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The courage to speak

How investigative journalists persuade reluctant
whistleblowers to tell their stories

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Abstract

Investigative journalism is often said to be based on two pillars of information gathering – documents and human sources. Yet while document retrieval and analysis have received much attention in recent years, particularly with the advent of computer-assisted reporting and Freedom of Information legislation, remarkably little attention has been given in the journalistic literature to best practice for developing and maintaining sources, especially reluctant, vulnerable sources with high-risk information. This thesis uses a case study approach to analyse four high-profile examples of New Zealand investigative journalism based on revelation by vulnerable and reluctant human sources. Using interviews with both the sources and the journalists who persuaded them to speak out, it draws on persuasion and social psychology theory to explain the decision-making process of the whistleblowers and establish a model of best practice for journalists wishing to persuade reluctant, vulnerable people to speak out safely and effectively.

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

James Hollings

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Attestation of authorship	ii
Chapter One – Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Evolution of the research interest	2
1.3 Developing the research problem	3
1.4 The organisation of this thesis	4
Chapter Two – Literature review	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Definition and context	11
2.3 The role of news sources	14
2.4 Other kinds of witnesses: Whistleblowers and police witnesses	24
2.5 Investigative journalistic practice	31
2.6 Summary	49
Chapter Three – Methodology	53
3.1 Introduction	53
3.2 Methodological choices	56
3.3 Theoretical perspectives	60
3.4 Research design	94
3.5 Conclusion	108
Chapter 4 – Case Study One - Philip Kitchin and Anna Smith	110
4.1 Introduction	110
4.2 The case	111
4.3 Analysis	121
4.4 Conclusion	135
Chapter Five – Case Study Two - Philip Kitchin and Louise Nicholas	140
5.1 Introduction	140
5.2 The case	141
5.3 Analysis	160
5.4 Conclusion	171

Chapter Six – Phil Taylor and Donna Johnson	177
6.1 Introduction	177
6.2 The case	178
6.3 Analysis	191
6.4 Conclusion	203
Chapter Seven – Fionnuala Kelly	206
7.1 Introduction	206
7.2 The case	206
7.3 Analysis	220
7.4 Conclusion	228
Chapter Eight – Discussion	230
8.1 Introduction	230
8.2 Persuasion effects.....	231
8.3 Message and other factors	233
8.4 The role of emotion in the ELM and CDT	238
8.5 Relationship Effects	247
8.6 General Effects.....	250
8.7 Conclusion	252
Chapter Nine – Conclusion.....	258
9.1 Introduction	258
9.2 The findings	260
9.3 A model of best practice: The Informed Commitment Model	276
9.4 Strengths, limitations and implications of this research	278
9.5 Implications for the ELM	279
9.6 Implications for the whistleblower and witness literature	2800
9.7 Towards a new theory of whistleblowing.....	282
9.8 Implications for the journalism literature and journalistic practice	283
9.9 Conclusion	288
Appendix One: Sample Interview Schedule and Information Sheets.....	292
Appendix Two: Sample Interview Schedule.....	296
Appendix Three: Master coding and data sheet	300
Reference list	300