the presence or absence of this investigative characteristic in each of the 398 stories. Stories with concealed information revealed evidence that was either: (A) deliberately suppressed; (B) concealed by law (e.g. classified CIA documents or medical records); or (C) public, but compiled by the reporter in a way that exposed a widespread pattern (e.g., an analysis of city government expense reports revealing that council members were using taxpayer money to fund personal vacations). This characteristic is present in most definitions of investigative journalism (see, e.g., Cordell, 2009; Houston, 2009; Ullman &

Honeyman, 1983). Concealed information was present in 70 stories, or 17.6% of the sample (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .83$).

Public Interest. Coders indicated the presence or absence of this investigative characteristic in each of the 398 stories. Stories in the public interest revealed that a powerful entity had done harm to a citizen or citizens. A powerful entity was defined as either: (A) government (e.g., a police officer or city council); (B) public institution (e.g., a public university); or (C) large private entity (e.g., a corporation or hospital). “Harm” was defined as an act that negatively affected the: (A) health; (B) quality of life; (C) safety; or (D) money/property of a citizen or citizens. A similar characteristic is present in most investigative definitions (see, e.g., Aucoin, 2006; Bernt & Greenwald, 2000; de Burgh, 2008; Investigative Reporters and Editors, 2015). A total of 120 coded stories, or 30.2% of the sample, were determined to be in the public interest (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .63$).

Investigative Score. A scale (0-2) was constructed measuring the “score” of all 398 individual stories. A score of “2” meant that a story contained both “Concealed Information” and “Public Interest,” and was considered “fully” investigative; a score of “1” meant that a story contained one of the characteristics; a score of “0” meant that a story contained neither of the characteristics ($M = .48$, $SD = .69$). This was seen as a measurement of the investigative properties of each story.

The following variables were measured at the station level by averaging content analysis data for each station in the study ($N = 80$):

Branded Investigative Percentage. The number of stories that each station branded as investigative during the constructed week was divided by that station's total number of stories coded during the constructed week ($M = .19$, $SD = .24$). For example, a station with one

investigative-branded story and five total stories during the constructed week would have a branded investigative percentage of “.20.” The percentage of stories that a station presents as investigative provides a quantitative measure of commitment to this type of journalism. The highest branded investigative percentage among all stations in the sample was 1.00; the lowest was .00.

Full Investigative Percentage. The total number of stories with an investigative score of “2,” containing both “Concealed Information” and “Public Interest,” at each station during the constructed week was divided by that station’s total number of stories coded during the constructed week ($M=.11$, $SD=.19$). For example, a station with one fully investigative story and five total stories during the constructed week would have a full investigative percentage of “.20.” The percentage of fully investigative stories at a station measures the quantity of *actual* investigative work being done, rather than the quantity of stories that a station presents as investigative. The highest full investigative percentage at a station in the sample was 1.00; the lowest was .00.

Quality Index. The investigative scores (0-2) for each station’s investigative-branded stories were summed, and then divided by the number of investigative-branded stories at that station, producing an “average” score ($M=1.25$, $SD=.59$). For example, if a station had 10 branded stories during the constructed week of newscasts and the total score for all 10 stories was “10,” then the station’s quality index would be “1.” This was preferable to Full Investigative Percentage as a measure of quality because it accounted for stories that scored a “1,” rather than only accounting for stories that scored a full “2” on the investigative scale. The highest quality index at a station in the sample was 2.00; the lowest was .00.

Investigative Length. The average length of a station's investigative-branded stories, measured in seconds ($M=198.40$, $SD=74.66$). Investigative-branded stories, rather than fully investigative stories, were chosen for this category because investigative branding indicates a station's commitment to that story. Because length has been connected to a station's emphasis on quality (see, e.g., Scott et al., 2008), the length of an investigative-branded story is a meaningful measure of how much a station is committed to investigative quality. The highest average investigative length for a station in the sample was 427 minutes; the lowest was 84.

Non-Investigative Percentage. The number of a station's investigative-branded stories that had an investigative score of either "1" or "0" (i.e., branded stories that were missing the "Concealed Information" characteristic, the "Public Interest" characteristic, or both) during the constructed week was divided by that station's total number of stories coded during the constructed week ($M=.58$, $SD=.38$). For example, a station that had two branded stories that scored either a "1" or "0" and four total branded stories during the constructed week would have a Non-Investigative Percentage of ".50." This measured the amount of "soft" investigative stories that a station produced. The highest non-investigative percentage at a station was 1.00; the lowest was .00.

Organizational and Market Measures

The following measures were gathered through analysis of local television organizations and local television markets:

Public Ownership. Stations were grouped into those that were owned by publicly traded corporations and those that were not. Ownership data were gathered from the *Complete Television, Radio & Cable Industry Directory* (2014) and cross-referenced against Google Finance, TVnewscheck.com, Manta.com, and other websites. Of the 165 respondents in the

survey, 76 (46.1%) worked for stations owned by publicly traded companies. Six of the eight companies that owned the most stations in the survey were publicly traded, including Sinclair, which owned the most stations (14), and Media General, which owned the fourth-most stations (8). However, Raycom Media (12 stations) and the Hearst Corporation (9 stations), which owned the second- and third-most stations in the survey, respectively, were private companies. The top four organizations owned more than a quarter (26.1%) of the stations in the survey. For the purposes of this project, the company that was in control as of December 31, 2013, was defined as the station owner. Public ownership was used to operationalize a corporate news entity.

Market Size. This was operationalized as the number of television households in each of the 210 U.S. markets, according to Nielsen estimates for the 2013-2014 TV season (Halbrooks, 2013). The largest market in the survey, New York, had 7,461,030 households; the smallest market, Glendive, MT, had 4,260 households ($M=762,432.97$, $SD=915,481.56$). The median number of households in the survey was 457,600.

Competition Level. This was operationalized as the number of commercial stations in each of the 210 U.S. markets ($M=7.29$, $SD=3.52$). Data were gathered from the *Complete Television, Radio & Cable Industry Directory* (2014). Although Nielsen shares are a preferable measure of market competition level in some circumstances, the number of commercial stations in a market is also valid (Lacy & Vermeer, 1995), and was logistically feasible for the present project. The market with the most stations was Los Angeles (23 stations); Lafayette, IN, and Glendive, MT, tied for the fewest (1 station).

For some results in the following chapter, both conventional ($p < .05$, $p < .01$, $p < .001$) and marginal ($p < .10$) significance levels were reported. This was done because the sample sizes for most analyses were relatively small, which tends to increase sampling error (Beam, Weaver, &

Brownlee, 2009; Nunnally, 1978). Less stringent, or marginal, standards allow for potentially important relationships to be highlighted. Significance levels were clearly noted in the corresponding tables.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS

RQ1 asked about the overall quantity of investigative journalism at local TV stations. To answer this question, all 398 coded stories were analyzed for investigative properties. As Table 2 shows, 17.6% of all stories contained “Concealed Information,” and 30.2% contained “Public Interest.” Table 3 shows that nearly two-thirds of all stories (63.8%) contained neither investigative characteristic and thus had an investigative score of “0.” In other words, almost two-thirds were not at all investigative. About a quarter (24.6%) of all stories had one investigative characteristic, and 11.6% had both characteristics. This suggests that during the sweeps periods that were sampled, coded stories had about a one-in-nine likelihood of being fully investigative.

To further explore **RQ1**, the number of “branded” investigative stories (86) was divided by the total number of stories coded (398). Using this approach, data indicated that 21.6% of stories had investigative branding (Table 4). The remaining 312 stories (78.4%) were not branded by the station as investigative. In sum, roughly one out of every five stories was branded as investigative, but only one in nine was actually investigative by definition (being in the public interest and containing concealed information). Additionally, fewer than half (47.5%) of all stations (N= 80) aired investigative-branded stories during the constructed week. However,

reporters in the survey (N=165) indicated that at 53.9% of stations, investigative reporting had increased somewhat or increased significantly within the past year.

RQ2 asked about the overall quality of investigative journalism at local TV stations. To answer this question, the 86 investigative-branded stories in the sample were analyzed. As Table 2 shows, 65.1% of these branded stories contained “Concealed Information,” and 59.3% contained “Public Interest.” Table 5 shows that 17 investigative-branded stories (19.8%) had an investigative score of “0,” 31 stories (36.0%) scored a “1,” and 38 stories (44.2%) scored a “2,” so fewer than half of all branded stories contained both investigative characteristics. The average investigative score across all branded stories was 1.24 ($SD=.77$).

To further explore **RQ2**, length was used as a measure of quality. First, though, a moderate correlation ($r = .32, p < .01$) between length and “Investigative Score” among all stories (N=398) showed, at least, the face validity of using length as a quality measure. More specifically, Table 6 shows that the 86 investigative-branded stories in the sample averaged 193.05 seconds ($SD=73.68$), while non-branded stories averaged 153.16 seconds ($SD=45.89$); this mean difference was significant at the $p < .001$ level, by the t -test. Also shown in Table 6, fully investigative stories (packages with both “Concealed Information” and “Public Interest” attributes) averaged 221.61 seconds ($SD=87.45$), while non-fully investigative stories averaged 153.96 seconds ($SD=44.44$); this mean difference was significant at the $p < .001$ level. Table 7 shows that among the 86 stories that were branded investigative, those that were not fully investigative averaged 169.27 seconds ($SD=53.10$), while stories that were both branded investigative and fully investigative by definition averaged 223.08 seconds ($SD=85.02$); this mean difference was significant at the $p < .01$ level. These significant differences indicate that stories that are more investigative, either by branding or by definition, tend to be longer. The

results also show that stories that are investigative by definition are likely to be longer than those that are merely branded as investigative.

Before examining tests of hypotheses, these measures of investigative journalism quality and quantity merit exploration in terms of important theoretical concepts that permeate the scholarly literature. Bivariate Pearson's r correlations were calculated to explore these concepts. Among investigative journalist survey respondents ($N=165$), there was a small negative correlation ($r = -.21, p < .01$) between perceived company emphasis on profit and emphasis on investigative news (Table 8). This connection suggests that profit-oriented companies are perceived by journalists as loath to support investigative journalism. Predictably, market size was strongly correlated with competition ($r = .72, p < .001$). Larger markets tend to generate a greater amount of advertising revenue and audience niches, and thus can support more competitors. Accordingly, staff size shared moderate correlations with both market size ($r = .57, p < .001$) and competition ($r = .52, p < .001$). Because larger markets generate more revenue, stations in those markets can afford to hire more employees to cover the news. Finally, perceived station investigative emphasis was correlated with market size ($r = .25, p < .01$), competition ($r = .20, p < .05$), and staff size ($r = .31, p < .001$). This suggests that investigative journalism is often found at larger stations in larger markets with more competitors.

Table 9 presents correlations for stations in the content analysis. Staff size was correlated with market size ($r = .53, p < .001$) and competition ($r = .51, p < .001$). Staff size was also weakly correlated with the percentage of a station's stories that were fully investigative ($r = .23, p < .05$) and with the rate of investigative-branded stories at a station ($r = .29, p < .05$). Stations with larger news staffs can often free up reporters to work on investigations while other reporters handle day-to-day news. Market size was strongly correlated with competition ($r = .75, p < .001$), and

shared marginally significant relationships with fully investigative stories ($r = .22, p < .10$) and investigative-branded stories ($r = .22, p < .10$). Although the connection was not strong, these results suggest that stations in larger markets produce more news that is branded investigative, and also more news that is investigative by definition.

As shown in Table 9, fully investigative stories shared a strong positive correlation with investigative-branded stories ($r = .77, p < .001$). This indicates that stations producing investigative-branded stories are also producing fully investigative stories, and engaging, at least somewhat, in a type of “truth in branding.” Fully investigative stories also shared a correlation with the investigative quality index variable ($r = .64, p < .001$). Recall that the quality index was each station’s average investigative score across all investigative-branded stories. Fully investigative stories had a marginally significant relationship with the length of investigative-branded stories ($r = .28, p < .10$). Fully investigative stories were also strongly negatively correlated with the percentage of non-investigative stories ($r = -.74, p < .001$). The quality index variable was moderately correlated with investigative length ($r = .50, p < .01$), indicating that the length of an investigative-branded story is related to investigative quality. The quality index further shared a strong negative relationship with the rate of non-investigative stories at a station ($r = -.88, p < .001$), and the length of investigative stories had a negative correlation with the amount of non-investigative stories at a station ($r = -.52, p < .01$); these two correlations suggest that branded investigative stories that are not investigative by definition are low in quality. The percentage of branded investigative journalism at a station was not correlated with the quality index or investigative length, which indicates that stories branded as “investigative” are not necessarily high quality.

Finally, Table 9 shows that a station's perceived investigative emphasis was moderately correlated with staff size ($r = .28, p < .05$), market size ($r = .27, p < .05$), and competition ($r = .27, p < .05$), and negatively correlated with perceived profit emphasis ($r = -.25, p < .01$). Investigative emphasis was also significantly correlated with fully investigative stories ($r = .34, p < .01$), branded investigative stories ($r = .37, p < .01$), the quality index ($r = .36, p < .05$), and negatively correlated with the percentage of non-investigative stories ($r = -.38, p < .05$), indicating that perceptions of investigative productivity are associated with actual investigative quantity and quality.

To address **H1 (a, b, and c)**, **H2 (a, b, and c)**, **H3 (a, b, and c)**, **H4 (a, b, and c)**, **H5 (a, b, and c)**, and **RQ3 (a, b, and c)**, five multiple linear regression analyses were used to predict two measures of investigative quantity, two measures of quality, and one measure of investigative emphasis. For each of the five analyses, the same five predictor variables were used: profit emphasis and staff size (determined from survey responses), along with public ownership, market size, and competition (determined from organizational and market analyses). Two criterion variables represented quantity: the percentage of fully investigative stories and the percentage of branded investigative stories. Two criterion variables represented quality: investigative length and the quality index. Finally, the investigative emphasis variable (a summed measure of survey responses) was used as a criterion. Secondary analyses showed little multicollinearity among predictors; the lowest tolerance score for any of the predictors was .40, and the highest Variance Inflation Factor score for the predictors was 2.53.

H1 projected that a station's emphasis on profit, as perceived by its investigative reporters, would negatively predict investigative **(a)** quantity, **(b)** quality, and **(c)** emphasis. As Table 10 shows, a station's profit emphasis did share a negative relationship with the two

quantity variables, full investigative percentage (standardized $\beta = -.160$) and branded investigative percentage ($\beta = -.131$), but results were not significant. Therefore, **H1a was not supported**. Profit emphasis also did not significantly predict the two quality criteria, quality index ($\beta = -.003$) and investigative length ($\beta = .071$), so **H1b was not supported** (Table 11). However, profit emphasis did significantly predict a decrease in a station's perceived investigative emphasis ($\beta = -.220, p < .01$). Thus, **H1c was supported** (Table 12). This result indicates that investigative reporters' perceptions of how much a station focuses on profit predict their perceptions of how much investigative journalism is being done. Respondents themselves, it seems, associate profit with a decrease in investigative productivity.

H2 predicted that, holding other factors constant, staff size would be positively related to investigative (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis. The size of a station's newsroom did positively predict the number of full investigative stories ($\beta = .140$) and branded investigative stories ($\beta = .171$), but results were not significant (Table 10). Therefore, **H2a was not supported**. Staff size did not significantly predict either quality criterion (quality index [$\beta = -.124$], length [$\beta = .156$]), so **H2b was not supported** (Table 11). However, staff size did significantly predict a station's investigative emphasis ($\beta = .241, p < .01$), so **H2c was supported** (Table 12). This result suggests that perceptions of investigative quantity and quality can be predicted by the size of a news staff, which, along with the H1c outcome, seems intuitively logical.

H3 projected that market size would positively predict investigative (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis. The size of the market in which a station was located, measured by the number of TV households, did not significantly predict any of the quantity criteria in Table 10 (fully investigative [$\beta = .209$], branded investigative [$\beta = .060$]) or the quality criteria in Table 11 (quality index [$\beta = .318$], length [$\beta = -.043$]). Market size also did not significantly affect

perceived investigative emphasis in Table 12 ($\beta = .078$). Therefore, **H3a, H3b, and H3c were not supported**. This indicates that market size does not predict the investigative productivity of local television stations.

H4 predicted that, holding other factors constant, the level of competition in a market would be positively related to a station's investigative (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis. Competition, measured by the number of commercial stations in a market, did not predict any of the investigative journalism quantity criteria in Table 10 (fully investigative [$\beta = -.143$], branded investigative [$\beta = -.035$]) or the quality criteria in Table 11 (quality index [$\beta = -.180$], length [$\beta = -.127$]). Competition also did not predict perceived investigative emphasis in Table 12 ($\beta = -.032$). Therefore, **H4a, H4b, and H4c were not supported**. This suggests that the number of commercial competitors does not predict the investigative productivity of local television stations.

H5 predicted that a station owned by a publicly traded company would yield higher investigative (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis, holding other factors constant. Public ownership status did not significantly predict the percentage of fully investigative stories at a station ($\beta = .108$), but, as Table 10 shows, ownership did significantly predict the percentage of investigative-branded stories ($\beta = .263, p < .05$). Therefore, **H5a was partially supported**. Public ownership had no significant effect on the quality criteria shown in Table 11 (quality index [$\beta = -.071$], length [$\beta = -.160$]), so **H5b was not supported**. However, a station's public ownership status significantly predicted perceived emphasis on investigative news ($\beta = .170, p < .05$), so **H5c was supported** (Table 12). These results suggest that public ownership predicts perceptions of investigative productivity, and the actual quantity of investigative journalism, but not investigative quality.

RQ3 asked which of the five predictor variables (profit emphasis, staff size, market size, competition, public ownership) was the strongest predictor of a station's investigative: (a) quantity, (b) quality, and (c) emphasis. Overall, market size and public ownership had the largest effects. Market size was the strongest predictor of fully investigative quantity ($\beta = .209$) and the quality index ($\beta = .318$), shown in Tables 10 and 11, respectively, but neither of these relationships was significant. Public ownership was the strongest predictor of branded investigative quantity in Table 10 ($\beta = .263, p < .05$) and investigative length in Table 11 ($\beta = -.160$), but only the relationship with branded investigative stories was significant. Finally, Table 12 shows that staff size was the strongest predictor of a station's investigative emphasis ($\beta = .241, p < .01$).

H6 predicted that the proportion of a station's branded investigative stories that were "non-investigative" would increase as the level of competition increased in that station's market. Correlational analysis (Table 9) showed no relationship between competition and the percentage of non-investigative stories ($r = .07, ns$). Therefore, **H6** was not supported. This suggests that increased competition does not increase the amount of investigative-branded stories a station produces that are non-investigative by definition.

In summary, data showed that about 18% of all stories and 65% of investigative-branded stories contained the investigative characteristic of "Concealed Information." About 30% of all stories and 59% of investigative-branded stories contained the "Public Interest" characteristic. Local television stations branded nearly 22% of all stories as investigative, but just 12% of stories were fully investigative by definition (i.e., they contained "Public Interest" and "Concealed Information"). Approximately 25% of all stories contained just one of the investigative characteristics. Of the 86 investigative-branded stories that were coded, less than

half (44.6%) were defined as fully investigative; 36% of branded stories were partially investigative, containing just one of the investigative characteristics.

The more investigative a story was, the longer it was likely to be. Branded stories were approximately 21% longer, on average, than non-branded stories, and fully investigative stories were about 31% longer than stories that lacked at least one investigative characteristic. The average fully investigative story was about 15% longer than the average investigative-branded story, and stories that were both branded and defined as investigative were about 24% longer, on average, than stories that were branded as investigative but lacked at least one investigative characteristic.

Several of the models' predictors shared significant relationships with perceived investigative emphasis. Public corporate ownership ($\beta = .170$), staff size ($\beta = .241$), and perceived profit emphasis ($\beta = -.220$) significantly predicted investigative emphasis. In addition, market size ($r = .25$), staff size ($r = .31$), profit emphasis ($r = -.21$), and competition ($r = .20$) were significantly correlated with investigative emphasis. Among quantity variables, only public ownership ($\beta = .263$) was significantly predictive of investigative-branded story production. In fact, the public ownership variable was significantly predictive of more criteria (investigative emphasis and percentage of branded investigative stories) than any other measure. The percentage of fully investigative stories and the percentage of branded stories (both of which signified quantity) were significantly correlated with staff size ($r = .23$, $r = .29$, respectively) and market size ($r = .22$, $r = .22$, respectively). However, predictor variables were not significantly related to investigative quality, as expected in the hypotheses, and increased competition did not lead to increased production of investigative stories that were not investigative by definition.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

There are several potential limitations to this study. Regarding the survey method, about one-third of respondents were part-time investigative journalists. A sample of only full-time reporters might produce a fuller picture of how investigative journalists see their profession, but might also exclude reporters in smaller markets, who tend to divide their time between investigative and non-investigative stories. Second, although journalists' stations were chosen randomly, individual journalists self-selected whether to participate. Third, journalists' estimations of staff size and perceptions of stations' commitment to investigative news and emphasis on profit include measurement error. Most respondents (76.4%) were either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs; however, investigative journalists, compared to general assignment reporters, might be more pessimistic about certain items affecting their profession, including a station's emphasis on profit, because investigative reporters face these challenges more often. Therefore, investigative journalists' survey responses could be more negative than responses from general assignment reporters. Additionally, overall perceptions of investigative quantity were likely higher than average because all respondents indicated that investigative work was done at their stations; recall that stations without investigative reporters were excluded from the study. Fourth, the sample was slightly skewed toward larger markets. The median TV

market rank (1=New York; 210=Glendive, MT) of respondents' stations was 65, and 68% of respondents were in the top 100 Designated Market Areas. However, overrepresentation of large markets is to be expected because stations in more populated areas are more likely to have investigative reporters, and tend to have more of them (the Spearman's correlation between market size and the number of investigative reporters at a station was $\rho = .60, p < .001$).

Similarly, large markets were also more prevalent than small markets in the content analysis; recall that the sample included 20 stations in each of the market rank categories (1-20, 21-50, 51-100, 101-210). The coding sample contained data from 85% of the top 20 markets (17 of 20), but only 16% of markets (18 of 110) in the smallest category. Thus, bigger markets figured more prominently in the data. Second, coders did not analyze entire newscasts; instead, for logistical reasons, they analyzed stories that aired or were teased in the first 15 minutes of each newscast. Because of this, some investigative stories toward the end of newscasts could have been missed, although this is not likely (Tuggle et al., 2014). Third, sample newscasts from November 24th featured an abnormally large amount of breaking news coverage because of events surrounding the Michael Brown shooting case. Although this out-of-the-ordinary event took precedence over pre-planned stories, several stations in the sample were still able to air investigative packages within the first 15 minutes on this date. Fourth, sampled newscasts aired during sweeps ratings periods. News managers often alter content during sweeps to maximize ratings, and thus stories that were sampled might not be representative of year-round local television programming. Including sweeps and non-sweeps newscasts would have controlled for stations attempting to increase ratings (Greeley, 2014; Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008). However, including non-sweeps dates would have decreased the chances that stations would air investigative stories (Gauthier, 2011a; Niederpruem, 2014), especially in smaller markets where

stations often have fewer resources. Therefore, sweeps dates were selected to provide for a larger sample of investigative reporting. In sum, because content analysis stations were drawn from a pool of stations that produced investigative journalism, because the sample week included sweeps dates, and because the sample was skewed toward larger markets, the number of investigative stories coded was probably higher than normal.

Fifth, for logistical reasons, the content analysis data were collected one year after the survey data, so comparing results from both analyses could be problematic. Sixth, the market competition variable (number of commercial stations) was limited because it treated every television competitor as equal and didn't take into account actual market shares. A measure that accounted for Nielsen shares might have been a more valid representation of market competition, but this information was not available for the time period studied. The competition variable was further limited in its scope because it measured only TV rivals; local stations also compete with cable television, internet sources, radio stations, and newspapers for consumers' attention.

Finally, the definition of investigative journalism used in the content analysis (original stories in the "Public Interest" that featured "Concealed Information") was necessarily limited because it was used for quantitative content analysis. Although this definition was supported by the literature, it could not encompass all aspects of investigative reporting due to the need for agreement among coders. For example, one investigative-branded story focused on a bill in the California legislature that threatened to invade citizens' privacy by tracking their movements. The bill had been proposed but had not been passed, and thus coders determined that the story was not in the "Public Interest" because it dealt with *potential* harm instead of *actual* harm. One could argue that the traditional watchdog duty of the press is to provide "surveillance" of potential threats, but investigative stories typically feature harm that has already occurred. This

difficulty in limiting investigative journalism to a short definition further manifested itself during the training of coders. Despite several reliability tests, the “Public Interest” variable never reached the desired minimum reliability score of .80. The trouble inherent in narrowly defining investigative journalism may also be a reason why quantitative researchers have given this subject limited attention.

Despite its drawbacks, this study suggests that the amount of investigative journalism in local television is fairly low. This is especially true when one considers that stations in the sample had already indicated that they produced investigative journalism, and that newscasts were analyzed during a time when investigative productivity was assumed to be higher than normal. Just a fifth of all stories were branded as investigative, and more than half of the stations examined presented no investigative-branded stories at all during the sample week. As a point of comparison, just a quarter of local TV news directors in 2002 said their newsrooms conducted no investigative journalism (Just et al., 2002). This indicates a possible investigative decline. A majority of the long-form local television news stories that were analyzed did not possess any investigative characteristics, and about a quarter of all news packages had just one investigative characteristic. Only a fraction of all stories were investigative by definition, containing both characteristics. Most investigative-branded stories were not investigative by definition, indicating that a large percentage of local television investigations are not as they seem. Among all stories coded, the “Public Interest” characteristic was more prevalent than “Concealed Information,” but neither characteristic was overly common.

Even though content analysis indicated low levels of investigative news, survey respondents were optimistic – more than half of reporters indicated that investigative journalism had increased at their stations. In their open-ended responses, some reporters were bullish on

investigative prospects. One small market reporter said that investigative journalism resources have been slashed in the past, but now station managers are realizing that was a “mistake,” and are “putting more resources into investigative coverage.” A reporter in a top-50 market wrote that “more jobs are being created for investigative journalists than two years ago, which is a great thing.” Thus, it is possible that journalists perceive their stations to be more committed to investigative journalism than they actually are.

Findings suggested that overall quality is low for investigative stories on local television. About a third of branded stories contained just one investigative characteristic, and nearly 20% of branded stories contained no investigative characteristics. In their open-ended survey responses, several reporters lamented the prevalence of “investigative” news that is anything but. A top-20 market reporter wrote, “There’s no mistaking – the craft has been watered down. The term ‘investigative reporting’ has largely been reduced to a ‘catch-all’ phrase and a promotional tool. Getting a copy of an indictment and knocking on someone’s door is not investigative reporting. ‘Does it Work?’ segments are not, repeat not investigative reporting (emphasis in original).” One top-50 market reporter wrote that a competing station in his market “routinely takes stories published in the newspaper, gussies them up with a confrontation and some jazzy graphics, and relentlessly brands those stories as ‘investigative.’ They are not, and we struggle to separate what we do from what they do.”

Stations that were perceived by reporters as placing a higher emphasis on investigative work were likely to produce more investigative stories and higher quality investigative stories in the content analysis. Stations that produced investigative-branded stories were likely to also produce fully investigative stories, but there was no connection between a station’s production of branded stories and level of quality, indicating that investigative branding does not always

translate into better journalism. Among investigative-branded stories, the “Concealed Information” characteristic was slightly more prevalent than “Public Interest.”

Content analysis results suggest that the more investigative a story is, the longer it is likely to be. Among all stories coded, investigative-branded stories were significantly longer than non-branded stories, and fully investigative stories were significantly longer than stories that were not fully investigative. The average fully investigative story was longer than the average investigative-branded story, and the longest stories were those that were both branded *and* fully investigative. This suggests that length is related to quality, and that length denotes a station’s commitment to investigative journalism.

A station’s staff size was related to its market size, and related to competition within that market. Further, market size and competition were correlated. These relationships make intuitive sense because larger markets can support a greater diversity of television content and different types of audiences, thus encouraging more stations to compete within the market and serve the various audience tastes. Stations in larger markets, with more potential viewers, tend to generate more advertising revenue and therefore can afford to hire more employees.

The strongest predictor of a station’s investigative production was ownership status. As expected, stations owned by publicly traded companies produced significantly more investigative-branded stories, even when controlling for a station’s market, staff size, level of competition, and perceived profit emphasis. Journalists working for publicly traded corporations also reported a significantly higher level of investigative emphasis at their stations. Ownership status did not affect the amount of fully investigative stories produced or the quality of investigative stories. However, investigative-branded stories are still likely higher in quality than most TV reports, so these findings show a positive connection between corporate ownership and

news quality and lend support to journalism studies touting the positive effects of corporations (see, e.g., Akhavan-Majid and Boudreau, 1995; Demers, 1996; Kim, 2009). These results also run counter to literature and popular sentiment suggesting that corporations hurt news quality (see, e.g., Dunaway, 2008; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; McManus, 1994). It is possible that the corporate structure allows news managers more freedom to pursue investigative journalism, as some research suggested, or that corporate bosses see investigative journalism as a way to distinguish a company's brand and improve ratings. The latter idea was reinforced by the opinion of one large-market survey respondent who worked at a station owned by Gannett, a publicly traded corporation: "I am fortunate (that) our station, our company and the industry as a whole recognize that investigative journalism can have a major positive effect on ratings." Another large-market reporter similarly stressed the positive effect his parent corporation had on investigative journalism at his station: "Comcast/NBC has re-invested mightily in its TV news operations at the station level after massive cuts by (the) previous owner. Stations are still rebuilding so resources remain an issue but it's nothing compared to the dark days of 2008-2011." Despite the link between corporate ownership and investigative quantity, the lack of connection between corporations and quality could indicate that publicly traded companies are focusing more on the production of investigative reports and less on the quality of those reports.

Companies that placed a high emphasis on profit were likely to de-emphasize investigative news. This expected result lends support to literature drawing a connection between the quest for profit and investigative shortcomings (see, e.g., Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Houston, 2006). Because of the expensive and resource-intensive nature of investigative reporting, profit-minded companies likely see it as an expendable practice, despite Belt and Just's (2008) study showing that investigative journalism is associated with higher local

television ratings. The negative relationship between profit and investigative news was supported by some survey respondents; one top-50 market reporter remarked, “The relentless pursuit of ratings is the destructive force that constantly undermines the effort to provide a consistent public service approach to investigative reporting. Investigations have been killed and failed to launch because of the perception that they will hurt ratings. Stories that should be cut back are pushed forward if they have proven to increase ratings (emphasis in original).” A like-minded large-market reporter wrote, “Profits vs. Resources is the biggest obstacle. Company is unwilling to pay (for) travel, pay for testing, pay for FOIA’s (government information requests), and seeks ways to get it done for free, such as having a university run tests.” One small-market reporter emphasized the importance of the bottom line at her station by writing that managers would pay for only about \$10 worth of documents from county clerks; another wrote that producers at her station did not support investigative reporting because they didn’t think it would “sell.”

However, the perceived connection between profit emphasis and investigative production was not supported by content analysis data. A station’s emphasis on profit predicted lower amounts of both investigative-branded and fully investigative stories, but results were not significant, and profit emphasis was not related to investigative quality. These findings indicate that a newsroom’s emphasis on profit is perhaps not as destructive as investigative reporters believe it to be. Recall that because these journalists are faced with investigative challenges each day, they are possibly more pessimistic about the effects of profit-seeking executives.

As expected, newsrooms with large staffs were more likely to emphasize investigative journalism, lending support to the idea that more reporters, producers, and photographers are needed for a station to properly conduct investigative journalism. This is chiefly because in smaller newsrooms, investigative reporters are more likely to work “double-duty,” churning out

daily news reports while simultaneously attempting to work on long-term investigations. Many respondents in understaffed newsrooms supported this line of thinking by writing that the need to produce a story every day (described as “feeding the daily beast,” or “feeding the daily furnace”) was the biggest obstacle blocking their investigative efforts. One reporter at such a station wrote “the climate in the newsroom is such that if you are not turning a story that day they simply cannot leave you alone. Depth is not something this newsroom pursues (emphasis in original).” A medium-sized market investigative reporter wrote that “I constantly face pressure to turn news reports every day. It is hard to get 2 or 3 days to investigate, write, research and edit an investigative piece! (emphasis in original)” One small-market reporter said “only one time has my news director allowed me not to do a daily-turn story in order to work on an investigative piece.”

Staff size was correlated with a station’s production of investigative-branded and fully investigative stories, and also predicted higher investigative quantity once other factors were held constant, but this prediction was not significant. Staff size also did not significantly predict investigative quality as had been expected. In sum, although many of the statistical relationships between staff size and investigative news lean in the same “direction,” they cast doubt on the perception that bigger staffs are used to produce more and better investigative journalism.

Market size was not significantly related to investigative productivity, which was surprising. The number of households in a market was correlated with investigative quantity and emphasis, but once other factors were held constant, market size had no significant effect on either aspect. The number of households was the strongest predictor of fully investigative reports and of the quality index, but these predictions were non-significant. This was unexpected because literature suggests that larger markets allow for a greater diversity of audience tastes,

including a preference for investigative journalism (see, e.g., Berkowitz, 2007; McManus, 1994). It is possible that the effect of market size on investigative reporting is overrated, and that other factors are truly at play. It is also worth asking if market size should be measured at the ratio level, as it was in this study. Because Nielsen markets are ranked, a case could be made that television market size should only be measured at the ordinal level; it is possible that ordinal measurement might have produced different results. Several local television studies have used ordinal rankings to represent market size (see, e.g., Coulson et al., 2001; Yanich, 2012). However, the ratio-level data that accompanied Nielsen market rankings (number of households) were used because they provided a more exact measurement.

Competition was not strongly related to investigative news. There was a correlation between the number of commercial stations in a market and investigative emphasis, but once other factors were controlled for, this relationship disappeared. Competition level did not predict investigative quantity, quality, or emphasis. These findings were unexpected because literature suggested that investigative news might be a way for stations to differentiate themselves and establish legitimacy in a competitive market (Lowrey, 2005; McManus, 1994; Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Although it was not supported statistically, some survey respondents said investigative reporting was indeed an effective way for stations to “stand out” from the competition. One top-20 market reporter wrote that “investigations are one of the few vehicles that allow a station to present unique promotable content.” A reporter who worked in a medium-sized market wrote, “Most market research indicates (investigative) journalism is the #1 factor in media preference. Most TV stations are dramatically increasing visibility of investigative reports (emphasis in original).” Another reporter said stations are starting to rebuild investigative units as a “reason to watch,” and another said her station tries to “win viewers with unique, investigative stories.”

Market competition was not related to the amount of “non-investigative” investigations at a station, a finding that was also unexpected. This suggests that competitive demands are not causing station managers to cut corners in their investigative reports. It is possible that news managers are pouring resources into investigative journalism whether they are in a competitive environment or not; another possibility is that competition is actually driving investigative quality and quantity, but would be better measured by analyzing Nielsen market shares.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings in this study are a bit troubling. For years, critics and scholars have warned of the decline of investigative and public affairs journalism on local television and the effect it could have on society (see, e.g., Anderson, 2010; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Lewis, 2014). Many have denounced the pervasiveness of frivolous television “investigations” that warn us of the dangers of frozen yogurt (Just et al., 2002) or titillate us with undercover video of prostitute solicitation (Gauthier, 2011b). Lewis (2014) said local TV has abandoned its obligation to serve the public with quality reporting, surmising that an increasing number of stations now take a “dumb and dumber” approach to news.

The current project gives some empirical support to this criticism. Only a small proportion of the stories analyzed were investigative, and most of the stories that were presented as investigative were actually not. Downs (1957) postulated that most people are not motivated to seek out political information because they believe it is not worth the effort. If this is true, the majority of citizens will acquire useful public affairs information only if it is available through their favored means of communication. Because local TV is the most relied-upon form of news, many will not receive valuable information about society’s leaders if stations do not provide a healthy amount of quality investigative reporting.

In spite of these negative indicators, analysis results from the current project provide hope for investigative news. Most survey respondents indicated that their newsrooms were placing an increasing emphasis on investigative reporting, and some studies support this optimism (Jones, 2013; Willnat & Weaver, 2014). Three years ago, local television stations unexpectedly swept the most prestigious investigative awards in the yearly IRE competition, showing that local TV can still produce journalism that is as good or better than any other medium (“Local TV Entries,” 2012). It is possible that after a long decline in the early part of this century, local television managers are now ramping up investigative efforts, although the present study suggests newsroom enthusiasm might be outpacing content.

This dissertation helps fill research gaps regarding the amount and quality of investigative journalism being produced in America, and provides needed clues regarding the relationship between corporations and news production. Because publicly traded companies were associated with more investigative journalism, more research on how corporations are affecting news is warranted. Since the completion of this project’s survey in early 2014, corporations such as Sinclair and Gannett have purchased several more local TV stations, further increasing the prevalence of corporate-owned news (Matsa, 2015; Mitchell, 2014). A qualitative study examining corporate news structure and executives’ relationships with news managers could reveal important information about the influence of corporations, and why they might be producing more investigative reporting.

This project also showed a connection between increased profit emphasis and decreased investigative emphasis, but many more questions in this area remain unanswered, including: Is the quest for profit anathema to investigative news, or do these stories actually improve ratings by providing consumers with a recognizable quality project? And, are news managers starting to

see investigative reporting as a viable business model? Belt and Just (2008) showed evidence that investigative journalism can produce higher ratings, and consumers have expressed their demand for this type of news (Jones, 2013). Additionally, some survey respondents in this project detailed how their stations had become successful by making investigative reporting a top priority. Though building an investigative “presence” takes time, local TV news managers could better serve employees, shareholders, and the public by investing in this impactful news format.

To further flesh out variables influencing investigative journalism, future researchers could use different operationalizations of the independent factors in this study. For instance, profit emphasis could be measured by financial records, news staff size could be determined through employment records, and competition could be measured by Nielsen market shares. The influence of these factors might also be brought into sharper focus if a larger sample of stations were drawn for analysis, if content analysis data were collected at the same time as the survey, and if newscasts from sweeps and non-sweeps periods were examined. Such methods were outside the scope of this project, but might help further determine the conditions under which investigative journalism is produced. Additionally, analyses of other media such as documentaries and the Internet, which may be taking the place of traditional investigative news, could yield valuable information about the future of this kind of reporting.

As has been the case for many years, investigative journalism is frequently contingent on effort. Some organizational factors in this study failed to explain investigative production, but an organization’s commitment to serving the public good will almost always lead to more and better investigations, and when managers provide little support, determined investigators will often find a way. One small-market survey respondent wrote, “90% of the investigative work I do is done on my own time. I commit an extra 20 hours a week to investigative reporting because I enjoy it

and I know how important it is to our viewers.” Of course, investigative journalism needs financial support and encouragement in order to thrive as a whole, and the health of this kind of reporting tells us much about the health of journalism in general. One survey respondent said investigative news “is the one element of news media keeping this business alive.” If investigative reporting is indeed the lifeblood of journalism, we should continue to assess its status and explore the factors that regulate its production if we are to ensure its survival.

TABLES

Table 1. Results of Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation of Survey Respondent Scores/Ratings

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<i>Investigative Emphasis</i>			
Station Investigative Increased	.821	.292	.089
Quality of Investigative Improved	.816	.347	.068
Time Spent on Investigative Increased	.791	.092	.287
Investigative Airtime Increased	.724	.516	.126
Investigative 2-Month Projects Increased	.651	.091	.345
Investigative Staff Increased	.617	.295	.338
Investigative Reporters Have Adequate Time	.529	.211	.339
Station Allows Airtime for Thorough Investigative	.528	.517	.337
<i>Investigative Awareness</i>			
Reporters Think Investigative is Important	.088	.838	.165
News Directors Think Investigative is Important	.416	.667	.085
Investigative is Given Prominent Airtime	.342	.665	.391
<i>Personal Productivity/Staff</i>			
I Spend Most of My Time on Investigative	.454	.090	.774
Number of Investigative Reporters at Station	-.027	.281	.744
Amount of My Work that is Investigative	.464	.150	.709
Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	4.572	2.587	2.416
Total % of Variance Explained	32.7	18.5	17.3
Cum. % of Variance Explained	32.7	51.1	68.4
Factor loadings greater than .520 are displayed			

Table 2. Presence of Investigative Characteristics in Content-Analyzed Stories

	All Stories (N=398)	Investigative-Branded Stories (N=86)
Concealed Information	17.6%	65.1%
Public Interest	30.2%	59.3%

Table 3. Investigative Scores for All Stories in Content Analysis (N=398)

Score	Number of Stories	Percentage
0	254	63.8%
1	98	24.6%
2	46	11.6%
Total	398	100%

0 = No Investigative Characteristics (i.e., “*Concealed Information*” and “*Public Interest*”)

1 = One Investigative Characteristic

2 = Two Investigative Characteristics

Table 4. Investigative Branding for All Stories in Content Analysis (N=398)

	Number of Stories	Percentage
No Investigative Branding	312	78.4%
Investigative Branding	86	21.6%
Total	398	100%

Table 5. Investigative Scores for Branded Stories in Content Analysis (N=86)

Score	Number of Stories	Percentage
0	17	19.8%
1	31	36.0%
2	38	44.2%
Total	86	100%

0 = No Investigative Characteristics (i.e., “*Concealed Information*,” “*Public Interest*”)

1 = One Investigative Characteristic

2 = Two Investigative Characteristics

Table 6. Length of All Stories in Content Analysis

Category	Stories	Mean Length (sec.)	SD	Category	Stories	Mean Length (sec.)	SD
Non-branded	312	153.16***	45.89	Not Fully Investigative	352	153.96***	44.44
Investigative-branded	86	193.05***	73.68	Fully Investigative	46	221.61***	87.45
Total	398				398		

*** = Mean difference within column significant at $p < .001$

Note: Story length was measured from when a reporter started talking or when a story “package” started, whichever came first, to when a reporter finished talking or when a story “package” ended, whichever came last.

Table 7. Length of Investigative-Branded Stories in Content Analysis

Category	Stories	Mean Length (sec.)	SD
Not Fully Investigative	48	169.27**	53.10
Fully Investigative	38	223.08**	85.02
Total	86		

*** = Mean difference within column significant at $p < .01$

Note: Story length was measured from when a reporter started talking or when a story “package” started, whichever came first, to when a reporter finished talking or when a story “package” ended, whichever came last.

Table 8. Means and Bivariate Correlations (Pearson's *r*) for Key Variables (N=165)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Profit Emphasis	3.80	1.09				
2. Staff Size	53.60	39.54	.02			
3. Market Size (households)	762432.97	915481.56	-.01	.57***		
4. Competition (stations)	7.29	3.52	-.05	.52***	.72***	
5. Investigative Emphasis	3.13	1.08	-.21**	.31***	.25**	.20*

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $p < .001$ Table 9. Means and Bivariate Correlations (Pearson's *r*) for Key Variables Measured by Each Station (N=80)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Profit Emphasis	3.79	1.35									
2. Staff Size	65.73	45.99	-.08								
3. Market Size (Households)	1023452.38	1159883.75	-.02	.53***							
4. Competition (Stations)	8.16	3.66	-.04	.51***	.75***						
5. Full Investigative %	.11	.19	-.18	.23*	.22+	.19					
6. Branded Investigative %	.19	.24	-.16	.29*	.22+	.17	.77***				
7. Quality Index	1.25	.59	.02	-.10	.11	-.01	.64***	.14			
8. Investigative Length (seconds)	198.40	74.66	.05	.03	-.13	-.14	.28+	-.01	.50**		
9. Non-Investigative %	.58	.38	.02	.04	-.06	.07	-.74***	-.27	-.88***	-.52**	
10. Investigative Emphasis	3.28	1.12	-.25*	.28*	.27*	.27*	.34**	.37**	.36*	.17	-.38*

+ = $p < .10$ * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $p < .001$

Full Investigative % = fully investigative stories (with an investigative score of "2")/total stories

Branded Investigative % = investigative-branded stories/total stories

Quality Index = total investigative score for branded stories/total number of branded stories

Non-Investigative % = number of branded stories with an investigative score of "0" or "1"/total number of branded stories

Table 10. Regression Predicting Investigative Quantity

	% Full Investigative				% Branded Investigative			
	B	SE	β	<i>P</i>	B	SE	β	<i>P</i>
Profit Emphasis	-.030	.021	-.160	.163	-.031	.026	-.131	.235
Ownership (1=Public)	.041	.047	.108	.388	.127	.058	.263	.031*
Staff Size	.001	.001	.140	.310	.001	.001	.171	.203
Market Size (Households)	.000	.000	.209	.247	.000	.000	.060	.733
Competition (Stations)	-.007	.009	-.143	.410	-.002	.011	-.035	.833
<i>F</i> (5, 70)	1.77				2.80*			
<i>R</i> ²	11.2%				16.7%			

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $p < .001$

B = Unstandardized regression coefficient (beta)

SE = Standard error of unstandardized coefficient

 β = Standardized regression coefficient*P* = Significance level

Table 11. Regression Predicting Investigative Quality

	Quality Index				Investigative Length			
	B	SE	β	<i>P</i>	B	SE	β	<i>P</i>
Profit Emphasis	-.001	.100	-.003	.988	5.166	12.570	.071	.684
Ownership (1=Public)	-.087	.237	-.071	.715	-24.818	29.794	-.160	.411
Staff Size	-.001	.002	-.124	.530	.221	.275	.156	.427
Market Size (Households)	.000	.000	.318	.243	-2.188E-6	.000	-.043	.874
Competition (Stations)	-.026	.038	-.180	.490	-2.336	4.750	-.127	.626
<i>F</i> (5, 32)	.35				.39			
<i>R</i> ²	5.2%				5.8%			

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $p < .001$

B = Unstandardized regression coefficient (beta)

SE = Standard error of unstandardized coefficient

 β = Standardized regression coefficient*P* = Significance level

Table 12. Regression Predicting Investigative Emphasis

	B	SE	β	<i>P</i>
Profit Emphasis	-.218	.072	-.220	.003**
Ownership (1=Public)	.369	.165	.170	.027*
Staff Size	.007	.002	.241	.008**
Market Size (Households)	.000	.000	.078	.488
Competition (Stations)	-.010	.033	-.032	.766
<i>F</i> (5, 159)	6.62***			
<i>R</i> ²	17.2%			

* = $p < .05$

** = $p < .01$

*** = $p < .001$

B = Unstandardized regression coefficient (beta)

SE = Standard error of unstandardized coefficient

β = Standardized regression coefficient

P = Significance level

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Please answer these first few questions by circling the number which matches your answer.

1. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In general, the news media's commitment to investigative reporting is as strong today as it was a year or two ago."

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Thinking about *your station's* news over the past year or so, please indicate whether the amount of investigative journalism at your station has decreased significantly, decreased somewhat, remained the same, increased somewhat, or increased significantly.

1	2	3	4	5
Significantly Decreased	Somewhat Decreased	Remained the Same	Somewhat Increased	Significantly Increased

3. How satisfied are you with your present job?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied

4. Thinking about *your* work in the past year or so, how much of your reporting do you consider to be investigative?

1	2	3	4	5
None of My Reporting is Investigative	Some of My Reporting is Investigative	About Half of My Reporting is Investigative	Most of My Reporting is Investigative	All of My Reporting is Investigative

5. Has an investigative story you've produced ever won an award or been nominated for an award?

0	1
No	Yes

6. For how many years have you been a television reporter? _____ (fill in blank)

7. For how many years have you been conducting investigative reports? _____ (fill in blank)

Thinking about *your* investigative work in the past year or so, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the number which corresponds with your level of agreement:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
8. I have a great deal of freedom to select my own stories.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have a great deal of freedom to decide which aspects of a story should be emphasized.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I spend most of my time working on investigative reports, in comparison to other forms of journalism.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The amount of time I spend on investigative journalism, in comparison to other news stories, has <i>increased</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
12. The total number of staff members at my station assigned to work on investigative projects (reporters, researchers, producers, photographers, etc.) has <i>increased</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
13. The number of investigative projects I've worked on that took longer than two months to prepare has <i>increased</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
14. I often feel pressure to alter an investigative story because of its potential to embarrass our station's advertisers.	1	2	3	4	5

Thinking about *your* work in the past year or so, please indicate how relevant the following characteristics are in your investigative stories by circling the number which corresponds to your level of agreement:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
15. My investigative stories are in the public interest (e.g., topics which involve government, large corporations, or other powerful entities affecting large numbers of people).	1	2	3	4	5
16. My investigative stories reveal information that someone wants suppressed or is for other reasons concealed from the public. (e.g., revealing that the military covered up information about sexual assaults).	1	2	3	4	5
17. In my investigative stories, I pursue the main issues of each story beyond allegation and denial (e.g., looking for evidence of government corruption despite an official's denials).	1	2	3	4	5
18. My investigative stories reveal new information and/or bring together information that is already public in a way that is revealing (e.g., analyzing government receipts to show a misuse of public funds).	1	2	3	4	5
19. My investigative stories alert viewers to systemic failures and/or point out where society is failing or falling short of expected standards (e.g., mistreatment of patients at a large hospital).	1	2	3	4	5

20. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 indicates "Extremely Unlikely," 5 indicates "Neither Likely nor Unlikely," and 10 indicates "Extremely Likely," please **write down a number** along the scale below which indicates how likely you are to still be working at your current job in five years.

0 -----5-----10
 Extremely Unlikely Neither Likely nor Unlikely Extremely Likely

The next few questions concern investigative journalism at your station as a whole. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the number which corresponds to your answer:

		Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
21.	Reporters at my station are given adequate time to cover investigative news stories.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Investigative news routinely is given <i>prominent</i> air time at my station.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	My station routinely allows air time for <i>thorough</i> investigative news coverage.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Reporters in my newsroom think investigative reporting is the most important assignment at my station.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	My news director thinks investigative reporting is the most important assignment at my station.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	During the past year or so, airtime devoted to investigative news at my station has <i>increased</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
27.	During the past year or so, the <i>quality</i> of investigative news at my station has improved.	1	2	3	4	5

The following questions are about your news organization. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the number which corresponds to your answer:

		Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
28.	My news organization places a great deal of importance on open communication between ownership and news employees.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	My news organization places a great deal of importance on earning high, above-average profits.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	My news organization places a great deal of importance on maintaining high employee morale.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	My news organization places a great deal of importance on keeping the size of our audience as large as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	My news organization places a great deal of importance on producing high-quality journalism.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	Over the past year or so, newsroom resources at my station have been <i>shrinking</i> .	1	2	3	4	5

For the next two questions, please circle the number which corresponds to your answer.

34. Is your news organization owned by a public corporation whose shares are traded on a stock exchange?

- 0. No
- 1. Yes (which corporation? _____)
- 2. Don't Know

35. Is the person or company that owns your news organization located in your town or city?

- 0. No
- 1. Yes
- 2. Don't Know

36. How many full-time *news* employees work at your station? _____ (fill in the blank)

These next questions deal with what is most important to you about working in journalism. Please indicate the level of importance of each goal by circling the number which corresponds with your answer:

		Not Important at All	Fairly Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Fairly Important	Extremely Important
37.	Getting information to the public quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
38.	Providing analysis and interpretation of complex problems.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	Providing entertainment and relaxation.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	Investigating claims and statements made by the government.	1	2	3	4	5
41.	Providing analysis and interpretation of international developments.	1	2	3	4	5
42.	Staying away from stories where factual content cannot be verified.	1	2	3	4	5
43.	Concentrating on news that's of interest to the widest possible audience.	1	2	3	4	5
44.	Discussing national policy while it is still being developed.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	Developing intellectual and cultural interests of the public.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	Being an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	Being an adversary of businesses by being constantly skeptical of their actions.	1	2	3	4	5
48.	Setting the political agenda.	1	2	3	4	5
49.	Giving ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs.	1	2	3	4	5

	Not Important at All	Fairly Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Fairly Important	Extremely Important
50. Motivating ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Pointing people toward possible solutions to society's problems.	1	2	3	4	5

You're almost done with the survey...fewer than ten questions to go. This section of the questionnaire deals with how you incorporate social media into your daily reporting routine.

52. First of all, how many *professional* social media websites (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) do you currently maintain? (Professional social media websites are defined as websites that you use as part of your job rather than websites you use primarily to communicate with friends and family).

Number of professional social media websites: _____ (fill in the blank)

Thinking about *your* professional use of social media over the past year or so, please indicate your level of agreement with these statements by circling the number which corresponds with your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
53. I often use social media to interact with the public and provide a forum for feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
54. I often use social media to generate story ideas (e.g., asking for viewer feedback on a certain story idea, investigating a viewer comment that eventually turns into a story, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
55. I often use social media to assist in the production of stories (e.g., research, contacting sources, obtaining information, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5

Changing topics now. The following questions deal with financial and other personal information. Once again, all information you provide will be treated in strict confidence, and neither you nor your organization will ever be linked by name to this information.

56. What was your age on your last birthday? _____ (fill in the blank)

For the next three questions, please circle the number which corresponds to your answer.

57. What is your gender?

1 Female	2 Male
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58. What is your ethnicity?

1 Caucasian	2 African- American	3 Hispanic	4 Native American	5 Asian	6 Other
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59. Please indicate your total personal income, before taxes, from your work in journalism during the past year. Again, this information will be kept confidential.

1. Less than \$15,000
2. Between \$15,000 and \$29,999
3. Between \$30,000 and \$44,999
4. Between \$45,000 and \$59,999
5. Between \$60,000 and \$74,999
6. Between \$75,000 and \$89,999
7. Between \$90,000 and \$104,999
8. Between \$105,000 and \$119,999
9. Between \$120,000 and \$134,999
10. Between \$135,000 and \$149,999
11. \$150,000 or over

60. Finally, this question is important to our understanding of investigative journalism as a whole. In your own words, what is the biggest obstacle facing the production of investigative journalism at your station? (Please use as much space for your answer as necessary, including the back of the page)

Thank you very much for participating. Please return the completed survey in the provided envelope. If you would like the results of this survey sent to you, please write your email address here:

Appendix B

Coding Protocol

Introduction: This study examines local television investigative journalism stories to determine the amount, the quality, and the emphasis on this form of news at stations across the country. A constructed week of newscasts (M-F) will be drawn from a random sampling of stations that employ investigative journalists. The unit of analysis is each station's newscast. This particular analysis is part of a larger project examining the overall state of and influences on investigative television journalism.

Background: Critics and scholars have speculated about the status of investigative journalism for many years, but few studies have empirically tested the state of this news genre. Investigative news fulfills the all-important "watchdog" function that aims to help democracy by informing citizens about powerful institutions. Across all media, resources have been reduced over the past decade, which might indicate a decline in the resource-intensive practice of investigative reporting. However, recent studies have indicated that investigations might be taking on a more prominent role at news outlets. Local television remains the top source for news among adults, making it a significant testing ground.

Method: Content analysis involves the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to definitions and rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories, often with the purpose of drawing inferences to antecedent or subsequent conditions or events. Analysis should be based on content only and should be free from coder bias and personal opinion.

Procedure: Coders should read the protocol before each coding session, and refer to it during coding. Coding sessions should last no more than four hours at a time to prevent fatigue. Specific coding instructions and operational definitions of key variables are explained below.

1. **Coder ID** – Identification number of each unique coder:
 - (1) Jesse Abdenour
 - (2) Justin Blankenship
 - (3) Diane Francis
2. **Series Number** – number corresponding to the newscast being examined.
3. **Station ID** – number corresponding to the station being examined.
4. **City** – the principal city from which the newscast originated.
5. **Call Letters** – Call letters (WOIO, KING, etc.) of the station being examined.
6. **DMA** – Market ranking (11, 156, etc.) of the station being examined.

7. **Day** – Day of the week.
8. **Date** – Month/day (11/25, 2/10, etc.) when the newscast aired.
9. **Time** – Time of day (10, 11, etc.) when the newscast aired. PM shows.

Identifying Stories to Code: Coders should analyze every news “package” story that begins within the first 15 minutes of a newscast, is a FULL two minutes in length, and is an original, locally produced story. In addition, coders should analyze any package that is *introduced or teased* as expressly “investigative” within the first 15 minutes, *regardless of story length and position of the story* in the newscast.

Package: a story that includes a recorded reporter voice track.

Newscast Length: a newscast begins either when the main “show open” appears, or when a tease or “cold open” appears immediately before the show open, whichever comes first.

Story Length: a story starts either when the reporter begins talking, or the package begins, whichever comes first. A story ends either when the reporter is done talking, or the package ends, whichever comes last.

Locally Produced Story: a story featuring a reporter or anchor from the local station. News packages that do not feature a local reporter should not be coded.

Expressly “Investigative”: a story introduced or teased using any form of the word “investigate” (“investigation,” “I-Team,” “Channel 6 investigates,” “News 4 investigator,” etc.). The investigative word or phrase should refer to the station’s activity, and not the activity of an outside party. For instance, mention of a police “investigation” would not qualify.

- If a package is introduced or teased as expressly “investigative” within the first 15 minutes of a show, it should be coded in all instances, even if it is less than two minutes in length, and even if the story begins after the 15-minute mark.

If, within the first 15 minutes, there are no stories that fit the preceding description, coders are done with that newscast. For each story fitting the above description, please code according to the following instructions:

10. **Investigative Branding** – indicate if a story was introduced or teased using any form of the word “investigate” (“investigation,” “I-Team,” “Channel 6 investigates,” “News 4 investigator,” etc.). The investigative word or phrase should refer to the station’s activity, and not the activity of an outside party. For instance, mention of a police “investigation” would not qualify (1=yes, 0=no).
11. **Tease** – indicate if the story was previewed in a short “tease” segment. A tease could appear at the beginning of the show or in the middle of a show (1=yes, 0=no).
12. **Lead** – indicate if the story led the newscast (1=yes, 0=no). A lead story is defined as the first substantive story in the newscast. It is usually, but not always, after the initial anchor introductions.

- 13. Block** – indicate the show block in which the story appeared (e.g., A). The initial segment of consecutive news stories before the first commercial break is the “A” block. The second segment of consecutive news stories before the second commercial break is the “B” block, and so on.
- 14. Position** – indicate the position of the story within the show block (e.g., the second story in a block would be marked as “2”). Sports stories and weather segments count; teasers do not count.
- 15. Length** – indicate the length of the story in seconds (e.g., 182). A story starts either when the reporter begins talking, or when the package begins, whichever comes first. A story ends either when the reporter is done talking, or when the package ends, whichever comes last.

Investigative Characteristics: Coders are expected to judge whether each investigative characteristic is present within a story. Investigative characteristics are drawn from the following definition of investigative journalism: a story must **reveal information that was concealed from the public**, and it must be **in the public interest**. Each characteristic is discussed further below.

- 16. Concealed Information** – The reporter reveals information that was concealed from the public. To determine whether this standard has been met, consider the following criteria regarding the information revealed in the story: (examples provided)

- ☐ **A. Was someone trying to hide it?**
- interviews with former and current military members establishing that rape and sexual harassment within the armed forces is tolerated, and often not reported, despite denials by military officials.
 - internal memos or emails establishing that U.S. officials had knowledge of the killing of innocent civilians in a war zone, despite denial by the government.
 - interviews and documents showing that the mayor fired city employees to keep them quiet about official misconduct
- ☐ **B. Was it concealed by law?**
- student records, protected by FERPA, demonstrating that college athletes received passing grades for fake classes
 - classified government records showing that the CIA was spying on American Muslims
 - confidential hospital records showing that a patient did not receive proper medical care

- ☐ C. Was it available to the public, but compiled by the reporter in a way that exposes a widespread pattern?
- hours of public police dashboard videos revealing patterns of racial profiling on traffic stops
 - public tax documents and receipts establishing that city employees are abusing public funds by taking unnecessary vacations and buying expensive dinners
 - interviews with law officials and witnesses establishing that a man convicted of murder did not receive a fair trial

If you checked a box beside **EITHER A, B, or C**, mark “1” for Concealed Information (variable 16). If you did not check any of the boxes, mark “0”.

17. Public Interest – The story must be in the public interest. To determine whether this standard has been met, consider the following criteria regarding the information revealed in the story:

A. Have citizen(s) been harmed in any of the following areas?

Health <input type="checkbox"/>	Quality of Life <input type="checkbox"/>	Safety <input type="checkbox"/>	Money or Property <input type="checkbox"/>
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B. Does a party responsible for the harm that occurred fall in any of the following categories? (examples provided)

Government <input type="checkbox"/> (Police Department) (City Council)	Public Institution <input type="checkbox"/> (Public University) (Public High School)	Large Private Entity <input type="checkbox"/> (Corporation) (Private Hospital)
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If you checked at least one box in **BOTH A & B**, write “1” for Public Interest (variable 17). If you did not check at least one box in both A & B, write “0”.

18. Slug – Write the essence of the story in four words or less.

19. Story Count – On the Excel coding document, indicate in every row corresponding to the station being examined the number of stories you coded within the newscast. (e.g., 2). Leave at least one row for each newscast. Delete rows that are not used.

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