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Seismo

Performing investigative identities: How print journalists establish authority through their texts

Lena Wuergler* and Annik Dubied, University of Neuchâtel, Academy of Journalism and Media, Switzerland
*Corresponding author: wuerglerl@gmail.com

Abstract
Faced with an increasingly challenging environment, journalists and news organizations are looking to investigative journalism as a symbolic resource to assert their professionalism. However, while the literature recognizes a strong link between authority and professionalism on the one hand, and investigative journalism and professionalism on the other, it has overlooked how investigative journalism itself can be used to establish authority. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring how investigative pieces contribute to the legitimization of journalists in French-speaking Switzerland. To answer this question, we conducted a thematic and discursive qualitative analysis of 186 investigative pieces to examine identity markers that present journalists as particularly legitimate knowledge producers. Our findings show how print journalists perform an investigative identity throughout their texts. This includes playing a watchdog role, demonstrating an "investigative mindset," claiming specialized skills, and / or highlighting their thorough verification procedure. By employing these strategies, investigative journalists seek recognition based on their social role, their individual traits, their specialized skills, and / or their incontrovertible knowledge claims. We analyze these four identity markers as strategic devices for claiming special authority within the journalistic profession.

Keywords
investigative journalism, news coverage, journalists, authority, boundary work, discourse analysis, thematic analysis, Switzerland

1 Introduction

Contemporary journalism faces multiple challenges. Economic, political, and technological transformations are affecting journalists and news organizations, particularly legacy media outlets (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2019, p. 7). News institutions notably face increasing competition with non-journalistic news providers (Tong, 2018) and a decline in public trust (Reese, 2019). This threatens not only the economy of the media industry, but also journalists' authority (Vos & Thomas, 2018). Since authority – understood here as "the right to be listened to" (Höpfl, 1999, p. 219) – is necessary for journalism to exist (Carlson, 2017), it can be expected that journalists would try to regain or reinforce their authority in some way.

One of those ways is investigative journalism. Because investigative journalism embodies a set of core practices and values in the profession, it is considered a symbolically higher form of journalism (Carson, 2020). It can therefore be leveraged to compete in a challenging environment and reaffirm journalists' authority – and, by extension, their legitimacy (Hamilton, 2016). Indeed, investigative reporting functions as a professional ideal on which journalists can rely to legitimize their profession (Bromley, 2007). Consequently, we argue that investigative journalism should be a preferred place of inquiry for researchers seeking to describe how journalists and legacy media outlets defend, protect, or assert their authority. As Bjerknes (2020, p. 1037) notes, studying what investigative journalists do is "crucial to our understanding of journalism's legitimacy and role in society."

Despite a strong link between professionalism and authority on the one hand (Anderson, 2017; Carlson, 2017, pp. 29–49), and between investigative journalism and

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professionalism on the other (Cancela, Gerber, & Dubied, 2021; Olsen, 2018, p. 238; Wagemans, Witschge, & Deuze, 2016), few studies have explored the relationship between investigative journalism and authority (Bjerknes, 2020). One relevant framework for analyzing journalists' efforts to establish authority is boundary work (Carlson & Lewis, 2019), and "identity markers" in particular (Singer, 2007; Tandoc & Jenkins, 2018). This study draws on that framework to identify discursive strategies for constructing an investigative identity in news stories. Based on a thematic and discursive qualitative analysis of 186 investigative pieces published in newspapers in French-speaking Switzerland, the study shows that this identity is constructed through explicit and implicit claims to an investigative epistemology, an investigative mindset, a watchdog role, and / or specialized skills. Our findings highlight that those identity markers might contribute to setting boundaries not only at the borders of the profession, but also within it.

The study focuses on French-speaking Switzerland. In recent years, Swiss investigative journalism has become the focus of various studies, mostly regarding journalists' narrated conceptions, negotiations, and practices (Cancela et al., 2021; Labarthe, 2020). They notably indicate that several media outlets (either local newspapers, supra-regional newspapers, or public broadcasters) have recently created investigative units with varying degrees of formality within their newsroom (Cancela, 2021). Some journalists are also involved in major cross-border investigative consortiums, such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) or the European Investigative Consortium (EIC).[1] In this regard, the Swiss media landscape partly follows the global development of investigative journalism, which tends to be collaborative, cross-border, and data-oriented (Carson & Farhall, 2018). However, many investigations in Switzerland continue to be undertaken at a local level (Cancela, 2021).

Because of the country's linguistic and political segmentation, the Swiss media landscape is still dominated by local and supra-regional newspapers (Fög, 2021; Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 25), although the diversity of published content tends to decrease under the pressure of media convergence and concentration (Bonfadelli & Meier, 2021). The newspaper sector is owned by private companies, whereas the broadcasting sector is mostly funded by state subsidies (Künzler, 2013). Although the circumstances in Switzerland cannot be generalized to wider contexts, the Swiss media landscape provides a promising field of observation, as its historical transformations largely reflect the dynamics observable in many European countries (Clavien, 2017, p. 10). Previous research has shown that the Swiss journalists' working conditions and conceptions of the roles of journalism in society are similar to those in other Western countries (Bonin et al., 2017; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Because the freedom of the press is strongly protected in Switzerland, Swiss journalists enjoy a high degree of autonomy in their profession (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 67). Therefore, the way in which Swiss investigative journalists experience their professional identity is likely representative for journalists across Northern European countries (Cancela et al., 2021).

2 Conceptual framework: Journalistic authority

To understand journalistic authority, it is important to acknowledge that this issue is "deeply interwoven with professionalism" (Carlson, 2017, p. 30). Like any profession, journalism aims to define and control a "jurisdiction" over a particular domain (Abbott, 1988). While some professions are constituted by "formalized bodies of knowledge" (Zelizer, 1993, p. 189), journalism is not. As Carlson (2015, p. 8) states: "Journalism [...] lacks the formal barriers commonly associated with a profession, such as licensing, educational requirements, or trade association membership. To be a plumber requires a license; to be a journalist requires, in 2015, an Internet connection."

1 For instance, the investigative unit at Tamedia (the publisher of *Le Matin Dimanche, Tribune de Genève* and *24 Heures*) has participated in ICIJ investigations since 2013 and later joined the EIC, of which the public broadcaster RTS is also a member.

Tong (2018, p. 257) argues that journalism thus "depends on discursively constructing professional norms and ideals to maintain its boundaries and legitimacy." In other words, journalists use professional norms, ideals, and standards (e. g., professional ethics) to draw boundaries between who is a journalist and who is not (Carlson & Lewis, 2019), and between "good" and "bad" members of the profession (Singer, 2007). Journalists can engage in such boundary work both within and at the borders of the profession (Bjerknes, 2020; Zelizer, 1993). Indeed, any discussion of journalism's boundaries necessarily involves a discussion of identity markers (Tandoc & Jenkins, 2018, p. 584) that allow journalists both to define themselves (i. e., "Who I am") and demarcate themselves (i. e., "Who I am not") (Singer, 2007).

Professional norms, values, and standards are constantly evolving (Singer, 2007; Steensen, 2017). As definitions of good (or the "best") journalism change, so does the boundary between who is a journalist and who is not. For instance, some outlets or reporters previously considered as "outsiders" are now being recognized as legitimate players in the journalistic field (Schapals, 2022; Stringer, 2018). Boundaries concerning acceptable and unacceptable styles and forms of journalism are similarly shifting (Broersma, 2007).

Boundary work can be broadly described as a struggle for authority since it involves questioning or delimiting who possesses the legitimate "right to be listened to." The nature and scope of journalistic authority is a site of ongoing contestation "between those who want to maintain it and those who seek to reform, displace, challenge, or erode it" (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). This discursive struggle commonly takes place through meta-journalistic discourses, in which several actors construct, reiterate, or challenge the boundaries of acceptable journalistic practice (Bjerknes, 2020; Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Marchi, 2019; Schapals, 2022). Cancino-Borbón, Barrios, and Salas-Vega (2021) argue that journalists' narrations of their role constitute a form of boundary work, particularly when they describe the evolution of acceptable practices during the coverage of an event.

2.1 Authority and news forms

However, authority is also mediated through news content (Carlson, 2017, p. 15) and is observable in discursive strategies (Carvalho, 2008, pp. 169–170). For instance, quoting expert sources allows journalists to legitimate their knowledge claims (Carlson, 2017, p. 149). The discourse and form of conventional, fact-based news journalism is based on an underlying promise to deliver authoritative information about current events (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Nord, 2017). For Carlson (2017, p. 15), the ways in which news texts are shaped "communicate meaning about events being covered while also signaling the legitimacy of the news accounts." Media claims to authority depend on the recognition, by the journalists and the public, of conventional news presentation as a form that provides authoritative information. Consequently, "stepping outside that set of conventions risks stepping outside the claim to be able to 'get at the truth'" (Matheson, 2004, p. 446).

Finally, news stories also contain observable traces of reporters performing professional roles (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado, 2015; Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014). According to Hanitzsch and Vos (2017, p. 126), "by enacting a specific journalistic role […], journalists – often inadvertently – take position in the discursive construction of journalism's identity." In this view, reporters' conceptions of their role and their professional ideologies shape their journalistic practice; reporters, mostly unconsciously "perpetuate these deep structures through professional performance" (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369).

Following Raemy and Vos (2021, pp. 115–116), journalistic roles are considered as institutional scripts that journalists use and adapt to perform social roles. For example, "when journalists speak of the 'fourth estate,' they tap into a socially validated institutional script." For Hanitzsch and Vos (2017, p. 125), journalists may activate a role from this collective repertoire as a "marker of their journalistic identity." From this perspective, we argue that the enactment of a journalistic role in news content can act as an "identity marker" and be used for "authority-seeking purposes" (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2022, p. 2312).

However, Raemy (2021, pp. 843–846) underlines that journalistic roles are only one part of professional identity, which is also composed of features associated with individual journalists (their personality, skills, knowledge, and experience), as well as features associated with their organizational and community affiliations. While Raemy's study focuses on news professionals' discourse, our study focuses on professional identity as it is enacted in news content. In this regard, we hypothesized that identity markers in news texts can correspond to three levels (individual, organizational, and social) of professional identity.

2.2 Investigative journalism and professionalism

While journalistic authority is closely interwoven with professionalism, professionalism is, in turn, closely interwoven with investigative journalism. According to Vos and Thomas (2018, p. 2006), professionals protect their authority against non-journalists by defending "old-fashioned journalism" and pointing to "the past and a golden age of muckraking and investigation." Journalists and editors in legacy media consider their historical "investigative" role as the core of their profession (Tong, 2018). Even digital-native news organizations like Buzzfeed and Vice emphasize "traditional journalistic norms and practices" and invest in investigative journalism to gain legitimacy, recognition, and prestige within the profession (Stringer, 2018). In France, Mediapart's journalists have reverted to the traditional values of investigative reporting to distinguish themselves from legacy media (Wagemans et al., 2016). In both cases, journalists see investigative reporting as a professional ideal on which they can draw to enhance their symbolic capital, credibility, and prestige.

Indeed, as Schapals (2022, pp. 47–52) has shown, "peripheral" actors in the UK, Germany, and Australia regularly claim to uphold journalistic ideals such as the "watchdog function," "exposing wrongdoing," or "holding power accountable." Paradoxically, they deliberately position themselves as "divergent" from traditional media organizations while exhibiting "the same ideological professional norms and practices held by journalists for centuries." As Tong (2018, p. 265) notes, "the persistence in practicing investigative journalism, which for many constitutes the most prestigious journalism, contributes to maintaining or restoring the ethical image of journalism." In sum, faced with the crisis that affects contemporary journalism as a whole, "investigative journalism is more than ever displayed as a symbolic resource allowing them [journalists] to reaffirm their professionalism" (Descamps, 2017, p. 221). One remaining question is how this symbolic resource is used *in news stories* to enhance reporters' perceived professionalism, and thus their authority.

Considering that (1) investigative reporting is a symbolic resource for seeking authority, (2) authority is established partly by identity markers, and (3) news content can be a place in which journalistic authority is asserted, we assume that investigative pieces should contain markers of a particular professional identity: an "investigative" identity. This hypothesis resulted in the following research questions:

1) Do investigative pieces contain specific identity markers?
2) How do these identity markers contribute to establishing the journalist's authority?

2.3 Investigative journalism as subject of discussion

Examining how investigative journalists can establish and maintain their authority in news texts involves determining what the distinctive features of investigative journalism are. This is not an easy task for several reasons.

First, no consensus definition of investigative journalism currently exists among either academics or practitioners (De Burgh, 2008; van Eijk, 2005). In general, researchers describe investigative reporting as something "more" than regular journalism, but do not provide the same criteria to characterize this "more" (Wuergler, Cancela, Dubied, & Gerber, 2023).

From the practitioners' side, Cancela et al. (2021) have shown that journalists tend to define investigative journalism according to several criteria, which can materialize in varying degrees. They describe "investigative traits" such as "curiosity," "tenacity," or "criti-

cal thinking," but also refer to criteria such as revealing secrets, exposing wrongdoing, and initiative. Olsen (2018, p. 294) also speaks of an "investigative mindset" that includes being "critical and rigorous," "patient," "creative in getting the information," or "brave."

Second, until now, very few studies have focused on the *output* of investigative journalism, that is, the investigative stories themselves. Some do this indirectly by focusing on "quality journalism" (Olsen, 2018) or prize-winning news (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Others examine the text of investigative stories, but mainly to obtain quantitative results (Abdenour, 2015; Carson 2020; Cordell, 2009; Knobel, 2018). Gearing (2021) quotes case studies, but mostly focuses on the journalists' techniques and the impact of the stories. Hence, as Bjerknes (2020, p. 1040) noted, empirical work on investigative journalism is still "surprisingly rare," and qualitative studies on investigative stories are even rarer.

One of the most prominent studies of investigative narratives is Ettema and Glasser's *Custodians of conscience* (1998). Using both qualitative content analysis and interviews with journalists, the authors draw attention to the paradoxical "disengaged conscience" of investigative journalists, who seek to act both as "detached observers" and as "custodians of conscience." They also point out a distinction between the epistemology of daily reporters and investigative reporters (1998, pp. 156–160). In their view, daily reporters make knowledge claims that are pre-justified by authoritative sources, while investigative journalists defend their knowledge claims through epistemic justification. This relates to what Bjeknes (2020, pp. 1041–1041) calls the "investigative epistemology," in which every knowledge claim "must be checked, verified and confirmed regardless of how it was obtained and who or what the sources are." According to Bjerknes (2020, p. 1040), the distinctive epistemology of investigative journalists plays a key role in the "demarcation process surrounding investigative journalism."

Based on the literature review, the distinctive features of investigative journalism relate to a particular epistemology (verification, confirmation, evidential standards, initiative), to individual "traits" or "mindset" (curiosity, courage, tenacity, skepticism) and to social roles (revealing secrets, exposing wrongdoings). We have therefore hypothesized that markers of an investigative identity can materialize in a wide range of discursive forms.

3 Data and methods

We thus applied an iterative approach (Tracy, 2020) guided by the literature on investigative journalism (Carson, 2020; Hamilton, 2016; Knobel, 2018) in which we allowed codes to emerge inductively from the data. The iterative process allowed us to identify several markers of an investigative identity in news text, which correspond to different features of investigative journalism. All of them serve to discursively establish the reporter's journalistic authority.

3.1 Data selection

For this study, we focused on investigative stories published in print media outlets. Although digital media and new technologies are receiving much attention within academia, we argue that print media are of particular interest for the issue of authority. First, local and regional newspapers are the most endangered media outlets (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2019, pp. 7–8) and thus likely to work particularly hard to reaffirm their role as legitimate news providers. Second, print outlets remain a favored medium for investigative journalism, even today (Carson, 2020, pp. 105–143; Hamilton, 2016, p. 280; Knobel, 2018, p. 1).

We compiled a corpus of investigative pieces based on a series of internal criteria (Wuergler et al., 2023). To establish these criteria, we considered investigative journalism as a specific process and looked for traces of that process appearing in the text. This allowed us to observe that the sources quoted in news content are good indicators of this investigative process (Olsen, 2018, p. 115). Our internal criteria for identifying investigative stories were as follows: the article must (1) be written (and signed) by one or more journalists; (2) quote several unrelated sources, some of which must appear hard to reach or process; (3) make use of evidence and not simply juxtapose various points of

view.[2] It should be noted that these criteria are independent from the discourse structure of the texts or sentences, which deserve further analysis.

The corpus comprises 186 press articles published in six newspapers between January 1 and September 30, 2018. This list was designed to ensure a wide diversity of press in French-speaking Switzerland by including newspapers with a variety of readerships (upper class, generalist, or popular) that are published both daily and weekly, provide national and regional coverage, and have large and small circulations.[3] While homogeneous in terms of medium (printed press), the final corpus is very diverse in terms of topics, structures, methods, and styles (Wuergler et al., 2023).

3.2 Three-step analysis

Our first step was to conduct a thematic analysis of all articles in the corpus by applying codes to text segments using a qualitative analysis software (Atlas.ti). The list of codes was created using an abductive-reasoning, iterative approach (Tracy, 2020) that involved alternating between inductive and deductive approaches (Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017, p. 31). The categories were initially created inductively from the news stories and were mainly data-driven (Schreier, 2012). However, they were then refined based on the literature on investigative journalism, which helped to further define and explain the categories. Thus, the coding categories were initially closely related to the content of the quotations in the news stories, and progressively refined, reframed, and compiled to arrive at a rationalized, operational analytical system (Bardin, 1996). In other words, based on their common characteristics, quotations and codes were grouped into progressively more abstract explanatory categories, moving from descriptive to more theoretical coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 101–110).

Traditionally, thematic content analysis does not consider the general structure of a text and thus ignores its explicit coherence (Burton-Jeangros et al., 2009, p. 35). For the coding procedure, however, we drew on the *Critical Discourse Analysis* framework (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1988), which is more interpretative and concerned with structure and coherence. We used macro-propositions[4] as coding units and examined the interplay between their thematic content and their discursive function within the text as a whole (van Dijk, 1988). We coded each macro-proposition according to:

1) What is said (main topic, theme).
2) Who says it (news source / journalist).
3) The discourse function of the macro-proposition within the text.

These categories turned out to be exhaustive (each segment could be coded in a category), exclusive (each segment was coded only in one dominant category), and homogeneous (following the same coding principle) (Bardin, 1996, pp. 125–132).

In the second step, we analyzed the normalized density and the frequency (Atlas.ti, 2021) of each coding category within the corpus to identify general characteristics of investigative narratives in French-speaking Switzerland.

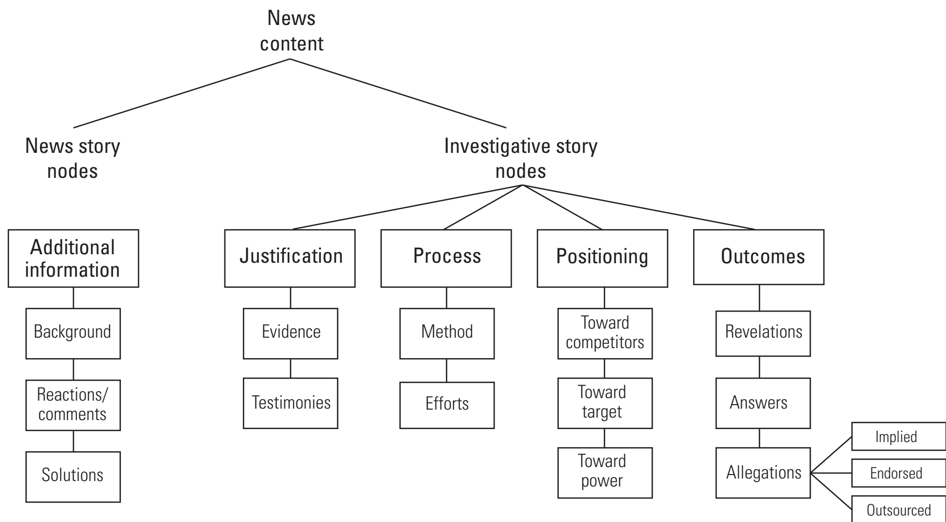
In the third step, we analyzed the discursive strategies used by investigative journalists at the lexical and sentence level to engage in boundary work within each category. For this step, we drew on previous studies on news discourse analysis (Bednarek, 2016; Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Martin & White, 2005; Montgomery, 2007; Semino & Short, 2004; White, 2020), paying particular atten-

2 For more information about these criteria and our selection method, see Wuergler et al. (2023).

3 *Le Temps* is a daily national reference newspaper with a small print run (35 000); *Le Matin Dimanche* is a Sunday national generalist newspaper with a large print run (89 000); *24 Heures* and *Tribune de Genève* are both daily regional generalist newspapers covering two French-speaking cantons (Vaud and Geneva). Since 2018, they share most of their content. Therefore, they were considered as one medium with large print runs (83 000). *Arcinfo* is a daily local popular newspaper with a small print run (25 000), covering mainly one canton (Neuchâtel). Finally, *L'Illustré* is a weekly popular newspaper with a medium print run (61 000) (REMP, 2018).

4 In contrast to propositions, macro-propositions do not refer to clauses or sentences but to larger stretches of texts expressing a specific topic.

Figure 1: Categories system



tion to the reporter's stance, appraisals, and attribution strategies.

The results of this three-step analyis – i. e., a description of the coding categories and their density and frequency, as well as investigative journalists' discursive strategies – are presented in the next section. The quoted excerpts have been chosen for their representativeness of the various recurrent discursive strategies (Bednarek, 2016, p. 32), which we analyzed within each coding category. In the supplementary material, we show how these discursive strategies also shape the entire structure of investigative pieces.

4 Results

The coding procedure allowed us to identify 14 content categories (sub-nodes), which we further grouped into five main categories (nodes), as presented in the chart above (Figure 1).

We considered the "background," "verbal reactions," and "solutions" sub-nodes as additional information that could be deleted without affecting the main story. We then looked for the normalized density and the frequency of each node within the corpus to analyze their overall distribution (Table 1).

4.1 Justification

The "justification" category consists of all evidence used to prove the "pivotal facts" (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p. 142) of the story, including documents and experts' statements and victims' testimonies. Justification segments can usually be identified by formulations such as "according to," "say(s) X," or "show(s) Y." Since attribution of quotations to sources is a key feature of news text in general (Bednarek & Caple, 2012), most of these segments are assertive, and thus semantically and grammatically resemble those of any news story (Montgomery, 2007, p. 120), as shown in this excerpt:

> *K's husband's name appears in seven other companies*, associations and foundations that support and finance various projects in Switzerland […]. *According to Lorenzo Vidino*, funding for Muslim Brotherhood-related projects in Europe usually comes from foreign donors (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, among others). (Krafft, 2018)[5]

5 All the quoted articles are referenced in the supplementary material. All translations from French to English have been made by the authors.

Table 1: Distribution and frequency of the categories (in percent)

Main categories	Additional information			Justification		Process		Positioning			Outcomes		
Normalized density: Proportion (%) of the category within the data	22			39		4		14			21		
Frequency of the category: occurrence in % texts	96			98		54		80			99		
Subcategories	Back-ground	Reac-tions, com-ments	Solu-tions	Eviden-ces	Testi-monies	Method	Efforts	Toward com-petitors	Toward target	Toward power	Revela-tions	An-swers	Allega-tions*
Normalized density: Proportion (%) of the subcategory within the data	14	7	1	32	7	2	2	0	8	6	8	3	10
Frequency of the sub-category: occurrence in % texts	88	49	12	94	46	32	35	6	61	56	75	47	82

Note: *The "allegations" category was further divided into "suggested allegations" (1 %; 35 %), "endorsed allegations" (2 %; 35 %), and "outsourced allegations" (7 %; 79 %).

4.1.1 Suggesting an active stance

However, some ways in which material is integrated into or quoted in news stories emphasize the investigative reporter's active stance, as opposed to the "passive stance of the daily reporter" (Ettema & Glasser, 2006). These segments include formulations such as "contacted / questioned, X says," "according to the documents we managed to consult / obtain," "according to our research / the data we collected," or "according to several / different / many sources." All these formulations suggest that the journalist actively sought evidence, verification, or confirmation. Indeed, the verb "to confirm" appears in 157 quotations, as in the following example:

> *Contacted*, the spokesman of the Public Ministry [...] "*confirms* the opening of an investigation," *without further comment.* (Roselli, 2018)

This excerpt not only provides evidence but also suggests that the journalist knew information that she was not supposed to know. Moreover, it suggests that she became aware of the information through unofficial sources and was able to push official bodies to confirm it, despite their reluctance to do so.

4.1.2 Materializing evidence

Another recurring discursive strategy is to directly quote written material authored by other people. In addition to lending authenticity, flavor, and color to the story (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 214), this technique transforms evidence into "incontrovertible facts" (Bell, 1991, pp. 207–208) by discursively "showing" them:

> These intermediaries react with a mixture of panic and annoyance, emphasized by the use of capital letters. "*THE CLIENT HAS DISAPPEARED! I CAN'T FIND HIM anymore!!!!!!*" writes a Swiss asset manager. [...] "*WE CANNOT GO BACK* the next day to ask for more papers. *WE LOOK LIKE FUCKING AMATEURS.*" (Haederli, Brönnimann, & Zihlmann, 2018)

> A look at the company's entry in the British Commercial Register shows that the oligarch was still listed as being domiciled in Switzerland yesterday. "*Name: Roman Abramovich. Nationality: Russian. Domicile: Switzerland,*" mentions the public and official database. (Odehnal, Knellwolf, & Parvex, 2018)

The above quotations correspond to what Semino and Short (2004, p. 50) call "writing presentation in texts," which seems more accurate than "speech presentation in text": "The fact that the source is a written text creates higher expectations that the quotation is a faithful word-by-word representation of (part of) the original." The writing presenta-

tion of text therefore suggests a diminished human intervention between the "real evidence" and the readers, providing the quotations with the same "mechanical objectivity" as photography (Carlson, 2019). This technique enhances the story's epistemic authority, and thus its legitimacy.

In general, the justification segments highlight the rigorous verification procedure applied by the journalist and the robustness of the evidence, thereby reflecting the principles of the investigative epistemology (Bjerknes, 2020; Ettema & Glasser, 2006).

4.2 Process

The "process" category consists of segments that describe the journalist's method or mention difficulties encountered in obtaining information. The "process" segments account for only 4 % of the corpus text but appear in 54 % of the articles. Information about the method used by the journalist appears in 32 % of the articles, while information about the difficulties encountered appears in 35 %. This indicates that, most of the time, journalists mentioned their process only briefly, as in these excepts:

> *L'Illustré* interviewed relatives about their roles and relationships. Most of those involved wished to remain anonymous. (Dana, 2018)

> Its chairman [...] did not wish to answer our questions. [X.] does not talk. (Bernet, 2018b)

In most cases, the process information is not presented in well-defined segments, but is scattered in justification segments:

> *On an extract from the debt collection register, which we have obtained*, we can see, for example, that a greengrocer is claiming more than 170,000 francs in debts. [...] *In this document, we also see* that the company of X totals more than 700,000 francs of debt collection since 2014 [...]. One year ago, A., N. and I. realized that their AVS accounts had not been provisioned since 2016, *as confirmed by a recent statement from the compensation fund*. However, their share of the contributions was indeed deducted, *as evidenced by their salary slips.* (Grosjean, 2018)

In this case, the reader can infer that the journalist carefully verified each fact by searching for the corresponding document. However, this excerpt is more about proving facts than detailing the method used. Indeed, the coding results make clear that investigative journalists rarely insist on their method when they use traditional – and thus non-extraordinary – legwork journalism, such as interviewing people or reading documents.

4.2.1 Method: Data-driven mindset

Apart from a few articles that recount each step of the investigation (see the "process structure" section in Table 5 in the supplementary material), the largest segments devoted to methodological issues usually appear in data-driven investigations (Parasie, 2015) or, more generally, in articles in which quantitative data plays a major role. These include details on the figures used and how they are calculated:

> *The analysis conducted by "Le Matin Dimanche" is based on the key figures* for nursing homes published annually since 2012 by the Federal Office of Public Health. [...] *Qualified care staff was calculated by* multiplying total staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, by the percentage of care staff, and then by the percentage of qualified care staff. *In order to compare the nursing homes,* the resulting figure was reduced to the actual number of beds in each facility. *The calculation was validated by specialists from the FSO [Federal Statistics Office].* (Haederli & Boss, 2018)

In line with Weber, Engebretsen, and Kennedy's (2018, p. 202) observations, most of these "how-we-did-it" passages appear at the end of data journalism stories. By including these "meta-stories," investigative journalists are ultimately fostering disclosure transparency, which involves explaining "the way news is selected and produced" (Karlsson, 2010, p. 537). In their analysis of the *The New York Times' Caliphate* podcast, Perdomo and Rodrigues-Rouleau (2022, p. 2312) state that disclosure transparency serves "to convince audiences of the authority of the journalistic method." Moreover, disclosure transparency is deemed a crucial and commonly held principle of data journalism (Weber et al., 2018). Since such methodological "meta-sto-

ries" are a key feature of data journalism, they help link the investigative stories with the specialized sub-field of investigative data journalism.

4.2.2 Efforts: Facing difficulties

Journalists regularly evoke the difficulties encountered in obtaining information (e.g., "getting a complete picture of medical salaries is an uphill battle;" "there are no public statistics on the number of penal complaints against police officers"). The struggle to obtain information is even more obvious in text segments that mention legal battles the journalists are facing, such as publications bans or the denial of a request to access documents. In these (sometimes substantial) segments, investigative journalists assert that they will fight or have fought in court to secure publication or access rights:

> What happened? *"Le Matin Dimanche" was prevented from writing* about it, as the judge of the Commercial Court of the Canton of Zurich issued super-provisional measures at the request of [R.] on Friday evening. *Our newsroom will continue to fight to obtain the right to reveal this information which, in our opinion, is in the public interest.* (Parvex, Knellwolf, & Zihlmann, 2018)

The mentions of those legal hurdles highlight journalists' "adaptability and perseverance" (Bjeknes, 2020, p. 12) in the face of adversity. They also highlight journalists' determination to uncover facts that someone wants hidden, which is often considered a specific feature of investigative reporting (De Burgh, 2008, p. 15). Such emphases on legal impediments also implicitly suggest that defenders of the public interest (journalists) are victims of systemic failures.

4.3 Positioning

The "positioning" category systematically includes inter-discursive markers, as it involves journalists directly or indirectly quoting previous news stories or other people's discourses. It is composed of textual segments in which the journalists confront the target of the story with an accusation or adopt a stance toward others' statements (Martin & White, 2005, p. 92), whether of those in power or of other media outlets.

Since investigative journalism is considered a means for media outlets to distinguish themselves from their competitors (Hamilton, 2016), we expected the journalists to promote their own work by distinguishing it from their competitors' work. This did occur – reporters occasionally mentioned that an event "didn't make the headline," "went unnoticed," or happened "without much press coverage" – but the scarcity of those segments (density 0.2 %; frequency 6 %) suggests that this strategy is not a common or clear boundary marker, at least in their texts.

4.3.1 Toward targets: Confronting wrongdoers

In the "confrontation" segments, the target of the article is given a chance to tell their "side of the story." This is almost a mandatory step in the investigative process: "Sooner or later, you must confront your 'target' with the allegations" (Harcup, 2015, p. 106). Ettema and Glasser (1998, p. 176) argue that confrontation segments have even become "a ritualized display" mandated by the conventions of journalistic objectivity and ethics. Our analysis seems to confirm their observation, since almost two thirds of the articles (61 %) include such "confrontation" segments. Indeed, most of them are formally anecdotal, i.e., condensed into a single paragraph and left at the end of the article:

> *She [the person concerned] denies any conflict of interest.* "As president of [company R]'s distribution body, I have very little involvement in decision-making. [...]. My role is to ensure that the rules are respected and to decide in case of a tie [...] but I have never had to do so." (Giroud & Signorell, 2018)

Most confrontation segments are introduced with formulations such as "X defends himself of ...," "X denies that ...," "X contests that ...," or "X replies that ...." Such attributing verbs convey the target's unfavorable attitude toward the alleged claims. As Bednarek (2006, p. 176) states, they are "illocutionary attributing expressions," which "make explicit the speaker's (supposed) purpose." The confrontation segments thus implicitly suggest a conflict, or at least a tension, between the journalist's and the alleged wrongdoers' po-

sitions. In some cases, the journalists even mention the targets' refusals to comment:

> The spokesman of [X.] replied to all our questions that "*he did not wish to comment* on personal matters and ongoing proceedings." (Parvex et al., 2018)

> […] the two institutions do not explain this delay, *hiding behind the ongoing investigation.* (Besson, 2021)

> [Company R.] disputes these figures, *without putting forward* any others […]. [Companies A. and P.] also deny any coordination, *without answering precisely* on the existence of "contact" between the two manufacturers. (Haederli & Philippin, 2021)

Such segments have a double meaning: First, they confirm that the journalists fulfilled their duty of fair-mindedness by giving the target an opportunity to defend himself or herself. Second, they function as an argumentative device. A refusal to respond to an accusation is commonly interpreted as an admission (Dulong, 2000), since denial is the expected response. According to Bilmes (1988, p. 167), "if one fails to deny an accusation, a denial is noticeably absent and is a cause for inference, the most common inference being that the accusation is true." As Ettema and Glasser (1998, p. 176) point out, such confrontational statements are thus a "credibility tactic," "intended to say more about the veracity of the reporter than the accused."

4.3.2 Challenging public statements

This leads us to the third category, "positioning" (i. e., toward power), which appears in 56 % of the articles. This includes dialogistic positioning, by which the speaker "adopt[s] a stance towards to the value positions being referenced by the text" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 92). The most common dialogistic strategy observed is to follow a source quotation with a contrasting or opposing proposition, introduced with an adversative conjunction (e. g., "however, nevertheless, despite, in any case, in either case" (Idegbekwe, 2019, p. 45), as in the examples below:

> Until now, *[Company X] admitted that* it had provided support to [Company y], which "needed help." *However, in reality,* it has done more. (Krafft & Le Bec, 2018)

> P. defends himself in a "memo to the media" […]. "*There is no secret* in my tax situation," says the first sentence of his two-page text. The investigation by "Le Matin Dimanche" reveals *that there are, however, grey areas* […]. (Citroni, 2018)

> *[Company S.] claims that* its electricity has been 100 % Swiss and renewable for a year. *However,* it imports up to 20 % of its electricity. (Bernet, 2018a)

The effect of adversative conjunctions is "to negate either partially or totally the information that precedes it" (Idegbekwe, 2019, p. 45). Their use in this context suggests that the people or institutions quoted did not (completely) tell the truth, or even contradicted themselves.

All positioning segments reflect an opposition or conflict between what certain people or institutions have said or done and what the journalist demonstrates. Following Mellado (2015), we can describe these segments as markers of journalists performing their watchdog role. Indeed, Mellado (2015, p. 604) considers that the watchdog dimension is performed in news content notably when the journalist "question[s] the veracity or validity of what […] individuals or groups in power say or do" or when the news story contains "evidence of conflict between the journalist and those in power."

4.4 Outcomes

The "outcomes" category comprises segments that present the "pivotal facts" of the investigative story. Such segments were identified in almost every article of the corpus (99 %) and make up one fifth of the data. We distinguish three sub-nodes: "revealing unknown facts," "answering questions," and "denouncing someone / something." The latter sub-node is further divided into "endorsed allegations," "implied allegations," and "outsourced allegations," based on whether a source or the journalist makes the denunciation (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 155) and on how explicit the charges are.

4.4.1 Raising allegations

Most frequently, allegations in our corpus are "outsourced" (density 7 %; frequency 79 %) – i. e., they are attributed to victims or authoritative experts. These usually appear at the end of an article:

> As a result, the Church investigates many only internally […]. *Is it truly appropriate? The magistrates are sceptical* […]. "*These are not reliable* […]. In the past, so many cases have been hushed up! *To me, it's impossible to trust them.*" (Boss & Jeannet, 2018)

Thus, the authors often assign the most radical judgments to other people, which allows them to maintain the objective "reporter voice" (Feez, Iedema, & White, 2008, p. 21). Subjectivity is introduced through the use of quotations "in order to increase newsworthiness" (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 155).

"Endorsed allegations," by contrast, consist of journalists' explicit opinions or judgments as demonstrated through negative adjectives, nouns, verbs, or adverbs:

> About fifteen companies *have abused the credulity* of cross-border workers by offering them *aberrant employment contracts*. [Company U.]'s partner companies have used […] the loopholes in the legal system *to exploit poorly qualified workers*. The *unscrupulous bosses* promised the drivers a better life in Switzerland. (Jeannet, 2018)

In other examples of "endorsed allegations," journalists appeal to normative standards: They denounce a transgression by explaining what individuals or groups should have done according to the standard and contrasting this with what they actually did:

> The problem is that *a ban exists for a foundation like A.* […]: neither the members of the board nor their relatives can be employed by the foundation. *However […] [G.] does not only support* the director of [foundation A.], but his wife also handles human resources. (Arboit, 2018)

Such propositions correspond to what Ettema and Glasser (1998, pp. 71–73) have termed the "objectification of moral standards": investigative journalists' attempt to transform moral claims into empirical claims. In this way, the journalists denounce a transgression without expressing subjective appraisals.

In the case of implied allegations, the speaker only suggests wrongdoings or problems:

> [lead] M. has numerous connections with structures in French-speaking Switzerland that are active in mosques. *His links with organizations close to the Muslim Brotherhood are multiple.* (Krafft, 2018)

As in this example, several investigations focus on the dubious relationships of individuals, notably with organizations deemed as fundamentalist. The allegations are thus quite vague and sometimes even euphemistic.

Following Márquez-Ramírez et al. (2020), endorsed and outsourced allegations are understood as expressions of two different orientations of the watchdog reporter: detached watchdog and interventionist watchdog. Outsourced and implied allegations draw legitimacy from the norm of objectivity, which refers back to more general journalistic professionalism (Schudson & Anderson, 2009). In contrast, endorsed allegations are the ultimate form of adversarialism (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, pp. 63–66): The journalist assumes responsibility for the denunciation and thus adopts an explicit critical position toward those in positions of power. It constructs a self-representation that is closer (although not altogether similar) to what Aucoin (2007) described as the typical muckraker journalist. While the detached watchdog relies on journalistic professional norms and values to establish authority, the interventionist watchdog relies on the more specific "democratic role" of the fourth estate for this purpose.

4.4.2 Revealing unknown facts

The "revelation" segments explicitly or implicitly emphasize what is secret or new in the story, i. e., the unexpectedness of the disclosed facts. We coded a large proportion of the story headlines and leads as belonging to the "revelation" node.

> [title]: In Berne, the Green Party is the richest in lobbyists

> [lead]: As a revision of the rules is currently discussed, *"Le Matin Dimanche" combed through* the guest list of the Parliament. *Surprise!* (Bailat & Parvex, 2018)

In this example, the title highlights what is new, while the lead emphasizes the laborious journalistic process ("combed through") and the unexpectedness of the scoop ("Surprise!"), signaling that unknown facts could be disclosed thanks to the media outlet's investigation. Formulations like "our investigation shows which hours are at risk" or "our investigation makes it possible to publish a global figure, which has never before been calculated" emphasize the same news properties (novelty and product of an investigation).

The journalists also regularly highlight the secret, confidential, sensitive, or classified nature of the information disclosed. In several excerpts, the journalists make extensive use of the lexical field of secrecy and mystery, through formulations like "one of the best-kept secrets of …" and "investigation on the hidden side of…". Keywords such as "revelations" and "investigation" are in this same vein. More generally, several quotations suggest that the journalist had access to normally inaccessible and even ultra-secret information and sources, notably investigations made by the judicial authorities, the police, or the secret services:

> An investigator, *who is not allowed to speak to the media*, confirmed to "Matin Dimanche" an incident during the WADA symposium a year and a half ago. *No details.* But his description fits with *the start of an investigation by the Swiss Federal Prosecutor's Office (MPC)* in March 2017 – for "a cyber attack against the World Anti-Doping Agency". (Knellwolf, Odehnal, & Plattner, 2018)

Revealing hidden facts that would not have come to the public's attention without one's own research is one of the main contributions of investigative journalism (Cordell, 2009, p. 121). By referring to the novelty or secrecy of the facts disclosed and to the laborious process undertaken, journalists are clearly placing their texts in the category of investigative journalism. Quoting unnamed, secret sources also helps "efficiently create an image of investigative reporting" (Poler Kovačič & Erjavec, 2011, p. 336).

4.4.3 Answering questions

Investigative journalists often pose questions or raise doubt in their articles. This can be done through "incomprehensible evaluators" (Bednarek, 2006, p. 69), such as "it is unclear why / how" or it "raised questions about,"[6] or through the formal structure of an interrogative sentence (Ivanova, 2020, pp. 502–503):

1) "How did it get to that point? Behind this drift lies a war between judges and lawyers" (Burnier, 2018).
2) "How is it possible that these expired medications have been administered […]? This exceptional case reveals the weaknesses of the system" (Parvex, 2018).
3) "Do the links mentioned by [X.] really exist? According to our research, they do" (Bernet & Roselli, 2018).
4) "How big is this wave of departures? Accounts vary. A well-informed source mentions 21 departures, spread out between 2015, 2016 and 2017" (Boeglin, 2018).

Such questions may appear in the introduction or lead of the articles (1–2), or in the body of the text (3–4). These questions are systematically embedded into a three-part structure: exposition – question – answer. The journalists obviously do not expect an answer from anyone; hence, the questions serve primarily to introduce the (documented) answer, which is the result of the journalist's investigation. The questions are used to pique readers' curiosity (Ivanova, 2020, p. 507), but they also serve to emphasize the writer's own curiosity. As Athanasiadou (1991, p. 108) stated, "the chief motivation for information questions is to be found in a desire for knowledge." The questions are not asked in order to get an answer, but to emphasize the journalist's desire for knowledge. Indeed, curiosity

6 Sentences such as "This case raises some questions about the way in which the Swiss authorities conduct these investigations and about the influence of international politics in these decisions" (Parvex et al., 2018) were also coded in the "question" category. However, they appear far less frequently than formal interrogative sentences.

is mentioned by practitioners as one of the most important investigative traits (Cancela et al., 2021, p. 886).

5 Discussion: The construction of three investigative identities

Through our coding procedure, we classified macro-propositions of investigative stories and identified four discourse categories and ten sub-categories that set these stories apart from ordinary news reporting. The coding categories should not be viewed as designed *per se* for the construction of an investigative identity – the texts aim mostly at providing relevant facts to the readers. However, they show that investigative pieces are mainly composed of macro-propositions that have different discourse functions than those of ordinary news pieces.

On the one hand, journalists do not quote documents and sources as *facts* but as *evidence* for their explicit or implicit position. The dominance of "justification" segments both in density (32 %) and frequency (98 %) within the corpus shows that investigative journalists primarily seek authority through their seemingly incontrovertible knowledge claims.

On the other hand, journalists do not present "both sides" of the story as equal, but rather take a position in 80 % of the articles. Even when written in an impersonal style, investigative pieces engage the responsibility of their authors. This result suggests that investigative pieces should be interpreted as reporters' positioning on the truth (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p. 161).

The coding results are in line with Bjerknes' (2020, p. 1047) analysis of meta-journalistic content, which demonstrates that traditional legwork methods "are usually only mentioned in passing." On the contrary, "meta-stories" are fully outlined in investigative pieces based on data-journalism or innovative methods, which serve as "epistemic resources in the struggle for identity and recognition within the field of journalism" (Bjerknes, 2020, p. 1037).

At the micro-level of text, some identity-markers emphasize the reporters' personal investigative mindset (curiosity, perseverance, or adaptability), their investigative epistemology (active stance or careful verification procedure), their watchdog role (by confronting targets or making value judgments) or their specialized skills and creativity (through meta-stories on the investigative process). While we can observe these discursive strategies at the micro-level of language, they can also shape the article's larger structure (see supplementary material).

Most of the observed discursive strategies suggest a high degree of commitment on the part of the journalist in terms of effort and verification. Journalists that employ them therefore rely on traditional journalistic norms and practices to gain legitimacy, recognition, and prestige (Stringer, 2018). The same is true for performing the watchdog role since this comes under the esteemed fourth-estate function of journalism. However, as we have shown, reporters can perform this role in either a detached or an interventionist way (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020).

The detached watchdog orientation mainly consists of performing "journalistic traditions associated to objectivity" (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020, p. 53). In this sense, we claim that the detached watchdog performance, as well as performances of an "investigative epistemology," act as a professional intrinsic argument (Carlson, 2018, p. 1884) for the authority of journalism as a whole: i. e., what the journalist is doing is "normal journalism" (Cancela et al., 2021) at its best. This intrinsic argument seeks to establish authority by reaffirming the professional (and traditional) journalistic culture and implicitly showing what makes good journalism (Marchi, 2019; Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2022, pp. 2321–2322).

In contrast, we argue that the interventionist watchdog performance acts as a boundary marker both at the borders of and within the journalistic profession. At the borders, it discursively reaffirms journalism's independence from other centers of power and thus its autonomy (Carlson & Lewis, 2019, p. 127). Within the profession, an interventionist watchdog performance emphasizes the journalist's commitment to the highly valued but "rarely enacted" (Raemy & Vos, 2021, p. 119) institutional role of the fourth

Table 2: Discursive categories constructing investigative identities

Investigative identity	The "good" journalist		The "adversarial" journalist		The "inventive" factfinder	
Categories	Justification; Revelations	Outsourced; implied allegations	Positioning	Endorsed allegations	Method	Efforts; answering questions
Performance	Performing an investigative "epistemology"	Performing the detached-watchdog role	Performing the interventionist watchdog role	Performing the interventionist-watchdog role	Performing specialized, data skills	Performing an investigative "mindset"
Density	47 %	8 %	14 %	2 %	2 %	5 %
	55 %		16 %		7 %	
Argument for authority seeking	Journalism's core values		Fourth estate (social role)		Personal traits	

estate – i.e., it signals that the reporter is not engaged in "normal journalism" but adversarial journalism. Indeed, the interventionist watchdog orientation involves making the journalist's own voice apparent in their news texts (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020, p. 56). Journalists thus take on responsibility for publicly denouncing wrongdoing or criticizing the statements of others, a social role specifically associated with investigative reporting or muckraking. In this perspective, the interventionist watchdog acts as a marker of a specific professional ideology within journalistic culture (Cancela et al., 2021; Hanitzsch, 2007).

Finally, when reporters mention their specialized skills and creativity, they implicitly set a boundary between themselves and "normal" news journalists, but also between themselves and "traditional" investigative journalists. In the words of Bjerknes (2020), they are the "inventive factfinders" while the others are merely "factfinders."

The identities that emerge are thus of three kinds (Table 2): the "good" journalist, the "adversarial" journalist, and the "inventive" journalist. All three are based on a core differentiation from "ordinary" journalists that operates at varying degrees. The "good journalist" identity reaffirms core professional values and asserts general journalistic authority by contributing to the "inter-group" struggle at the borders of journalism. The "adversarial journalist" identity engages in boundary work at the borders of the profession by reaffirming journalism's autonomy, but also within the profession by claiming special authority for a sub-group of journalists with a shared professional ideology. It therefore sets "intra-professional" boundaries between investigative journalists (who fulfill the role of the fourth estate) and other, "ordinary" journalists. The "inventive journalist" identity engages in inter-personal boundary work by claiming special expertise as individual journalist.

6 Conclusion

This article has shown that authority is constructed in investigative pieces through "investigative markers" corresponding to several levels of journalistic identity (Raemy, 2021, pp. 843–846): the macro-level of professional culture, the meso-level of the highly valued (but rarely performed) social role of the fourth estate, and the micro-level of individual qualities. At the micro-level of language, multiple types of identity markers might be found in the same investigative piece, but at the macro level of discourse structure (see supplementary material), the articles are generally dominated by one of the three identities observed. The general dispersion of the categories associated with each of the three identities suggests that investigative journalists in French-speaking Switzerland mainly seek to establish authority by reaffirming the core values of journalistic culture.

While our analysis is a first attempt to document how investigative articles can contribute to journalistic authority, as well as to qualitatively analyze how journalists' professional identities and roles materialize in news content, it provides little information on the actual process of investigative reporting. Following Bjerknes (2020) we would suggest that further empirical observations be conducted on the process of investigative journalism,

with a focus on the writing phase. Additionally, in line with Ettema and Glasser's work (1988, p. 23), it would be worth comparing our results with the "reporters' own understanding of their intellectual enterprise" to examine the extent to which journalists are consciously constructing their identities when writing their investigative pieces.

Further research could also focus on regions or countries outside French-speaking Switzerland. For example, since Switzerland's linguistic regions are strongly influenced by the culture of neighboring nations (Germany, France, and Italy) (Udris, Eisenegger, Vogler, Schneider, & Häuptli, 2020, p. 259), it would be interesting to compare our findings with those obtained from similar corpora for German-speaking Switzerland. Furthermore, our study focuses on print media. Future studies might compare our results with an analysis of investigative pieces produced for radio and television, since news content varies by media type (Udris et al., 2020, p. 265). Moreover, while Swiss journalists' role orientations and performances do not differ significantly from those of other Western journalists (Raemy & Vos, 2021, p. 124), we would encourage researchers to conduct similar qualitative analyses in other cultural contexts.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited). https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/article/view/j.scoms.2023.02.3488

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