



REPORTERS' ACCESSIBILITY: WORKING CONDITIONS OF LOCAL JOURNALISTS COVERING INDIGENOUS CONFLICT IN SWAT

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Abstract

This research investigates the working conditions and challenges faced by local journalists in the Swat district of Pakistan amidst periods of violence, focusing on incidents such as military operations and suicide bombings by the Taliban. Through interviews with journalists in the region, the study explores how they navigate the complexities of reporting traumatic events while grappling with physical and emotional strain. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory, the research analyzes journalists' strategies for accessing conflict zones safely and ensuring the journalistic principles of objectivity and fairness. Using concepts like Capital, Habitus, and Doxa, the study situates journalists within the volatile social landscape to highlight the interconnectedness of their professional and personal spheres. Despite possessing cultural and social capital, journalists face significant risks to their safety while fulfilling their reporting duties in dangerous environments.

Keywords: Local journalism, internal conflict, field, habitus, capital, working conditions



Introduction

In the post-9/11 scenario, Pakistan's Swat district emerged as a global media flash point. This mountainous tract of land does not share a border with any country, yet it remains an active part of international conflicts. In 2001, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan had far-reaching consequences beyond Afghanistan's borders. The spillover of the conflict into neighbouring Pakistan exacerbated existing tensions and created a volatile environment, especially in the Swat Valley. The presence of militant groups sympathetic to figures like Osama Bin Laden further complicated the situation, leading to a precarious balance between state forces (military) and insurgent factions (the Taliban).

In such environments, the role of media becomes crucial yet perilous. Journalists operating in conflict zones face significant risks to their safety, with the 24/7 news cycle often driving demand for constant coverage that can put reporters in danger. Targeting journalists by state and non-state actors further underscores the dangers inherent in conflict reporting. Local journalists, in particular, face unique challenges in navigating the complexities of conflict reporting. They often lack the resources and support available to their international counterparts and may struggle for accurate reporting with concerns for their safety and the safety of their communities.

The deaths of journalists in Swat serve as a stark reminder of the risks involved in covering conflict, and they highlight the need for greater awareness and support for journalists operating in such environments. Training and resources to enhance journalists' safety and understanding of conflict dynamics can be crucial in improving the quality and safety of reporting from regions like Swat. Additionally, efforts to hold accountable those who target journalists and undermine press freedom are essential for fostering a more secure environment for media professionals.

Indeed, conflict reporting represents a crucial aspect of journalism, as it often involves navigating complex and dangerous situations while striving to inform the public about important events and issues accurately. The experiences and challenges faced by journalists covering conflicts have been the subject of academic inquiry, with researchers examining various aspects of their work, including the role of local versus international journalists, the impact of new technologies, the ethical dilemmas they encounter, and the psychological toll of reporting from conflict zones.

Enough research on conflict reporting has focused on journalists' experiences and responses, but a gap in the literature concerning coverage of internal conflicts remains. Internal conflicts often lack global attention and present unique challenges for journalists. These challenges may include navigating complex political dynamics, managing personal safety concerns, and balancing the need for accurate reporting with the potential risks to the families and sources.

The experiences of journalists covering internal conflicts may differ significantly from those covering international conflicts. However, comparatively less attention has been paid to this



specific aspect of conflict reporting. As such, there is a need for more in-depth research and analysis to understand better the dynamics and challenges of reporting on internal conflicts.

Local journalists covering their "own" conflict study and the analysis of the reflections of these journalists is a contribution to knowledge. Academics and war journalists often write research and autobiographies, but understanding their responses and experiences from an insider's perspective is crucial. This research debates the local journalism working conditions and journalists' criticism of their role and approach during the "war on terror."

Scholars (such as Bergen, 2009; Carpentier & Trioen, 2010; Hoiby & Garrido, 2020; Lynn, 2020; Mack, 1975; Taylor, 1992) argue that journalists in conflict scenarios face different restrictions in access to the war zone and little support from the state. Due to this, they also faced pressures from the warring parties local to the site of violence, who are generally held responsible for perpetrating violence on local people. Such barriers—such as lack of accessibility and official cooperation—make it hard for local journalists to verify the news, which puts their safety at risk. This outline aims to raise the need to offer a thematic overview of the available literature to examine how scholars define working conditions (accessibility) and their relationship to journalists in different contexts and conflict zones.

Problem Statement

This study investigates the factors influencing journalists' operational methods in the Swat district during the 2006-2012 armed conflict between the state and the local Taliban. It uses qualitative research to determine targeted local journalism and identify journalistic practices and conditions arising from war pressures and established norms. The aim is to understand the motivations driving journalists' working conditions, accessibility, and practices.

Conflict reporting demands professional excellence, local knowledge, and bravery. Local journalists face unique challenges in performing their duties due to the proximity of the reporters as well as their families. This research examined local journalists' working conditions and responses in Swat Valley, covering internal conflicts from 2006 to 2012.

Journalists using armed bodyguards for local events raises questions about conflict dynamics, local journalism framework, and the interplay between them. Between 2006 and 2012, District Swat experienced a siege due to Taliban hostilities. Understanding local journalism's dynamics and working conditions is crucial, as it highlights journalists' safety, well-being, and professionalism in conflict zones. Lack of training and biased reporting contribute to their safety issues. Many journalists have been killed due to these challenges. Gaining a deeper understanding of the responses of these journalists is essential.



Review of Literature

The Swat-based journalists, as well as news outlets, which mainly use the national or regional language, not only focus on a specific audience, but they specifically publish news for a wide range of audiences in a given community. Therefore, I would prefer to use the terms 'Swat-based journalists' and 'local' in a broader term to include all the surrounding Malakand Division's seven districts.

Working conditions of local journalists covering conflict:

War and crisis reporting always attracted scholarly attention, but little research was done on local journalists and fixers facing various threats and challenges. Local journalists' dangers and challenges remain un-theorized, reinforcing the argument that they should be under consideration by media researchers (Garnham, 1979; Mosco, 2011). Journalism in a state of war is an altogether different story. Conflict-sensitive reporting becomes characterized by uncertainty due to extreme precarity, making a journalist dependent on local conditions (Ashraf & Brooten, 2017). Here, the focus is on local reporters in the conflict zone field conditions, power struggles, and material conditions they face.

Understanding local journalists' working conditions and news practices is crucial for local media practitioners (Ashraf, 2018). A study titled 'Tribal Journalists Under Fire' conducted in the ex-FATA of Pakistan by Syed Irfan Ashraf and Lisa Brooten pointed out that local journalists in tribal areas are the only independent information sources on FATA. However, their working conditions are highly problematic (Pate & Idris, n.d., 2017). Local journalists in FATA face challenges in reporting due to impunity, institutional apathy, and threats. Impunity leads to a tightrope walk in journalism, with journalists often cooperating with militants. The state's passivity negatively impacts their mental health. Direct and indirect threats make independent decisions difficult, and authority puts emotional stress on journalists, leading to the death of colleagues and threats to their families.

The situation in ex-FATA is the same as in Nigeria regarding violence, terrorism, and risky reporting from a conflict zone. The Boko Haram violent terrorism in East Nigeria and Cameroons from 2009-2015 endangered local journalists during the conflict. Under 'How Journalists Survived to Report,' Pate and Hamza Idris explained the threats, risks, and challenges local journalists face. One was the challenge of having no experience in covering an inside conflict. The local journalist was threatened and hounded, yet they gathered news that required bravery and passion to cover the event (Pate & Idris, 2017). The Boko Haram terror group was aware of the use of communication means and monitored how they were covered in the media. The publicity and letters were sent to various media organizations, and interviews were offered to international broadcast media such as the VOA, the BBC, and the DW.



In Nigeria, detention and imprisonment by security agencies were other challenges faced by journalists. The story of two Aljazeera reporters detained by the military in Maiduguri on March 26, 2015, received worldwide attention (Oshodi, 2021). According to a military spokesperson, the two journalists, Ahmed Idris, and Mustafa Ali, were reportedly arrested for trespassing in the prohibited areas. However, Al-Jazeera countered the military's claim that both have permission from the relevant quarters. The two were released after imprisonment in their hotel rooms for ten days. Another challenge from state security agencies was denying access to the sites of occurrences (bomb blasts, interviews with victims, and many other such incidents).

Judith Lohner, Irene Neverla, and Sandra Banjac studied the working conditions of journalists in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia, and South Africa (Lohner et al., 2017). This study revealed many aspects of journalists' challenges and working conditions, making their duties more exciting and demanding. According to the study, the first challenge is the repressive legal framework limiting the independence of local journalists (Lohner et al., 2017).

Studies on local journalism and journalists' working conditions (Baglo, 2008) need a persistent professional debate among journalists and academia. While covering a conflict event, journalists face several hurdles in selecting angles for a news report. In a study conducted in the context of the Baluchistan conflict, Syed Atif Abbad Shirazi mentioned essential aspects of professional constraints on journalists (2017). The first constraint is routine means, such as deadlines, resources, etc., affecting news production quality. Another constraint on journalism is the audience. Journalists significantly care for audience interest, socioeconomic status, and educational background when selecting an issue or an angle (Shirazi, 2017).

Journalists face challenges in reporting violence and conflict in conflict zones due to impunity, threats, power elites, and their impact on independent decision-making.

Theoretical Framework

This research study on the working conditions and practices of local journalists in Swat covering the Taliban militancy is theoretically linked with French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) field theory. The field theory Bourdieu (1998) focuses on how the positions and powers of individuals posted in interlinked fields determine the available opportunities for individuals. Any field has a different structure with autonomy in social space, having specific regulations and authority. This theory will help understand how journalists cover the violent conflict in district Swat and military operations and define their role in journalism.

Further, field theory examines how individuals construct social fields, and then such fields affect [other] individuals. Hence, like the market and other fields of life, the social fields are environments where the race between individuals and groups occurs. Pierre Bourdieu (2005) mentioned that a field is a setting where agents and their social positions are located.



Journalism is a disciplinary and practical field with its settings, such as beats, routines, conditions, and practices. It is essential to know that these settings work according to the rules of the field. In other words, journalism, as a field, allows a journalist to follow specific rules as a code of conduct. The position of each particular agent (read journalist) in the field (read journalism) is a result of interaction between the specific rules (code of conduct), the agent's habitus (disposition or cultural and professional upbringing), and the agent's capital (experience). Each field has its own internal rules, guiding how people can enter that field, progress within it, or be rewarded (Dickinson & Memon, 2012).

The field theory aims to explain how elements interact with one another and with other fields (Benson, 2004). A field can be identified as the fundamental structure of a space. Competing for the "transformation or preservation" of one's space is shared among professionals in many fields (Bourdieu, 1998b). Journalists, for their part, fight to preserve traditional news values and practices, which composes the field's [rules] Doxa (Vos et al., 2012). A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Ongoing, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, simultaneously becoming a space where the various actors struggle to transform or preserve the field.

To examine the working conditions of local journalism and its role in a state of war, the utility of field theory is of value for this research as the differentiated positioning of an individual local journalist in the journalistic field. The challenge of reporting from the site of conflict is how to add objectivity and neutrality and avoid the threat.

Pierrie Bourdieu's 'Habitus'

The concept of habitus connects the individual level (agency) and the societal level (structure) by capturing internalized beliefs and dispositions that individuals acquire through socialization and accumulated capital. The relations between habitus and position within a field shape agency while, at the same time, actors lean more towards positions that best mirror their dispositions.

Habitus's accumulated experiences in the field create a deeper understanding of the 'journalistic game' (Willig, 2013). The habitus is so ingrained that people often mistake their feel of the game as natural when it has been, in fact, culturally shaped. Bourdieu (1977) commonly uses sports analogies to explain the habitus, such as how baseball players know when to swing at a fastball without thinking about it consciously. As professionals in any field proceed throughout their careers, they tend to develop predispositions of what should be expected within the field. The greater their capital, in this case, experience, the more adept and creative journalists tend to be in 'integrating past experiences' as a matrix of 'perceptions, appreciations, and actions' that are used at every moment and 'make possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu,



1977). Habitus indicates the degree to which journalists have a script they follow; once they know the script, they can improvise on reporting decisions at the moment.

Research Methodology

This research focuses more on the local journalists who produce news than the 24/7 corporate media and the internal situation of these journalists in a conflict scenario. The research question guiding this study is determining what conditions journalists face and make decisions during an armed conflict. How local journalists react and perceive their professional performance impacts how they cover the war in proximity.

Local reporters and journalists working in District Swat are the population for this research. The researcher selected the local journalists' members of local press clubs believed to be 'credible' and have at least twelve years of experience in the field. Each participant had a coded IP prefix (Interview Participant), followed by the number assigned to each participant (e.g., IP 1, IP 2, IP 3).

An in-depth qualitative methodology for data collection has opted to understand the dynamics of local journalists working during conflicts. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Keats, 1999) were conducted with Swat-based local journalists from the members of the various Tehsil level press clubs and district press clubs in district Swat who had covered the Taliban militancy from 2006 to 2012 to collect data to answer the research questions.

This study used the thematic analysis (TA) approach to learn from qualitative data about people's beliefs, values, and knowledge. Further, this strategy identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within the data (Braun et al., 2014).

Research Findings and Analysis

Working Conditions: Accessibility

This research data is based on in-depth interviews with journalists in Malakand Division's Swat about their role and challenges during the violent conflict from 2006 to 2012. They have spoken about their different situations and challenges while reporting the conflict.

Themes emerged from the data, focusing on two research questions of this research study. Research questions were developed based on the concepts in theory selected for this study, i.e., the field theory. Collected data presented the different dynamics of the journalistic field (conflict reporting) in Pakistan, its formation, and the role of *capital*, *habitus*, and *doxa* relating to the media system in which it is located.

All the participants viewed the proximity to the conflict as a vital factor influencing their work. As the number of violent activities by the militants increased, like other residents, many



journalists fled their homes and resettled in safe places. However, their work required reporting the emerging conflict in both 'safe' and 'unsafe' areas (IP 5; IP 9; IP 12). It was challenging to move around in the conflict areas and cover the events. If there was any sound of blast or message of a terrorist attack on any government building, it needed the courage to visit the spot. Due to the curfew enforced by the security forces and fear of militants, journalists were reluctant to cover the event. Instead, they preferred to wait and get a version from the concerned authorities. Some media organizations asked for fresh footage and photos, which put pressure on and endangered journalists' safety.

In Swat, if you go to certain areas, they will tell you they are danger zones because there are terrorists. When they see you as a journalist, they believe you are coming to expose them, and you would be the first target (IP 5).

The confusion in knowing both the army and the Taliban sometimes makes it difficult for journalists to go to conflict areas when there is violence. Journalists rely on eyewitness accounts or rumours that often turn out false (IP 10).

As emphasized above, the interviewees' concept of 'challenge' mentioned the hurdles for local journalists by the actions of the warring parties. The journalists have limited access to conflict areas, making their work even more challenging. The response by IP14 that journalists do not report about events in the territories occupied by either group for fear of attacks corroborates the statement, which suggests that going to such conflict areas means endangering their lives. Participant No. 1 explains how difficult it was for him to cover an event in conflict. He recalled Taliban was armed and dangerous; on the other, the army was also armed and dangerous. If the Taliban wanted to shoot you, no one was there to question them, even if the army wanted to kill you; no one was there to question them too; no FIR would be filed. All I mean to say is that our lives were unsafe from both sides. (IP 1)

According to IP 5, people generally distinguish between safe and dangerous areas in Swat to the extent that they warn journalists to avoid visiting areas regarded as dangerous. As discussed earlier, the notion that the journalist covering conflict is an 'enemy' of warring groups is re-echoed by this participant. He explains that whenever a journalist approaches a conflict scene, the community is suspicious of him.

One participant in an interview explained his experience when he encountered the militants for the first time as he was on his way back to the office after covering an assignment. He narrates
When I saw their masks and latest-model weapons, I was shocked and felt a spark in my heart. They asked me to come down. I had a press card from a local daily newspaper [...]; they shouted, 'Look, here is a journalist.' I looked into their eyes in black masks. They were clad in black costumes and loaded with grenades and weapons. One of them asked a question, and I could not answer due to fear (IP 2)



Local transport was scarce during the conflict, and TV journalists had to reach the site. The journalists usually use an ambulance or police van to reach the site.

The effect of this on the reporting of conflict is that the tense environment may influence her/his selection of a news angle, and possible misrepresentation of facts would adversely affect the audience. This atmosphere of uncertainty has made the local journalists more careful, so they should remain safe. Therefore, journalists' coverage of the Swat conflict depends on how safe the conflict area is for the reporters. In contrast, some journalists believe that as local journalists, it is our responsibility to cover each event and present facts. This locally bound approach forced the journalists to cover each event and take ownership of the locality:

I have covered 30 to 35 suicide attacks in different areas of Swat, in which I covered most of them on the spot. I did not cover some of them on the spot because of curfew or the unavailability of access. Undoubtedly, going there to cover the incident was very challenging, but we thought people would not know about it if we did not cover such incidents (IP 3).

Participant No. 13 explains.

On one Friday, there was a blast at a school in Barabandai. As we were about to start its live coverage, around 30 militants came and asked, 'What are you doing?' I replied that *Muslim Khan* allowed us to cover this event. Then, they allowed us to continue the live report. It was a very tough situation as the selection of words was very difficult in the presence of armed militants. (IP 13)

Instead of visiting the war zones, journalists would turn to alternative methods of gathering information if they were concerned about their safety and realized that specific locations were inaccessible. In other words, because they lack access to the combat zones, actual data does not support their reporting. For example, a participant recalls that once there was violence in the valley, 'the head office would insist that you get the story at any cost' (IP 13), whereas the area was unsafe for journalists to access.

In the same way, IP5 remarks that whenever the atmosphere was tense, 'even the security men would advise you; do you want to risk your life. Why don't you wait and get our feedback?' In that circumstance, the security operatives would become the primary news sources. They would be interested in providing the essential information with which the journalist would produce the news. A TV reporter worries that your story can be killed (IP 6). These findings imply that the circumstances in which they operated as war journalists were not favorable for journalism.

It can be deduced from this data that access to the conflict area is a significant factor influencing the working practices of local journalists in Swat. Journalists' access to some conflict zones has been restricted, leading to conflict narratives that facts might not support. Themes emerged from



the data, focusing on two research questions of this research study. Collected data presented the different dynamics of the journalistic field (conflict reporting) in Pakistan, its formation, and the role of *capital*, *habitus*, and *doxa* relating to the media system in which it is located.

The analysis of data answered the research questions posed in this research. In this section, findings are presented to show how they address and respond to each research question.

Research has shown that situations that are social, physical, and emotional (such as a threat to life) and pressure from media organizations or armed actors (e.g., conflict actors and media owners) are potential factors that influence the attitudes of journalists and those who witness violence (Adisa, 2012; Obilom & Thacher, 2008). Access to or limited access to the conflict area is a significant factor influencing the working conditions of local journalists in Swat, resulting in the construction of conflict narratives that may be based on facts.

Working Conditions of Local Journalists During the Conflict

Due to geographical proximity to armed agents, local journalists worked under stressful conditions during the conflict. They faced many challenges and threats, and their families were under constant pressure from warring parties; still, they practised their journalistic role with courage.

The 'regional attachment' of local conflict journalists places them at the frontline to report. This frontline reporting [reporting from the field] places the Swat journalists in more dangerous situations, with the lowest hierarchy of status and economic benefits compared to global war journalists (Ashraf, 2021) in journalism. After 9/11, Tumber and Prentoulis (2003) classified "urban war correspondents" as a new category separating local conflict journalism from regional war journalism.

'Local conflict journalists' become chroniclers of local realities that still need to be discovered by the rest of the country without some of their reports. These journalists are the most vulnerable, providing news that is otherwise impossible to report. Some journalists are producing quality news, risking their lives, and working 24/7 without any break. Even the militants do not care about journalists. 'When they see you as a journalist, they believe you are coming to expose them, and you would be the first target' (IP 5). These local journalists ultimately become war casualties; even though they thoroughly understood their professional duty, mostly regarded as a 'mission' in society, they know they are responsible for their communities.

The research findings confirm the impact of working conditions of these 'local conflict journalists' reporting on the armed conflict in a specific context during the time frame investigated (2006 to 2012). The challenging working conditions and, most importantly, the accessibility (roaming in conflict zones) were the essential factors influencing this reporting type. Research has shown that situations that are social, physical, and emotional (such as a threat to life) and pressure



from media organizations or armed actors (e.g., conflict actors, media owners) are potential factors that influence the attitudes of journalists and those who witness violence (Adisa, 2012; Obilom & Thacher, 2008). Due to the curfew enforced by the security forces and fear of militants, journalists were reluctant to cover the event. Instead, they preferred to wait and get a version from the concerned authorities. Some media organizations asked for fresh footage and photos, which put pressure on and endangered journalists' safety. Access to the conflict area is a significant factor influencing the working practices of local journalists in Swat. It has limited journalists' access to some conflict areas, resulting in the construction of conflict narratives that may be based on something other than facts.

Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews and thematic analysis data sets, the journalists' lack of access to conflict zones and information due to threats and pressure from warring parties impacted the journalistic responsibilities. The communities the journalists lived in and the pressure they faced within and outside their organizations largely influenced how they constructed their conflict narratives. Two situations occurred while local journalists in conflict performed their professional role; one was the challenge of working conditions, and the other was difficulty with 'working practices.' The first concerns fieldwork challenges like access to the conflict zone, difficulty verifying news, and interviewing the victims. The other concerns selecting angles, choosing words, and practising self-censorship. The interview data confirmed the literature that conflict-sensitive reporting is still essential for resolving disputes (Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Singh, 2013). Most participants said they took care to prevent violence from escalating due to what they reported (e.g., IP7, IP 11, and IP 13).

The data analysis revealed that the fieldwork experience (working conditions, routines) had a visible impact on news production. Many journalists disregarded the standard of objectivity [working practices] during news production. After the fieldwork, in their offices or press clubs, the journalists identified news angles from which they chose words and phrases, keeping in mind the meaning attached to these words, and wrote their stories.

They assigned interpretations to their observations and shared the conflict with their communities per common beliefs. Because of this, the conflict's truth was formed "in layers" or "wrapped in language" (Stolley, 2010). In this 'field' where they counted the number of deaths, they relied on the ISPR version.

It means that the journalists' encounter with violence – what they observed at the scene is discarded and relies on the 'power' version under which they gained protection. Based on this data, it is a journalistic decision to be non-objective and influenced by an interest [safety].

Several journalistic strategies were noticed in the data to remain safe in a volatile situation in Swat. To substantiate their report, the journalists add reliable sources from the community (IP7, IP11, and IP14). The strategy of local journalists in Swat was that a group of journalists prepared



the news piece collectively and added various versions to the story. They only change the credit line when they share the story with their media outlets. For broadcast journalists, the timing of releasing the news was important. They share the story with their respective media organization at the same time. This strategy helps them to avoid criticism from warring parties.

Local journalism in Swat during the conflict strives for quality reporting by achieving the maximum amount of independence and balance in their news content. This method accepts journalism's standard international (Western) values, such as diversity of sources and subjects, the plurality of viewpoints, accuracy, contextualization, and in-depth research. It also shows that journalists can achieve professionalism and stay safe by practising 'quality journalism' close to the truth.

Probing the interview participants' (IP) challenges of reporting conflict required the formulation of 'what', and 'how' questions to gain a deeper understanding of their responses and experiences (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). The 'what' in RQ2 interrogated the challenges that influenced the news production practices of conflict journalists.

Journalists face challenges reporting on the conflict at home and while living amid violent conflict. This is especially true because they need regular access to information and discussion and also experience constant scrutiny from all parties involved in the conflict. A reasonable amount of literature on conflict reporting is available. What is evident in the accounts is that journalists' experiences of conflict influence their reporting decisions (Fahmy & Johnson, 2005; Novak & Davidson, 2013). All local journalists in Swat experience different challenges; those who report conflict face the most severe working conditions, which demand the ability to withstand social isolation. They survive the challenges that result from organized violence by the warring parties, and they may be traumatized in some cases. To gain support for their safety, some journalists fabricate facts about the fighting and the factions involved (IP6).

The interview and thematic analysis of data answered Research Question 2, which interrogated the challenges that influenced the practices of conflict journalists in the Swat conflict. The factors included the accessibility [working conditions] of conflict journalists in Swat objectivity. The analysis of the interview data reveals that the journalists' inability to visit conflict areas and the pressure from their organizations had impacted their work.

Conclusion

Studies on local journalism and journalists' working conditions need a persistent professional debate among journalists, academia, and research. Many academics have tried to examine local journalists in field settings by focusing on different conflict areas worldwide (such as Agha & Demeter, 2022; Feinstein, 2013; Høiby & Ottosen, 2019; Tumber, 2006). The working conditions of local journalists and local media practitioners' news practices have also been



researched (Ashraf, 2018; Boczkowski et al., 2018). However, there was a lack of insider academic views. Since the area of scholarship on reporting internal conflict had been ignored in the extant literature, it was essential to explore it for further research.

Based on the rationale for conducting this research, there was the need to investigate the reasons that compel local journalists to favor one among warring parties (Ali et al., 2019) about the most publicized violent conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Two research objectives of this study were:

- To evaluate the impact of global conflict on the local journalism working conditions in the conflict zone of Swat
- To examine the relationship between militarized violence [war on terror] and local journalism practices.

Both objectives were achieved by formulating two research questions reflecting the critical thematic elements (factors influencing journalistic working conditions, routine, and practices).

Local journalists covering internal conflict have contacts and sources within the military and the militants (the Taliban) who feed information to the journalists as news. According to Bourdieu (1998), this social capital indicates the possession of rare resources through connections usually used as a competition among the journalistic guild. A journalist with social capital is located along cultural and economic capital in the social space in a given society and at a given time.

The findings of this research suggest that the local media contributed to the development of the social capital of local journalists during the conflict. Local journalists feel pressure and responsibility to present news content in an acceptable way that increases social capital. It is clear from this argument that local journalists often develop a worldview of responsibility to protect and project community issues.

This research argues that local journalists covering the conflict displayed the 'doxa' in their articulation of principal values of journalism like a journalist should be 'unbiased toward any party' (IP4), 'provide an opportunity to each party to present their version in the story' (IP7), 'accurate and fair reporting' (IP11), 'provide background information to educate the audience on a specific issue' (IP15). The concept of 'habitus' in Field Theory indicates the degree to which journalists have a script to follow; once they know the script, they can improvise on reporting decisions.

The local journalists in this study could improvise creatively due to their agency within the habitus, as it is a traditional location where journalistic roles operate in the field. Experience brings creativity to journalists' roles (Willig, 2013). During the data analysis, journalists in the



Swat conflict made decisions according to the situation and pressure. The greater their experience, the more adept and creative journalists tend to be in 'integrating past experiences' as a matrix of 'perceptions, appreciations, and actions' used at every moment and 'making possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu, 1977).



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