

Forensic Journalism in India

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Abstract

Criminalistics, another name for forensic science, is the application of science to criminal and civil legislation. Investigative journalism is the parent discipline of forensic journalism. A forensic journalist follows the “Ten Golden Rules” in order to ascertain the truth and spot errors by studying and researching it in any accessible medium. When forensics, which is thought of as combining science and law, is combined with journalism, a new phrase known as “forensic journalism” is created. Although not new in wealthy western nations, forensic journalism is a new field in our nation. It is challenging to pursue this as a career option since being a successful forensic journalist requires enthusiasm, tenacity, hard effort, patience, and my other attributes. Investigative journalism is a type of reporting where reporters delve closely into a specific subject of interest, such as significant crimes, government corruption, or corporate misconduct. Forensic journalism, which goes beyond what most journalists do, is described as being practised when journalists cross the boundaries between journalism and law in order to achieve something socially, and there is overlap in this action. This action frequently aids in revealing the truth and justice by gathering information that is admissible and withstands the scrutiny in court. Currently, journalism focuses on issues, whereas forensic journalism focuses on solutions to those problems. Broadcasting media, which is seen to be considerably more opinionated owing to organised discussion sessions, is a very close illustration of this discipline. In fact, forensic journalism compromises between the media organisation and the legal authorities. By structuring the reports so that they concentrate on the details of the entire crime under consent, the reports serve the interests of the media organisation, law enforcement agencies, as well as the general public and make the news much more interesting and informative. In other words, via forensic journalism, the media finally stands up for what it believes to be right.

Keywords: Forensic science, Forensic journalism, Ten golden rules, Career Opportunity

Introduction

Forensic journalism, also known as investigative journalism, is a specialized field within journalism that involves in-depth research, analysis, and reporting to uncover and expose wrongdoing, corruption, and abuses of power. It goes beyond traditional reporting by employing rigorous investigative techniques, including gathering and analysing evidence, conducting interviews, and verifying facts.

The term “forensic” in forensic journalism refers to the meticulous and systematic approach used to investigate complex issues and present evidence in a compelling and coherent manner. Forensic journalists act as watchdogs, seeking the truth and holding individuals, organizations, or governments accountable for their actions. The primary goal of forensic journalism is to serve the public interest by revealing hidden information, exposing corruption, and promoting transparency and accountability.

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It plays a crucial role in democracy by providing citizens with information they need to make informed decisions and fostering an open and accountable society¹.

Forensic journalists often tackle a wide range of topics, including political scandals, corporate malfeasance, environmental crimes, human rights violations, organized crime, and more. They delve deep into complex issues, often requiring extensive research, data analysis, and the piecing together of evidence from various sources. To carry out their work, forensic journalists employ various investigative techniques, such as conducting interviews with sources and whistle-blowers, analysing financial records, reviewing legal documents, conducting background checks, and collaborating with experts in relevant fields. They strive to provide accurate and well-documented reports, which may involve fact-checking, cross-referencing sources, and adhering to ethical standards. Forensic journalists increasingly utilize data journalism techniques to analyse and present complex information. They use data visualization tools to create interactive charts, maps, and graphs that help convey patterns, trends, and relationships in a more accessible manner. Data-driven storytelling enhances the impact and clarity of forensic journalism investigations.

Digital Verification and Fact-Checking: In the era of misinformation and fake news, digital verification and fact-checking tools have become indispensable for forensic journalists. They can use digital forensics techniques to authenticate images, videos, and online content, ensuring the accuracy and credibility of their reporting. Fact-checking organizations and tools also help journalists verify claims, debunk falsehoods, and maintain journalistic integrity.

In recent years, advancements in technology have had a significant impact on forensic journalism. Journalists now have access to vast amounts of digital data and tools to analyse it, allowing them to uncover hidden patterns, track digital footprints, and expose wrongdoing more effectively. Technological advancements have provided forensic journalists with powerful tools for data collection, analysis, and visualization. They can use advanced data

mining techniques, social media analytics, and data visualization software to uncover patterns, connections, and anomalies in large datasets. These tools enable journalists to identify trends, track information sources, and present complex information in a more accessible manner. While forensic journalism can be a challenging and demanding field, it plays a critical role in ensuring transparency and accountability in society. By shedding light on hidden truths, it aims to bring about positive change, challenge the status quo, and empower the public to demand justice and accountability from those in power².

Forensic journalism has the power to inspire change at both individual and societal levels. By exposing social injustices, environmental degradation, and other pressing issues, it can create public awareness, empathy, and a sense of urgency. This can mobilize individuals, communities, and organizations to take action and drive positive change. Through in-depth investigations, journalists can bring attention to these issues, provide a voice to the victims, and advocate for justice. Their work can lead to legal action, policy changes, and societal reforms.

Forensic journalism continues to evolve and adapt to the changing media landscape and technological advancements. Here are some ways in which forensic journalism is evolving: **Embracing Digital Platforms:** Forensic journalists are increasingly leveraging digital platforms to reach wider audiences and engage with them in real-time. They use social media, podcasts, video streaming platforms, and interactive websites to disseminate their investigations and connect with the public. These platforms enable journalists to reach beyond traditional media outlets and have a direct impact on public discourse.

Data Journalism and Artificial Intelligence: With the growing availability of data and advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), forensic journalists are utilizing data journalism techniques and AI tools to analyse large datasets, uncover patterns, and draw insights. AI-powered algorithms can help identify trends, detect anomalies, and automate data analysis, allowing journalists to focus on investigative storytelling³.

Role of Journalism in Criminal Justice System

The word “media” comes from the Latin “medium,” which meaning “in the middle.” The term “media” refers to conventional mass communication networks, content producers, and other technologies for mediated human speech. The phrases “media” and “mass media” are sometimes used interchangeably. With the invention of newspapers and magazines, the word “media” first entered the English language. A broad and diversified population may be reached with knowledge and pleasure thanks to the media. There are already several established online newspapers, journals, and publications. The acceptance of online publications is rising. The web versions of virtually all of the major newspapers are just as popular as their print counterparts. While giving individuals a practical means to live their lives, the media has also aided in bringing social consciousness to a greater level. In recent years, discovering crimes, allegations, and malpractice in the media has grown more and more crucial. Over time, the media has had an impact on how people think, act, and decide. Media impact is often described as the strengthening or weakening of particular groups’ beliefs due to media messaging. The demographics and psychological health of the populace are only two of the many variables that determine how the media affects the populace. A damaging influence is regarded as such, whilst a beneficial impact is regarded as such. The judiciary may occasionally be impacted by the media. It is feasible to assert that public opinion affects judicial decisions because to the relationship between human psychology and opinions. Quantity varies depending on the person; the better the court outcome, the lower the influence.

The public’s perception and understanding of the criminal justice system have always been greatly influenced by the media. The media heavily influences how the system functions. People want to know how crimes are found and handled by the system, in addition to the intense interest that the general public has in crime and offenders (Marsh and Melville, 2009). The media plays a crucial role since it serves as the public’s “eyes” and “ears” most of the time. It may be a potent and effective tool for promoting corrective action in the conduct of public affairs.

The function of the media cannot be compared to that of the government, thus there should be restrictions just like there are in other aspect of society. As a result, the media helps to inform the public about the legal system. As few events generate more headlines for the TV news than, instance, a violent offender who has returned to the community, the media also plays a part in influencing public perceptions towards the criminal justice system (Clunies, 1999). Such reports occasionally, as is inescapably destined to occur, foster a hostile relationship between the media and the criminal justice system.

Many first-time jurors have admitted that their primary sources of knowledge regarding jury duty were newspapers and television. According to reports, the experience is very different from how it is portrayed in the media. Muncie & Wilson (2004) note that there hasn’t been much study on how much the media affects the public’s perception of the police. However, the little data appears to indicate that the early police-centric television programming may have had an impact on police officers’ expectations of the force⁴.

Career Opportunities in Forensic Journalism

It’s important to note that career aspects in forensic journalism can vary depending on individual interests, specialization, geographic location, and the evolving nature of the field. Exploring opportunities for internships, mentorships, or networking with professionals in forensic journalism can provide valuable insights into specific career paths and further prospects in the field. Forensic journalism combines elements of investigative journalism and forensic science to uncover and report on criminal activities, corruption, and other wrongdoing. It involves in-depth research, evidence gathering, and analysis to present factual and compelling stories.

➤ Investigative Journalist

- They work as a journalist specializing in investigative reporting. They will dig deep into complex stories, conduct interviews, gather evidence, and collaborate with experts to expose crime, corruption, and injustice. The role of an investigative journalist is crucial in exposing hidden truths, uncovering

corruption, and holding individuals, organizations, and governments accountable for their actions. Investigative journalists go beyond surface-level reporting and engage in in-depth research, analysis, and verification to bring important stories to light. Investigative journalists prioritize accuracy and fact-checking. They rigorously verify information, cross-reference sources, and corroborate claims to ensure the reliability and integrity of their reporting. Investigative journalists conduct interviews with various sources, including whistleblowers, witnesses, experts, and officials. These interviews help provide firsthand accounts, insights, and perspectives that contribute to the investigative process. Investigative journalists often work with large datasets, analysing and interpreting data to identify patterns, trends, or anomalies. Data analysis techniques allow them to uncover significant findings and support their investigative reporting with concrete evidence.

Investigative journalism often requires collaboration with other journalists, researchers, experts, and even legal professionals. Collaborative efforts can strengthen investigations, pool resources, and provide diverse perspectives on complex issues. They delve into public records, interview sources, analyse data, and dig deep to uncover hidden information and connections. Investigative journalists aim to uncover the truth behind events, actions, and claims. They scrutinize official narratives, challenge conventional wisdom, and investigate leads to expose wrongdoing or reveal previously unknown facts⁵.

- **Crime Reporter:** Crime reporters focus on covering crime-related events, such as major crimes, arrests, trials, and court proceedings. They gather information from various sources, including law enforcement agencies, court records, witnesses, and victims, to report on criminal activities accurately and promptly.

Crime reporters often engage in investigative journalism to uncover new information, expose wrongdoing, or highlight issues within the

criminal justice system. They may conduct their own research, interview sources, and analyze evidence to provide deeper insights into criminal cases. Crime reporters cultivate relationships with sources within law enforcement, legal professionals, and other relevant areas to gather information and gain insider perspectives on crime-related issues. Developing reliable sources is crucial for obtaining exclusive information and breaking news stories. They attend court hearings, trials, and other legal proceedings to provide comprehensive coverage of criminal cases. They report on key developments, legal arguments, witness testimonies, and verdicts to keep the public informed about the progress and outcomes of cases. Crime reporters conduct interviews with victims, witnesses, law enforcement officials, lawyers, and other individuals involved in criminal cases. These interviews provide firsthand accounts, insights, and perspectives that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the crime being reported. Crime reporters too analyse crime data, statistics, and trends to identify patterns, changes, or emerging issues in criminal activities. They use this information to report on the broader impact of crime on communities, identify potential root causes, and contribute to public discourse on crime prevention and criminal justice reform.

Crime reporters play a crucial role in informing the public about criminal activities, ensuring transparency in the justice system, and raising awareness of important issues related to crime and its impact on society⁶.

➤ **Data Journalist**

The role of a data journalist in forensic journalism involves using data analysis and visualization techniques to uncover insights, patterns, and connections related to criminal activities, corruption, or other subjects of interest.

Data journalists collect relevant datasets from various sources, including government agencies, law enforcement organizations, court records, and other public databases. They may also obtain data through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests or collaborate with other journalists or

researchers who have access to specific datasets. They clean and preprocess the collected data to ensure accuracy and consistency. They may remove duplicate entries, handle missing values, standardize formats, and perform other data cleaning tasks to ensure the data is ready for analysis.

Data journalists employ analytical techniques to uncover insights, trends, and patterns within the collected data. This can involve statistical analysis, data mining, and visualization methods to identify correlations, anomalies, or other significant findings related to criminal activities. Data journalists use data visualization tools and techniques to present complex information in a visually engaging and easily understandable manner. They create charts, graphs, maps, and interactive visualizations that help communicate the findings and tell compelling stories related to forensic journalism.

Data journalists collaborate with investigative journalists, crime reporters, and subject matter experts to integrate data-driven insights into broader investigative stories. They work together to identify relevant datasets, interpret findings, and present the data in a meaningful context within the investigative narrative. Data journalists ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data used in their analysis. They cross-reference and verify the data with multiple sources, fact-check claims and assertions, and adhere to rigorous journalistic standards to maintain the integrity of their work.

Data journalists contribute to the advancement of data journalism practices and promote the importance of data-driven storytelling within the field of forensic journalism. They share their methodologies, insights, and findings with the wider journalism community to encourage transparency, accountability, and evidence-based reporting⁷.

Forensic Aspects of Journalism: Journalism holds forensic significance in several ways, contributing to forensic investigations and the legal system. Here are some key aspects of journalism's forensic significance:

- **Information Gathering:** Journalists are often among the first to arrive at crime scenes or incidents. Their observations and interactions can provide initial information crucial to forensic investigations. They document details such as the condition of the scene, potential evidence, and witness accounts. This information aids forensic experts in reconstructing events and analysing evidence.
- **Witness Identification:** Journalists may interview witnesses, victims, or individuals with relevant information. Their interviews can help identify potential witnesses or suspects, gather statements, and provide leads for investigators. Witness testimonies obtained by journalists can be valuable in corroborating evidence or identifying individuals involved in a crime.
- **Public Appeals and Tips:** Journalistic coverage of forensic investigations can generate public awareness and encourage individuals with relevant information to come forward. Journalists often appeal for tips, which can lead to the discovery of new evidence, identification of suspects, or location of missing persons. The information received through such public appeals can significantly advance forensic investigations.
- **Documentation of Evidence:** Journalists play a role in documenting evidence through various mediums such as photography, videography, and written records. Their documentation of crime scenes, injuries, or events can serve as visual or testimonial evidence during legal proceedings. Journalists are trained to maintain accuracy and objectivity, making their documentation reliable for forensic analysis.
- **Uncovering New Evidence:** Investigative journalism can uncover new evidence or revisit cold cases. Journalists may delve into overlooked aspects, conduct independent research, or interview relevant individuals. Their findings can bring attention to overlooked evidence, prompt further forensic examinations, or lead to the discovery of new leads that aid in solving crimes.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Journalism plays a crucial role in holding authorities accountable for their actions and

ensuring transparency in the legal system. Journalists report on forensic investigations, court proceedings, and outcomes, allowing the public to understand the process, assess the fairness of investigations, and monitor the justice system's functioning.

- **Exposing Injustices and Wrongful Convictions:** Journalistic investigations have, at times, revealed flaws in forensic practices, biases, or miscarriages of justice. Journalists may expose wrongful convictions, highlight questionable forensic techniques, or shed light on cases of corruption or negligence. Such revelations can lead to re-examinations of evidence, reforms in forensic procedures, and the rectification of wrongful convictions.
- **Advocacy and Policy Impact:** Journalism with a forensic focus can create public awareness about the importance of sound forensic practices, advocate for reforms, or highlight the need for better training and resources. Journalists may investigate deficiencies in forensic systems, push for policy changes, or support the introduction of new legislation related to forensic investigations.

It is important to note that journalists are not forensic experts themselves, and their primary role is to gather and report information. Forensic investigations require the expertise of forensic scientists, law enforcement agencies, and legal professionals who conduct rigorous analysis and interpretations of evidence. However, journalism's forensic significance lies in its ability to contribute to the initial information gathering, public engagement, and accountability aspects of forensic investigations⁸.

Conclusion

In conclusion, forensic journalism is essential for advancing justice, accountability, and openness in our society. Forensic journalists can assist in revealing the truth behind complicated issues and hold people and institutions accountable for their actions by using scientific methods and procedures to find and report on crimes, abuses, and other human rights violations. However, forensic journalism is not exempt from criticism, which might focus on biases and preconceptions, a lack of objectivity, moral and legal dilemmas, and potential effects on existing inquiries and legal proceedings. To ensure that their reporting is truthful, impartial, and transparent, forensic

journalists must uphold the highest ethical and professional standards. But forensic journalism also has drawbacks, such as ethical and legal difficulties, dangers to the safety of journalists, and potential effects on media trustworthiness. Through legislative safeguards for journalists and sources, monetary support for independent media, and investments in digital technologies and data journalism, it is crucial to strike a balance between these effects and encourage forensic journalism. Promoting openness, responsibility, and social justice in our society requires sustained support for and development of forensic journalism. Since forensic journalism is a crucial part of a strong democracy, we must continue to acknowledge and encourage its significance.

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