

Sustaining Investigative Journalism: The Intersection of Fellowships, Grants and Strategic Communication

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Abstract

Investigative journalism is vital for democratic societies but requires significant resources, posing financial challenges for journalists and media organizations. Although fellowships and grants exist to support investigative reporting, journalists often struggle to access these funds due to strict eligibility criteria, complicated application processes, and limited awareness of opportunities. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding the qualitative experiences of journalists who apply for these grants, including their challenges and feedback, which provides valuable insights for improving funding programs and ensuring that investigative journalism can be sustained through effective strategic communication and resource allocation. Against this backdrop, this study explores various fellowships and grants available to investigative journalists, highlighting their objectives, eligibility criteria, application processes, and impact on fostering rigorous, independent journalism. The study examines notable programs such as the Fellowship for Investigative Journalism in East Africa, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting Grants, African Investigative Journalism Conference (AIJC) Fellowship, African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) Journalism Fellowships, and Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) Fellowships. By presenting a comprehensive review of literature and case studies focusing on grants and fellowships, this study aims to inform journalists, recipients, and investigative funders about opportunities for financial support encouraging the pursuit of investigative stories.

Keywords: Investigative Journalism, Grants, Fellowships, Strategic Communication, Africa

Introduction and Background

As Carson (2019) affirms, investigative journalism is vital for democratic societies. It however requires significant resources, posing financial challenges for journalists and media organizations. Although fellowships and grants exist to support investigative reporting, journalists often struggle to access these funds due to strict eligibility criteria, complicated application processes, and limited awareness of available opportunities (Lassila-Merisalo, 2018). Additionally, there is a gap in understanding the qualitative experiences of journalists who apply for these grants, including their challenges and feedback, which provides valuable insights for improving funding programs and ensuring that investigative journalism can be sustained through effective strategic communication and resource allocation.

This paper explores various fellowships and grants available to investigative journalists and then highlights their objectives, eligibility criteria, application processes, and impact on fostering rigorous, independent journalism (Hume, & Abbot, 2017). By examining notable programs such as the Fellowship for Investigative Journalism in East Africa, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting Grants, African Investigative Journalism Conference (AIJC) Fellowship, African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) Journalism Fellowships, and Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) Fellowships, this paper highlights the intersection of financial support and strategic communication in enabling investigative journalists to pursue impactful stories.

Padania (2019) highlights the importance of these funding mechanisms in sustaining a dynamic investigative journalism landscape closely tied to strategic communication. Effective strategic communication, as affirmed by Hofman (2019), is crucial in raising awareness about available fellowships and grants, helping journalists navigate application processes, and advocating for the need to fund investigative reporting. By fostering partnerships between media organizations, funding bodies, and the public, strategic communication can amplify the visibility and accessibility of these financial resources, ensuring that investigative journalism continues to thrive in the face of economic challenges.

Investigative journalism involves deeply probing and researching issues, events, or situations to uncover information that is often hidden, obscured, or misrepresented (Global Investigative Journalism Network, 2024). This type of journalism typically requires extensive research, fact-checking, and verification to expose wrongdoing, corruption, or other issues of significant public interest. Investigative journalism aims to reveal the truth, hold powerful entities accountable, and inform the public on matters that affect society. According to Bohnstedt (2011), investigative journalism is characterized by its in-depth exploration of complex issues, often focusing on exposing crime, political corruption, or corporate wrongdoing.

Problem Statement

The decline of investigative reporting in small and mid-market news organizations, as affirmed by Wasserman (2008), poses a significant threat to watchdog journalism, which is essential for democracy and public accountability. Without adequate resources and a supportive newsroom culture, the ability of these organizations to conduct thorough investigations and uphold their role as societal watchdogs is at risk, leading to a diminishing capacity for public oversight and informed citizenry.

This decline, as noted by Wasserman (2008), poses a critical threat to the essence of watchdog journalism, which is fundamental for democracy and public accountability. According to Just, Levine, and Regan

(2002), this decline is mirrored in the data from the annual survey of news directors, where despite 75% of newsrooms claiming to engage in investigative work, only a meager 2% of stories are labeled as such, with just 1% being original station-initiated investigations. This trend highlights the diminishing capacity for in-depth investigative journalism, particularly in smaller and midmarket outlets where resources and time are increasingly scarce.

Wasserman's (2008) concerns are further validated by Just, Levine & Regan's (2002) survey findings that the level of original watchdog reporting has steadily decreased, from one in sixty stories in 1998 to less than one in 150 today. This reduction emphasizes newsrooms' challenges in maintaining robust investigative units, especially as economic pressures and budget cuts tighten their grip. The survey also reveals that while some news directors strive to uphold investigative journalism despite the financial strain, the scope and impact of such investigations vary widely, with a significant portion bordering on the trivial or sensational rather than addressing critical investigative journalism issues.

Given this context, as affirmed by Lashmar (2009), the critical need for new funding mechanisms and organizational changes within newsrooms becomes apparent and communication plays a pivotal role in this transformation. The diminishing resources and increasing financial strain highlighted in the Just, Levine & Regan's (2002) survey findings demonstrate that traditional funding models and organizational structures can no longer support the rigorous investigative work required for effective watchdog journalism. This, therefore, means that to reverse the decline in investigative reporting, especially in smaller and midmarket news organizations, there must be a concerted effort to secure alternative funding sources and reconfigure newsroom operations through effective communication. These changes are essential to ensure the survival and effectiveness of investigative journalism, enabling newsrooms to overcome economic constraints and reinvest in the kind of in-depth reporting vital for democracy and public accountability.

Research Questions

- What are the objectives, eligibility criteria, application processes and geographical reach of various fellowships and grants available for investigative journalists?
- How can strategic communication effectively raise awareness and foster collaborations among media organizations, funding bodies and stakeholders to sustain investigative journalism?
- What challenges do journalists face in accessing fellowships and grants, and how do these barriers impact their ability to conduct investigative journalism?
- What are the best practices in resource allocation that enhance the long-term viability of investigative journalism?

Literature Review

The study includes a comprehensive review of the literature on fellowships and grants for investigative journalism and case studies, focusing on grant and fellowship recipients, investigative funders, and journalists.

Fellowships and Grants for Investigative Journalism (Differences)

Nisbet, Wihbey, Kristiansen, & Bajak, (2018).

Roca, Coleman, Haelle, & Lee (2020).

Aspect	Fellowship	Grant
Purpose	Supports investigative journalists with financial aid, mentorship, and resources.	Primarily provides financial support for specific investigative reporting projects.
Scope	Often broader, including training, mentorship, networking, and sometimes collaboration.	Focused on funding the costs associated with a particular investigative project.
Duration	Typically longer-term, ranging from a few months to a year or more.	Usually short-term, tied to the duration of the specific project being funded.
Support Provided	Includes financial support, training, workshops, and access to expert mentors.	Primarily financial, covering costs like travel, research, and data collection.
Eligibility	May target early-career to experienced journalists, depending on the nature of the fellowship.	Often available to both individual journalists and media organizations.
Focus	Encourages professional development alongside investigative reporting.	Solely focused on producing a specific investigative piece or series.
Networking Opportunities	Typically provides access to a network of other fellows and industry professionals.	Networking is less common, though some grants may include access to a network or community.
Application Requirements	It may require a detailed project proposal, resume, and sometimes letters of recommendation.	Generally, it requires a detailed project proposal and budget, but less emphasis on career development.
Outcomes	Produces in-depth stories along with professional growth for the journalist.	Focuses on delivering a completed investigative story or series.
Examples	Knight-Wallace Fellowship, Nieman Fellowship	Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting Grant, Fund for Investigative Journalism Grant

Fellowship for Investigative Journalism in East Africa

The Fellowship for Investigative Journalism in East Africa is offered by Deutsche Welle Akademie (DW Akademie). It is a specialized program aimed at supporting and enhancing the skills of investigative journalists in the East African region.

This fellowship is part of DW Akademie's mission to strengthen media development and foster free, independent journalism in challenging environments (Global Forum for Media Development, 2024). The program provides journalists with mentorship, resources, and opportunities to produce in-depth investigative stories that hold power to account and address critical social issues in the region.

The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) is a key global network of organizations that support independent media, journalism, and the broader media development sector. DW Akademie is a prominent organization within the global media development ecosystem, often collaborating with or participating in networks and initiatives connected to GFMD.

The fellowship aims to support investigative reporting by providing financial and professional support to investigative journalists in East Africa to produce in-depth stories on digital challenges. It also creates opportunities for journalists to connect with peers, editors, data experts, and scientists working on similar projects within the East African region. The fellowship is open to investigative journalists from East African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, as well as journalists from these countries living in exile within East Africa. Applicants must meet several eligibility criteria to qualify. They are required to have at least five years of professional experience as media practitioners and proven qualifications as investigative journalists. Additionally, applicants must demonstrate in-depth knowledge and experience in publishing stories about digital threats, as well as possess excellent analytical skills, attention to detail, and effective written and oral communication abilities (Global Forum for Media Development, 2024).

Applicants should be willing to work closely with a mentor, speak fluent English, and have a valid passport, as the fellowship requires travel to Kenya for the kick-off event in Nairobi. The program is designed to foster rigorous, independent journalism by equipping journalists with the necessary resources, mentorship, and networks to investigate and report on digital threats in East Africa. Beyond professional development, the fellowship also seeks to raise public awareness and understanding of digital challenges in the region, thus contributing to a more informed and engaged society (Global Forum for Media Development, 2024).

The application process for the fellowship begins with journalists submitting a detailed pitch for an in-depth journalistic media product focused on digital threats. In 2024, a total of 15 investigative journalists were selected based on the quality and relevance of their pitches. Following the selection process, the chosen fellows were invited to participate in a kick-off event held in Nairobi, Kenya, at the end of June 2024. The fellowship officially runs from July to mid-November 2024, during which each fellow receives financial support amounting to 4,000 EUR to produce their investigative story. By the end of the fellowship period, the completed investigative stories are published in the media outlets where the fellows work, ensuring the dissemination of critical insights on digital challenges to a broader audience (Global Forum for Media Development, 2024).

Notable Programs in Investigative Journalism

Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting Grants (Pulitzer Center, 2024) aims to support journalists covering underreported stories, particularly in areas affected by crises, systemic corruption, and investigations into human rights abuses and violations, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and oppression. The grants also prioritize projects focusing on conflict and post-conflict reporting, including coverage of ongoing conflicts, peace-building efforts, and the aftermath of wars. Environmental and climate change reporting is another key focus, with an emphasis on stories about environmental degradation, climate justice, and sustainable development, especially in regions vulnerable to climate change. Additionally, the grants support public health reporting, covering global health crises, healthcare access, pandemics, and health equity issues.

The grants are open to both freelance and staff journalists from around the world, including those based in Africa, as long as the proposed project focuses on underreported issues of global significance. The application process involves submitting a detailed project proposal, which includes the story idea, timeline,

budget, and samples of previous work. The Pulitzer Center evaluates applications based on the relevance, originality, and potential impact of the proposed projects.

The impact of these grants is significant, as they enable journalists to cover critical stories that might otherwise lack funding, thereby raising awareness of pressing global and regional issues. The grants have a global geographical reach, including African regions. They also offer various opportunities for investigative journalists through specialized funding streams such as Global Reporting Grants, AI Reporting Grants, Conflict and War Reporting Grants, Rainforest Reporting Grants, Climate and Labour Reporting Grants, and Science Misinformation Grants (Pulitzer Center, 2024).

African Investigative Journalism Conference (AIJC) Fellowships

The African Investigative Journalism Conference (AIJC) Fellowship is a Pan African opportunity designed to support experienced investigative journalists from across Africa to participate in the continent's premier investigative journalism event. The fellowship provides selected journalists with the chance to attend conferences. The last was a three-day AIJC conference held on November 22, 2023, in Johannesburg, South Africa (African Investigative Journalism Website).

The AIJC supports African journalists in attending the annual AIJC, providing them with networking opportunities, skills development and resources to improve investigative reporting. The Fellowship is open to African journalists, with a focus on those engaged in investigative reporting. Applicants often need to submit a work portfolio. The application process typically involves an application form with a requirement to submit previous investigative work, a letter of motivation, and references. It enables journalists to network, access training, and receive mentorship, thus improving the quality of investigative journalism on the continent.

African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) Journalism Fellowships (African Centre for Media Excellence, 2024)

African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) is a Kampala-based independent, non-profit professional organization dedicated to improving African journalism and mass communication. Established in Uganda, ACME has a fund fostering professional excellence and supporting Ugandan journalists in investigative reporting. ACME offers training programs aimed at mid-career journalists to enhance their skills in various areas, including investigative journalism, data journalism, and specialized reporting.

The fellowship provides media literacy training to civil society organizations, corporate entities, and the broader public, promoting a deeper understanding of how media operates and its role in governance and public accountability (ACME, 2024). ACME's main research areas include media performance, audience engagement, and other critical areas to support evidence-based improvements in journalism across Africa. The fund advocates freedom of expression and press freedom, working to protect journalists' rights and promote an environment conducive to independent and quality journalism. In its Programs and Initiatives, it has Journalism Fellowships that offer training, mentorship and financial support to journalists interested in in-depth and investigative reporting on governance, transparency, and public sector accountability.

Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) Fellowships

The Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) Fellowships provide financial support to journalists, enabling them to attend the Global Investigative Journalism Conference. These fellowships aim to offer participants access to training, resources, and networking opportunities that enhance their investigative reporting skills. The program is open to investigative journalists from developing countries and underrepresented communities, with applicants evaluated based on their journalistic experience and previous investigative work (Global Investigative Journalism Network, 2024).

The application process involves submitting an online application, which includes samples of investigative work, letters of recommendation, and a statement of purpose. The fellowship's impact is significant, as it provides journalists with access to valuable training and resources, ultimately leading to improved investigative journalism in their home countries. With a global geographical reach, the program particularly focuses on developing countries, including nations in Africa, thereby fostering a Pan-African presence within the global investigative journalism community (Global Investigative Journalism Network, 2024)

Strategic Communication at the Intersection of Fellowships and Grants

According to Swasy (2020), strategic communication is crucial in raising awareness about the importance of investigative journalism and fostering collaborations among media organizations, funding bodies, fellowship and grant providers, and other stakeholders. Strategic communication educates key stakeholders, including media organizations, the public, policymakers, and funding bodies, about the value of investigative journalism in promoting transparency, accountability, and democracy. Through campaigns, reports, public talks, and digital media efforts, journalists and advocates can emphasize the societal impact of investigative stories that expose corruption, human rights violations, and other critical issues (McGuire, 1986).

Targeted media campaigns that showcase successful investigative journalism projects can help illustrate their importance. Highlighting stories that lead to policy changes, justice for marginalized communities, or greater corporate accountability demonstrates the value of these efforts (Raphael et al., 2004). Additionally, highlighting the personal stories of journalists who have overcome significant challenges to bring important issues to light can humanize the profession and increase public empathy. These campaigns can also engage audiences by showing investigative journalism's direct impact on their daily lives, fostering a deeper connection and support for the field.

According to Hume & Abbot (2017), strategic communication links media organizations with funders such as foundations, international organizations, and governments. Strategic communication facilitates partnerships between investigative journalists, media organizations, funding bodies, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders (Müller & Wiik, 2021). These partnerships are essential for creating a sustainable environment for investigative journalism. Journalists can use strategic communication to foster cross-border and cross-sector partnerships, as Kaplan (2013) affirms, where resources such as expertise, data, and funding are shared.

Challenges Faced by Investigative Reporters When Accessing Fellowships and Grants

Journalists face challenges when accessing fellowships and grants, especially those focused on investigative reporting. Some of these challenges include fellowships and grants, often having limited slots, leading to high competition among journalists. Only a few opportunities are available relative to the growing number of applicants (Hume & Abbot, 2017).

The application processes for fellowships and grants can be complicated and time-consuming. Journalists must often submit detailed proposals, budgets, timelines, and work samples, which may be difficult to prepare under tight deadlines (Bendiscioli, 2019). Journalists working in small newsrooms or as freelancers may lack resources like time, support staff, and funding to prepare comprehensive applications. Without the backing of larger media organizations, investigative journalists may face difficulties securing fellowships and grants, as funders often look for established organizational affiliations as a form of credibility. Some may also struggle with the costs of submitting applications, such as travel to interviews or proposal presentations.

Many journalists, especially in small or underfunded markets, may not be aware of the availability of fellowships or grants (Free Press Unlimited, 2022). Even when they are, they may lack the necessary information to submit competitive applications. Even when journalists secure fellowships or grants, there can be limited follow-up support or mentorship, making it challenging to execute complex investigative projects or sustain long-term investigative work beyond the funding period.

Theoretical Framework

Gatekeeping Theory, originally conceptualized in Lewin (1947) and affirmed by Kurt Lewin in 1947 and later expanded upon by David Manning White in 1950, is a communication theory that explores how gatekeepers filter and select information—individuals or groups who control access to media content. In journalism, gatekeepers include editors, producers, news directors, and other decision-makers within media organizations who determine which stories are published, how they are framed, and how much coverage they receive.

As affirmed by Lewin (1947), the Gatekeeping Theory involves Selection and Filtering. Gatekeepers determine which news stories are deemed newsworthy and, therefore, selected for publication. This selection process is influenced by news values, audience demand, and organizational priorities. Once a story is selected, gatekeepers influence how it is framed, what aspects are emphasized, the angle taken, and the overall tone. This framing shapes public perception and understanding of the issue.

Gatekeeping Theory in Investigative Journalism

In the context of investigative journalism, gatekeeping plays a crucial role in determining what investigations are pursued, published, and amplified. Investigative journalism typically involves high costs, long-term commitment, and significant risk, which means that only certain stories get the necessary resources to be brought to light. Editors, funders of grants and fellowships, and organizational leaders act as gatekeepers, deciding which issues are worth investigating and which are not. Gatekeepers such as government officials, corporate executives, and whistleblowers can either facilitate or hinder access to the data necessary for deep investigations.

Fellowships, Grants and Gatekeeping

With newsroom budgets declining and the capacity to support long-term investigative work shrinking, fellowships and grants have become vital for sustaining investigative journalism (Walton, 2010). However, these external funding mechanisms introduce new layers of gatekeeping. This reliance on external funding can sometimes lead to challenges in maintaining editorial independence and shaping the agenda of investigative reporting, as funding bodies may have specific priorities or interests that influence the scope and focus of journalism projects.

Organizations that offer fellowships and grants also play a gatekeeping role by determining who receives funding based on specific criteria (Olm, 2022). Their funding instructions and qualification criteria shape the kinds of stories that are investigated. Some funders may prioritize stories with themes like human rights, corruption, or environmental issues like the Earth Journalism Network (2024). This thereby influences the focus of investigative journalism.

The decision-making process for fellowships and grants can be highly competitive and subjective. Gatekeepers at these institutions evaluate applicants based on their experience, the potential impact of the funding on their projects, and how well they align with the goals. Once funding is secured, grant providers may set conditions that influence the direction of the investigation. For instance, they might limit funding to certain geographic regions or issues, thus guiding the types of stories that receive support.

The Intersection of Strategic Communication and Gatekeeping in Investigative Journalism

Strategic communication within investigative journalism is essential in managing relationships with gatekeepers, securing funding, and ensuring that impactful stories reach the public (Salter, 2005). Investigative journalists and their supporters use strategic communication to advocate for their work. As Schwalbe, Silcock, and Candello (2015) affirm, effective communication strategies can influence gatekeepers in newsrooms, fellowship organizations, and funding bodies to prioritize investigative journalism.

When used to build networks of supporters including NGOs, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders, strategic communication can help journalists navigate gatekeeping barriers by providing alternative funding sources, legal support, and audience reach (Salter, 2005). Gatekeepers are often influenced by audience interest. Journalists can use strategic communication to raise public awareness of the importance of investigative journalism, thereby increasing pressure on gatekeepers to fund and publish in-depth investigations.

The Gatekeeping theory is deeply intertwined with the sustainability of investigative journalism, particularly in the context of fellowships and grants. Gatekeepers, whether they are editors, funders, or sources, control access to the resources and platforms necessary for conducting and disseminating investigative work (Hume & Abbot, 2017). Through strategic communication, investigative journalists can engage with these gatekeepers, secure the funding they need, and influence the types of stories that reach the public. Therefore, understanding and navigating gatekeeping dynamics is crucial for sustaining investigative journalism in an increasingly resource-constrained media landscape.

Methodology

This research paper reviewed various sources of secondary data. Secondary research, sometimes commonly referred to as desk research, was used. The secondary research was grounded on tried and tested data that was previously evaluated and filtered. The data collected was customized and filtered to fit the researcher's needs. According to Yin (2014), secondary research was used in this study because of the reliable sources available.

Access to historical data from existing literature in academic journals, social media, articles, and research papers provided a wide range of data on investigative journalism, fellowships, grants, and strategic communication, which was helpful for tracking trends and comparing data. Data sources were also from prior studies on Sustaining Investigative Journalism: The Intersection of Fellowships, Grants, and Strategic Communication.

This study gathered and collated all this data to produce a new secondary dataset. Secondary research was ideal in this study as it was conducted by third-party researchers who were not invested in the research's outcome. Secondary research allowed the researcher to replicate findings using similar analyses (David & Sutton, 2004).

The criteria used to select secondary sources of data were based on relevance, validity, currency, scope and accessibility. Relevance was a key factor, ensuring that the information gathered directly addressed the research topic or question. The data collected was specifically related to the study area and focused on sustaining investigative journalism through the intersection of fellowships, grants, and strategic communication. Validity was also prioritized, with efforts made to verify the accuracy and reliability of the information. Only credible sources were used, ensuring that the data was neither manipulated nor biased. The researcher documented all sample features, characteristics, methods, and procedures to maintain transparency.

Currency was another critical criterion, with the study relying on up-to-date information relevant to the current research problem. This ensured that the findings addressed contemporary challenges and opportunities in sustaining investigative journalism. The scope of the research was clearly defined, determining the type and quantity of information required to answer the research questions. Finally, accessibility was considered, ensuring that the data and information sources were readily available, credible, and easy to access. All identified sources of information were both reliable and accessible, contributing to the overall rigor and comprehensiveness of the study.

Of importance to note, the secondary data used contained meaningful and relevant answers to this study's research questions. Key themes that matched Investigative Journalism, Grants, Fellowships, and Strategic Communication were selected. Correlations and relationships between the different sets of data were identified.

This study adopted descriptive research design. Kothari (2004) defines descriptive research design as a type of research design that describes the characteristics, behavior, or conditions of a particular phenomenon or group of individuals. A descriptive research design was used in this study because the researcher wanted to obtain information about the current status of a particular situation or phenomenon which is organizational

subcultures, communication preferences, and workplace communication. The aim of descriptive research was to describe what had happened without attempting to explain the causes or reasons behind it.

This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the topic of "Sustaining Investigative Journalism: The Intersection of Fellowships, Grants, and Strategic Communication." The study utilized desk research to gather existing literature, reports, and data on this topic. The research design involved comparative industry analysis to identify patterns, trends, and differences in sustainable investigative journalism while integrating this with strategic communication.

Secondary data analysis was used, which involved reviewing existing literature from books, articles, websites, media, journals, government publications, industry reports, research papers, and corporate sustainability reports. The study used content analysis, which involved analyzing and interpreting the content of written materials, such as documents, media, journals, and articles, to obtain information about the topic. The data collected through these methods were analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns or trends in the data.

Content analysis techniques were used to identify frames used in Sustaining Investigative Journalism and the Intersection of Fellowships, Grants, and Strategic Communication. Cohen & Morrison (2017) affirmed that the study developed a coding scheme to categorize frames based on themes such as investigative journalism, grants and fellowships.

The coding scheme was consistent and reliable for the collected social media samples. Thematic coding and content analysis were used to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships related to sustainable investigative journalism, grants, and fellowships. This process involved categorizing and interpreting data from literature reviews, policy documents, and corporate reports to uncover insights and trends in Investigative Journalism and Strategic Communication.

Results & Discussion

In a study by Lewis (2012), both the Knight Foundation's approach and the focus on sustaining investigative journalism highlight the importance of funding and support systems, such as fellowships and grants, in fostering quality journalism. Secondly, the shift from traditional journalism to a broader information framework aligns with the need for innovative funding models to sustain investigative efforts in a rapidly changing media landscape. Thirdly, strategic communication plays a crucial role in both contexts, as effective outreach and engagement are essential for garnering support and ensuring that investigative journalism meets community information needs.

The study by Hume and Abbot (2017) highlights the importance of funding through fellowships and grants, emphasizing that increased donor interest can enhance the sustainability of investigative journalism. It emphasizes the need for strategic communication to effectively demonstrate the impact of investigative projects, which aligns with the challenges funders face in measuring grant effectiveness. Secondly, the focus on collaboration among organizations, as seen in the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), supports the idea that strategic partnerships can strengthen investigative journalism efforts and resource sharing, which is crucial for long-term sustainability.

The intersection of fellowships, grants, and strategic communication is critical in sustaining investigative journalism, especially amid economic challenges and evolving media landscapes. Investigative journalism,

a key pillar for ensuring transparency and accountability, increasingly depends on external funding sources such as grants and fellowships. These financial mechanisms provide journalists with the resources to pursue in-depth, time-intensive investigations that media organizations, particularly small and mid-sized ones, may struggle to support due to financial constraints.

Recommendations

To successfully amplify and sustain the impact of investigative journalism, media organizations, journalists, and funders must collaborate and be innovative besides strategically investing in key areas. This includes increasing fellowship opportunities for diverse investigative journalism, ensuring sustainable and flexible grant models, encouraging cross-collaboration among global media outlets both large and small, promoting journalist safety and independence, strengthening public engagement and civic participation, and advocating for long-term business models for investigative reporting.

Following the findings of this research, it is evident that journalists have been faced with several challenges in accessing fellowships and grants, hindering their ability to effectively conduct investigative work. Financial barriers, such as application fees or travel costs, can be mitigated by providing fee waivers, travel grants, or stipends for applicants from developing countries (Clement et. al, 2018). Mentorship programs should be introduced to guide potential applicants in preparing competitive proposals and applications. Dodd (2021) emphasizes the need to design eligibility criteria that ensure inclusivity and the inclusion of diverse groups of journalists.

To expand fellowship opportunities for diverse investigative journalists, it is important to move beyond focusing on elite journalists and well-established media outlets. Priority should be made to create opportunities for underrepresented journalists including those from marginalized communities, women, freelance journalists, and community newsrooms. This approach will enable the diversity of perspectives in investigative reporting (Bjerknes, 2024; Starosielski & Walker, 2016; Gynnild, 2014).

Against this backdrop, resource allocation should prioritize impact-driven projects that address critical issues such as human rights, corruption, and environmental challenges to ensure the long-term viability of investigative journalism (Schiffrin et.al, 2021; Lewis, 2012). Further, transparent and accountable mechanisms for fund distribution must be established to guarantee fairness and prevent favoritism. Investments in training, mentorship, and skills development programs are vital to sustaining high-quality investigative journalism. Moreover, adopting long-term funding models, such as multi-year grants or endowments, can reduce dependency on short-term funding and provide greater stability for investigative journalism initiatives.

Given the global challenges surrounding physical mobility particularly for journalists in conflict zones or restrictive environments, the development and advancement of more remote or hybrid fellowship models is important in the creation of better opportunities (Walton, 2010). Most notably, this could target niche topics such as health, environmental, and technology reporting. These specialized areas require in-depth expertise hence such fellowships can provide a platform to develop journalists who are experts in these fields.

The Knight Wallace Fellowship, for example provides journalists with the opportunity to thoroughly focus on their stories without the pressure of daily deadlines. This has promoted investigative journalists working

on issues such as climate change. Additionally, fellowships provided by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) focus on capacity building amongst women in the media with an emphasis to diversity in investigative reporting. Most notable, their recent fellowships have supported female journalists reporting on issues on gender inequality, corruption, human and sexual rights in underrepresented regions. The Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) has consistently advocated for increased funding and opportunities for investigative journalists from developing countries to gain specialized training and fellowships, ensuring more equitable access to resources (Polyak et.al, 2019; Lewis, 2012)

To enhance access to fellowships and grants for investigative journalists, it is essential to create comprehensive databases or platforms that detail the objectives, eligibility criteria, application processes, and geographical reach of various opportunities (Muller & Wiik, 2023). Such centralized resources would make information more accessible, especially for journalists in underrepresented regions. Simplifying application processes by reducing unnecessary bureaucratic steps would encourage more applicants to participate. Additionally, fellowship providers should focus on increasing regional representation by widely promoting opportunities in developing countries and underrepresented areas, particularly targeting African, Asian, and Latin American journalists through specific outreach programs (Dodd, 2021).

According to Schiffrin et.al (2021), strategic communication is critical in raising awareness and fostering collaborations to sustain investigative journalism. Awareness campaigns utilizing social media, webinars, and newsletters can educate journalists, media organizations, and stakeholders on the availability and importance of fellowships and grants. Collaborative platforms such as conferences, forums, or online hubs can serve as spaces where media organizations, funders, and journalists connect, share resources, and build partnerships. Furthermore, funding bodies should actively partner with regional organizations and media houses to align fellowship opportunities with local needs and challenges, thereby creating a more robust support system for investigative journalism.

Finally, Investigative journalism is most impactful when it resonates with the public. According to Bjercknes (2024) and Dodd (2021), journalists should invest in trust-building strategies, such as providing transparent reporting processes, correcting errors promptly, and engaging in meaningful dialogue with audiences. Furthermore, the use of interactive platforms for public output should be encouraged whereby readers can share their tips, perspectives, and opinions besides participating in investigations. In line with this, crowdsourcing can be used in uncovering stories, particularly in areas where journalists may not have first-hand access.

Findings and Conclusion

Findings

The evolving media landscape necessitates new strategies for funding and supporting investigative journalism. From this study, fellowships, grants, and strategic communication are all key components of this model. This combination provides the necessary framework for fostering a robust, independent press capable of continuing to play a critical role in society by investing in the sustainability of investigative journalism and ensuring that their voices reach the broadest possible audience. Despite the economic demands on the media industry, this combination allows the consistency of the impact of investigative journalism.

Of importance to note, this intersection of fellowships, grants, and strategic communication is pivotal in the long-term viability of investigative journalism, particularly in times of financial hardship and a rapidly changing media landscape. Studies by Bjerknes (2024), Hume & Abbot (2017) and Lewis (2012) reinforce the importance of external funding, such as fellowships and grants, in providing investigative journalists the necessary resources to pursue comprehensive, time-intensive investigations that traditional media organizations often cannot afford due to declining revenues.

Further, strategic communication helps bridge the gap between investigative journalists and the public by demonstrating the value of journalism, garnering support from funders, and aligning journalistic efforts with community information needs. Collaborative networks, like those offered by the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), also play an essential role in resource-sharing and fostering partnerships that bolster long-term sustainability (Polyak et.al, 2019).

Conclusion

The synergy between fellowships, grants, and strategic communication provides a holistic approach to the sustainability of investigative journalism as a result enabling society's pressing issues to receive the attention that they deserve. Fellowships provide the time and support to pursue in-depth investigations that might otherwise be impossible due to various challenges as addressed in this study. Grants on the other hand provide financial relief through resources, necessary research, travel, and professional development opportunities, relieving the journalists off economic pressures. By highlighting the importance of investigative journalism and creating tailored pitches or proposals, journalists can secure grants and fellowships designed to support long-term projects.

As reflected in this research, the growing importance of collaborative networks highlights the need for partnerships among media organizations, funders, and advocacy groups to share resources and foster sustainable investigative efforts. As media landscapes shift, innovative funding models and strong strategic communication efforts are essential in ensuring investigative journalism continues to serve its role in promoting transparency and accountability (Muller, & Wiik, 2023; Swasy, 2020; Polyak et.al, 2019)

Meanwhile, strategic communication enhances the visibility and impact of investigative projects, helping journalists effectively demonstrate the importance of their work to the public and funders alike. As highlighted by Scott et.al (2019), organizations that align communication with their funding efforts tend to attract more support, as they can better demonstrate the societal impact of their goals and objectives. Strategic communication helps raise awareness about the significance of investigative journalism, foster relationships with donors, and amplify the visibility of the work produced.

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