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## 2 **Supplementary Information for**

### 3 **Measuring Impactful Reporting in Local Newspapers**

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#### 7 **This PDF file includes:**

8     Supplementary text

9     SI References

## 10 Supporting Information Text

### 11 Extended Materials and Methods

12 The data set used for this study and the classifier is publicly available (1), with the full set of features for the 50 newspapers  
13 over the period analyzed, and the neural network outputs. We also provide the necessary code for researchers to easily extend  
14 our analysis to other newspapers by training a dynamic topic influence model, and build the word embedding representation to  
15 create new data sets that can be processed by our classifier.

16 **Data Collection.** The data set utilized for the analysis described in this paper was provided by NewsBank, a news database  
17 resource that provides a collection of millions of articles and media publications from thousands of different sources. We  
18 collected all available articles from 50 US newspapers among those that have historically won journalistic awards, choosing  
19 a geographically diverse set of newspapers. The articles from these sources were systematically queried, and the resultant  
20 data was reformatted and aggregated into the finalized raw data set. After removing advertisements and obituaries, the final  
21 data set consisted of 5,926,763 articles, 894 of which were winners or nominees of journalistic awards. We use all the articles  
22 between Jan. 1, 2010- Dec. 31, 2017 as our training set, Jan. 1- Dec. 31, 2018 as our validation set, and Jan. 1 - Dec. 31 2019  
23 as our test set. The number of articles in the training, validation, and test sets were 5005696, 511834 and 409233, with 562, 213  
24 and 119 award winning articles, respectively in each group.

25 **Data Preprocessing.** The first preprocessing step was reducing the words in the article text to their linguistic stems, and  
26 tokenizing the text into  $n$ -grams [ $n \in \{1, 2\}$ ] to generate a document-frequency matrix based on the 20,000 most commonly  
27 found  $n$ -grams within each newspaper.

28 Next, for every newspaper, we split our corpus into monthly groups and trained a dynamic document influence model with  
29 8 topics. This method has previously been used to evaluate the scholarly impact of scientific articles (2, 3). Influence scores, a  
30 measure of how an article affected next months articles on every topic, were obtained from this model. Each dynamic LDA  
31 topic for the 50 newspapers in our data set consisted of [20,000 x 120] matrices, where every row was a probability distribution  
32 over the terms in the vocabulary for every month. For every newspaper, these topic distributions were averaged over time,  
33 creating 50 distinct average distribution vectors for 8 topics. A greedy optimization algorithm was then used to match these  
34 topics across newspapers (4) based on their shared vocabulary, creating 8 topic clusters. The influences of articles on each  
35 topic were labeled according to these clusters to achieve consistency across different newspapers.

36 A separate step was to perform feature extraction on the text data in order to retrieve further information that could  
37 provide helpful information for our classification model. We conducted a human-designed feature extraction process, which  
38 tagged certain common article behaviors as potentially influential: any indication or mention of involvement in a series of  
39 articles, words related to investigative acts and court cases, inclusion of statistical, anecdotal, legislative data, references to  
40 contemporary investigations, and the number of words and sentences in the article.

41 Further steps were taken to extract useful information from the article sections. Namely, to capture the fact that some  
42 sections in newspapers were more likely to produce investigative articles compared to others (e.g. metro news versus sports),  
43 for every newspaper, we generated a document-frequency matrix using the words used in the section names of every article.  
44 We used this document-frequency matrix to train two separate gradient-boosting classification models on the training set. The  
45 first one was trained to predict whether a given section had any award winning articles at all, using section names (i.e., the  
46 ground truth label was positive for every article belonging to a section that had an award winning article). The second one was  
47 trained to predict award winning articles using section names (i.e., the ground truth label was positive only for award winning  
48 articles). The outputs (probabilities) from these two models were used as additional features for our final classification task.

49 Further, we used the pre-trained word embedding model FastText (5-7) which consisted of 1 million word vectors trained on  
50 Wikipedia, UMBC webbase corpus, and statmt.org news data set to create 300-dimensional latent representations for articles  
51 in our data set. For every article, we used the tf-idf weighted average of the word embeddings of the constituent words to  
52 generate article embeddings (8, 9).

53 Our final set of 320 features for each news article included the 300-dimensional article embeddings, 10 features from the  
54 document influence model (8 features representing the article's influence score on 8 topics, the sum of the influence values on  
55 all topics, and the maximum of the 8 influence scores), 2 features which are the probabilities extracted from the section-name  
56 based classifier described above, and 8 features from our human-designed feature extraction process (number of words, number  
57 of sentences, mention of a series of articles, number of references to other parts of an article series, accountability-related word  
58 count, investigation-related word count, mentioned investigation duration, mention of any investigation documents).

59 We used a three-layer neural network with the focal loss function (10), that has been found to be useful in classification  
60 tasks involving imbalanced data sets. Hyperparameter experiments were run to find the best model architecture using a grid  
61 search over the number of nodes within every layer, the regularization parameters, and the parameters of the focal loss function.  
62 When choosing the final model to deploy, we used a holistic approach and analyzed performance on the validation data set.  
63 We prioritized recall over precision, and investigated the false positives belonging to non-investigative sections within every  
64 newspaper. Our final neural network architecture is a three layer model with [256,128,128] nodes with ReLU activation, and the  
65 model was trained with dropout layers between every hidden layer with respective probabilities [0.4,0.4,0.6]. Our focal loss  
66 function uses the parameter values  $\alpha = 0.9999, \gamma = 3.0$ .

67 On the test data set, using a threshold value of 0.5, our model correctly identifies 92/119 award winning investigative  
68 articles. Our model also predicts that 8949 articles who did not win awards are investigative, and classifies the remaining

69 400163 articles as not investigative. With a threshold value of 0.9, the model correctly identifies 80/119 award winners, predicts  
70 4218 other non-award winning articles are investigative, and classifies 404894 articles as not investigative. The test AUC-ROC  
71 achieved by the model is 0.99, and AUC-PR is 0.02.

72 **List of Newspapers.** Full list of newspapers in our data set is provided below. For each newspaper, we queried all articles on  
73 Newsbank between Jan 1, 2010 - Dec 31, 2019. For some newspapers, articles were only available for a subset of this period,  
74 which we specify below.

75  
76 Albuquerque Journal (NM)  
77 Anchorage Daily News (AK, Jan 2010-Jul 2014, Jan 2015-Jun 2015, May 2016-Dec 2019)  
78 Arizona Daily Star (AZ)  
79 Austin American-Statesman (TX)  
80 Baltimore Sun (MD)  
81 Buffalo News (NY)  
82 Center for Public Integrity (USA)  
83 Charlotte Observer (NC)  
84 Chicago Sun-Times (IL)  
85 Columbus Dispatch (OH)  
86 Commercial Appeal (TN, all except Dec 2016-Feb 2017)  
87 Dallas Morning News (TX, Jan 2010-Nov 2013)  
88 Denver Post (CO)  
89 Detroit News (MI)  
90 East Valley Tribune (AZ, all except Feb 2017)  
91 El Paso Times (TX)  
92 Florida Times-Union (FL)  
93 Fresno Bee (CA)  
94 Houston Chronicle (TX)  
95 Idaho Statesman (ID)  
96 Kansas City Star (MO, Jan 2010-Sep 2018)  
97 Los Angeles Times (CA, Sep-Dec 2013, Dec 2014-Jan 2016, Jul-Dec 2016, Feb 2017-Mar 2018, Oct 2018-Dec 2019)  
98 Las Vegas Sun (NV)  
99 Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)  
100 Miami Herald (FL)  
101 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (WI)  
102 Oklahoman (OK)  
103 Omaha World-Herald (NE)  
104 Orange County Register (CA)  
105 Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)  
106 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)  
107 Plain Dealer (OH)  
108 ProPublica (USA)  
109 Sacramento Bee (CA)  
110 San Antonio Express-News (TX)  
111 San Diego Union-Tribune (CA, Jan 2010-Feb 2012, May 2015-Dec 2019)  
112 San Jose Mercury News (CA, Jan 2010-Jun 2016)  
113 Seattle Times (WA)  
114 San Francisco Chronicle (CA)  
115 Spokesman-Review (WA)  
116 St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)  
117 Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities (MN)  
118 Tampa Bay Times (FL, Dec 2011-Dec 2019)  
119 The Gazette (CO)  
120 The Oregonian (OR)  
121 The Blade (OH, May 2013-Dec 2019)  
122 The Virginian-Pilot (VA)  
123 The Wichita Eagle (KS, Dec 2010-Dec 2019)  
124 Winston-Salem Journal (NC)  
125 Wisconsin State Journal (WI)

**List of all custom words and phrases extracted.** The set of features extracted are derived from the extensive description of keywords used and characteristics of investigative news stories in (11). Specifically: (i) investigative stories are very frequently part of a series, and (ii) they often uncover new information on a topic of public interest that potentially someone in power would like to conceal, hence the keywords below are frequently used in investigative stories as described in (11).

Audit, FOIA, freedom of information act, court case, abuse, corruption, crime, exploitation, injustice, misconduct, misdeed, misuse, offense, wrongdoing, debasement, delinquency, desecration, fault, misapplication, mishandle, mishandling, mismanage, perversion, bribe, extortion, fraud, malfeasance, nepotism, crookedness, demoralization, jobbery, misrepresent, payoff, payola, shady, skimming, unscrupulous, venality, profiteer, blackmail, deceit, hoax, scam, artifice, barratry, cheat, chicane, con, dupe, duplicity, guile, imposture, sham, treachery, swindle, derelict, immorality, impropriety, malpractice, misbehavior, mischief, mischievous, misdemeanor, transgression, botch, neglect, abandon, disuse, mistreat, imperil, jeopardize, endanger, abduct, divert, embezzle, blackmail, accuse, allege, arraign, arrest, attack, blame, charge, complain, denounce, implicate, indict, prosecute, sue, summon, apprehend, betray, censure, frame, impeach, impute, incriminate, risk, steal, records OR documents OR analysis + showed OR found OR revealed OR uncovered OR documented OR discovered, X-(month OR year) long investigation, X'th part of series.

**List of Journalistic Awards Used.** The Sidney Hillman Foundation Awards, NLA Awards (Previously ASNE), ASNE Awards, National Press Foundation Awards, Dart Awards for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma, Sigma Delta Chi Awards, IRE Awards, Local Matters Picks (Sep 2017 onwards), Pulitzer Awards, OJA Awards, Goldsmith Awards, Mike Berger Award, Paul Tobenkin Memorial Award, George Polk Awards, Overseas Press Club Awards, Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Awards.

## Additional Details on the Main Text

**List of Articles Identified in Figure 2: Post-2018 Case Studies.** A: Investigations on Rich Rodriguez and Don Shooter scandals (12, 13) B: Series on Tucson housing crisis (14) C, D: Series on the Mexican border wall and family separations along the border (15, 16) E: Series on Buffalo Water Authority and Percoco Corruption Cases (17, 18) F, G, H: Investigations on the Buffalo Diocese and Boy Scout Organization sex scandals (19–21) I: Series on foster care in Florida, and political campaign spending (22, 23) J: Series on the use of DNA evidence in criminal courts (24) K: Series on Florida foster care facilities (25) L: California Camp Fire (26) M: Gilroy mass shooting, and criminal investigations around the Golden State Killer case (27, 28).

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