

Bibliography details

Name of the Serial/Publication: Veritas

Volume No.: 1

Issue No.: 2

Month & Year of publication: February 2022

Page numbers: Feature Articles (26-29)

Title of Article: Forensic Journalism – An upcoming field of Forensic Science

Contributor (s)

1. Ms. J B Arsha

FORENSIC JOURNALISM – AN UPCOMING FIELD OF FORENSIC SCIENCE



Ms. J B Arsha

What is the field of Forensic Journalism?

The field of Forensic Journalism is the application of science - its principles and techniques to journalism for the purpose of justice. Journalism is the field of collecting, reviewing and presenting news to the masses. When science can be applied during the collection, reviewing and presenting news, it can be termed as Forensic Journalism.

In simpler terms, a lay journalist would be able to collect, analyze and publish news while a forensic journalist would be able to answer the 5W1H - what, when, why, where, who and how of the news.

What are the duties of a forensic journalist?

A forensic journalist must

- Look beyond the information, into the meaning, reason and relevance of news.
- Must work in accordance with the rules of journalism and the limits of science.
- Must be able to dig deep into a topic, put it in the law's perspective, form an opinion, ensure the opinion is in line with science and present it in an understandable fashion.

What are the finer rules of Forensic Journalism?

The Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), a NGO dedicated to safeguarding rights of journalists lists out ten golden rules of forensic journalism as follows:

1. Any issue or topic must not be routine journalism. Instead it has to be dug deeply.
2. The issue or topic that a forensic journalist is interested in must be a matter of public interest preferably of crime.
3. The work of a forensic journalist is time consuming. So patience is essential.
4. The work of a forensic journalist must be original and self-explanatory.
5. The final output must possess new information.
6. The presentation must be able to highlight the significance of the findings.
7. The output must not be based on one source alone and must be multi-sourced.
8. The work gets better results when multi-sourced and must incorporate team-work than a one person effort.
9. The report must not have a tone of bias and must not be made with a prejudice of accusing someone.
10. The work must be objective and truthful.

How is Forensic Journalism different from Investigative Journalism?

Investigative Journalism is a form of journalism which unveils a crime like political corruption which may be deliberately concealed. But an

investigative journalist uses different means like sting operations, witness testimonies etc. to expose it to the public.

Forensic Journalism on the other hand uses scientific understanding to explain a crime in a fashion that the general public understands, or sometimes even the judiciary to form an opinion. Forensic Journalism is always an essential part of Investigative Journalism.

Some myths regarding Forensic Journalism busted-

Forensic Journalism focuses only on 'bad news'.

While Forensic Journalism often helps in exposing bad news, it need not always be the case. It sometimes exposes positive news like removing a stereotype, portraying the positive effects of an approved medicine etc.

Forensic journalists give anonymous reports.

A genuine Forensic Journalism report would always be identified with the author and would only be a tool to explain facts on the basis of science, rather than being a personal document which highlights the author.

Forensic Journalism is an unregulated system and can be unethical at times.

While in some countries the statement may be true, in many nations the field is regulated and bound by an ethical code of conduct where the responsibility is fixed under legislation.

The field is driven by private media houses and therefore not a serious field.

Even though presently it is driven by the private media houses in many countries, it is government owned in many countries where it has led groundbreaking investigations. The field is also growing in many other countries where it is starting to be taken seriously.

Forensic Journalism education

The following are some of the institutes offering courses on forensic journalism:

- PG Diploma in Forensic Journalism - National Forensic Sciences University, Gujarat, India
- Certificate course in forensic and investigative journalism - Bristore University, Zambia
- MA Investigative and forensic journalism - Columbia journalism school, US

Case example

A detailed case study involving forensic journalist Alison Flowers, used science to explain the shooting of Cortez Bufford by St. Louis Police in a dark tunnel is linked below.

shorturl.at/kvG03

Conclusion

If summarized, Forensic Journalism reports a crime in a more legal, scientific and evidence based manner. It is a primitive field today, with much prospect to be an advanced and sought after field in the future. While regulations are not sufficient at present in many countries, its scope is certain to bring about many reformations soon.

References:

- Das A, Biswas S. (2002). Forensic Journalism and Its Socio-ethical Aspects. J For Med Sci Law 29(2):39-42.
- Bhandari D. (2004). Forensic Journalism: A new job perspective. India Times Inc. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/education/forensic-journalism-a-new-jobperspective/article-show/48817717.cms>.
- Sikander Riaz. (2016). Who is that Investigative Journalist? Retrieved from <https://www.imaginated.com/writing-glossary/what-is-investigative-journalism/>
- Ansell et al. (2002). Investigative Journalism in Africa: "Walking through a Minefield at Midnight" Reporters without Borders. Investigative Journalism Handbook 1(3): 2-22.