

Expat Afghan Media and Local Media amidst Taliban Constraints

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Abstract: This research study delves into the intricate landscape of media in Afghanistan after 15 August 2021, focusing on the coexistence of local and Expat Afghan Media within the challenging context of Taliban constraints. In the wake of the Taliban's resurgence and control of Afghanistan, The challenging environment has compelled many journalists to flee the country, and media outlets have been grappled with a myriad of restrictions and limitations. This study seeks to shed light on the unique dynamics, struggles, and resilience displayed by these media entities as they navigate a complex environment characterized by censorship, security concerns, and shifting political realities. Through a comprehensive analysis of case studies, reports, and content analysis, this research aims to provide insights into the role of media in shaping public discourse, promoting free expression, and fostering a sense of identity and belonging among Afghans during these challenging times. Ultimately, this investigation contributes to a deeper understanding of the critical role media plays in societies facing political and ideological constraints and highlights the voices that persist amidst adversity.

Keywords: Afghanistan Media, Taliban, Restrictions, Free Expression.

1. INTRODUCTION

The period following the year 2001 in Afghanistan witnessed notable advancements in press freedom and the proliferation of privately owned media outlets. This era is often characterized as the "Golden age" of the media landscape, marked by the emergence of numerous audio, visual, and print media entities all over Afghanistan. These media channels swiftly penetrated the households of millions of Afghans, effectively reaching diverse segments of the population. Their role in disseminating information, combating corruption, advocating for principles of good governance, the rule of law, reform, and holding government institutions and officials accountable cannot be overstated. Remarkably, through a relatively brief span of two decades time, Afghanistan's media outlets achieved an unprecedented level of quality, maturity, and autonomy when compared to much of the regional media landscape during the same period. Their effectiveness and influence solidified the Afghan media's position as the fourth pillar of the state. Prior to the collapse, according to reports of Reporters Without Borders (RSF), there were 543 media outlets operating all over Afghanistan (RSF, August 2022), August 01. Additionally, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies of the previous government estimated that approximately ten million Afghans had access to the internet and social networks. The Media industry Played a prominent role in various facets of public life and served as a vital platform for social and political discourse. supported by legal Frameworks and the backing of civil society and international institutions, the media empowered the populace and fostered a sense of control and influence. Meanwhile, journalists and media outlets enhanced their professionalism, providing critical coverage of social, political, and security issues that garnered attention not only domestically but also among abroad audiences as trusted sources of information.

However, The seizure of Kabul by the Taliban on the 15th of August 2021 precipitated a substantial transformation within the realm of media. Over three months after this event, a considerable 43% of Afghan media establishments ceased operations. Among the cohort of 10,780 individuals who were employed within Afghan newsrooms at the commencement

of August, a mere 4,360 remained in gainful employment by December, delineating a reduction of approximately four out of every ten journalists. Notably, this downturn has had a disproportionately adverse impact on female media professionals, with an alarming 84% of women experiencing job displacement following the Taliban's resurgence, in stark contrast to a comparatively lower rate of 52% among their male counterparts (RSF, Aug 2022). The challenging environment created by the Taliban has compelled many journalists to flee the country, resulting in a substantial information void. Those who remain within Afghanistan face unemployment, with some in hiding or pursuing alternative livelihoods, such as becoming street vendors. The media organizations that continue to operate have been coerced into adapting their content and publications to align with Taliban directives, often necessitating disregard for laws and regulations in place over the past two decades. These media entities are subject to direct censorship by the Taliban or engage in self-censorship as a survival strategy. While the situation is particularly pronounced in Kabul, reports suggest that media organizations and journalists in the provinces encounter even greater challenges in carrying out their duties fairly and independently.

2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this methodology is to provide a structured approach for researching the dynamics between expat Afghan media and local media in the context of Taliban constraints using qualitative research methods. This study seeks to understand how Afghan media outlets operated by expatriates interact with and influence the local media landscape in Afghanistan given the challenges posed by the Taliban regime.

Literature Review: Conduct an extensive review of existing literature, academic articles, reports, and media sources related to the evolution of Afghan media, the impact of the Taliban resurgence, and the role of international media outlets.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Collect and analyze quantitative data on media closures, job displacement, and gender-specific impacts through surveys and official reports, such as those from Reporters without Borders, International organizations and governmental agencies.

3. DISCUSSION

This research study aims to investigate the role and influence of expatriate and international media outlets operating from abroad in the context of the Afghan media landscape following the Taliban's takeover and the subsequent severe restrictions imposed on media activities in Afghanistan after August 15, 2021. The study seeks to ascertain the extent to which these media outlets have shaped the Afghan media landscape and provided alternative sources of information during this period. Additionally, it explores whether Afghan media outlets and journalists based abroad can effectively fulfill the functions of local media when faced with operational bans by the Taliban, thus addressing the information vacuum within Afghanistan. Furthermore, the research endeavors to determine the potential dominance of expatriate Afghan media in shaping public discourse and disseminating information in scenarios where the Taliban limits local media's access to information and imposes its regulatory framework.

3.1. Literature Review

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as promulgated by the United Nations in 1948, articulates a fundamental tenet in its Article 19, which asserts that 'Every individual possesses the entitlement to freedom of opinion and expression; this entitlement encompasses the liberty to harbor opinions devoid of external encumbrance, and to actively pursue, receive, and disseminate information and ideas through various communication modalities, irrespective of territorial boundaries' (United Nations, 1948, Article 19, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' United Nations. Archived from the original on 24 February 2018)[United Nations (1948, Article 19) "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". United Nations. Archived from the original on 24 February 2018.]. John Stuart Mill, in his influential essay 'On Liberty,' argues that freedom of speech and expression is crucial for individual self-development and societal progress (Mill, John Stuart, 1860)[Mill, John Stuart (1860). On Liberty (2 ed.). London: John W. Parker & Son.]. He believes that a society that values freedom of speech benefits from the 'marketplace of ideas,' where diverse opinions can be heard and debated, ultimately leading to better decisions.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, initial media development initiatives primarily centered on providing support for the processes of democratization and the establishment of market capitalism in regions such as Latin America and the former Soviet Union. However, a significant shift in focus emerged as the imperative for media development in conflict-affected and post-conflict regions became apparent. This transformation was underscored by pivotal events, notably the catalytic

roles played by specific media outlets, including local radio stations during the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and Serbian state television during the Balkans conflict. Tragically, these media entities actively contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives through their dissemination of harmful content and propaganda. These cases serve as stark reminders of the potential harm that media can inflict during conflicts. They have informed international efforts to promote responsible media development in conflict-affected regions. Lessons learned include the need for media literacy programs, robust regulatory frameworks, and support for independent journalism to counteract the spread of misinformation and propaganda. These lessons remain highly relevant in today's world, where the influence of media in conflicts, disinformation, and propaganda continues to be a pressing concern. Recent examples, such as the role of social media in exacerbating conflicts, highlight the ongoing challenges. Thus, responsible media development remains a vital component of peace-building and conflict resolution efforts worldwide.

In contemporary academia, the intersection of media and conflict remains a dynamic field of study. Recent research has delved into the role of digital media, social networks, and artificial intelligence in shaping conflict dynamics (Chadwick, 2013). The ongoing relevance of these issues underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches that draw from media studies, political science, international relations, and communication theory to address the multifaceted challenges posed by media in conflict-affected regions.

The events of 9/11 marked a turning point in the history of Afghanistan's media industry. Afghanistan's media outlets began to flourish once again after many years of deadly restrictions and censorship, especially during the first Taliban regime, which had imposed severe limitations on media freedom. Scholars have noted a significant growth in media outlets in Afghanistan after 2001. They highlighted the emergence of numerous television stations, radio stations, newspapers, and online news platforms. This expansion was seen as a positive development for media plurality and freedom of expression.

Afghanistan's private media outlets achieved unprecedented quality, maturity, and independence in just two short decades compared to much of the regional media during that period. Due to its effectiveness and influence, the Afghan media came to embody the fourth pillar of the state. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported that there were 543 media outlets present in Afghanistan before the collapse. Additionally, according to the previous government's Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, approximately ten million Afghans had access to the internet and social networks, making information more accessible.

However, since the collapse of the former republic on August 15, 2021, much of this progress is coming to a tragic end. New estimates by national and international organizations suggest that the number of media outlets has slashed significantly since the Taliban takeover and freedom of the press is at its all-time low. On the World Press Freedom Index of Reporter Without Borders, Afghanistan dropped from 122 in 2021 to 156 in 2022 (RSF, 2023).

3.2. Media Landscape in Afghanistan Post-Taliban Takeover

Under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the media landscape has historically faced significant challenges and restrictions, which have intensified over time. Although the Taliban's de facto government did not cancel the previous laws governing private media, the establishment of their transitional cabinet and the introduction of new structures, such as the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, the GDI (General Directorate of Intelligence), and the declaration of 9 new rules on media activities, have directly impeded the functioning of media outlets, leading to closures and collapses of many of them. According to a report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), out of 547 media outlets, 219 have ceased their activities. Furthermore, of the 11,857 journalists who were active before August 15, 2021, only 4,759 remain employed. Women journalists, in particular, have been severely affected, with almost 67% losing their jobs or not being allowed to return to work. Numerous cases of beatings, detention, and intimidation of journalists have occurred over the past two years.

The security forces, especially the GDI (intelligence services), have detained at least 80 journalists since August 15, 2021, and they have been responsible for the majority of arbitrary journalist arrests, including instances of violence, since the beginning of 2022. Decrees from the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, GDI, and even from the supreme leader of the Taliban, Mullah Haibatullah Akhonzadah, regarding media content, journalists, and media workers have indirectly forced them to curtail their professional work and align their content with the regime's policies.

As a result, many terrestrial media outlets have resorted to self-censorship and have adjusted their content to align with the regime's preferences. Some media outlets inclined to follow the Taliban's rules have chosen to close down and cease operations in Afghanistan. For example, on October 3, 2022, the Taliban ordered the closure of two prominent Afghan news

websites: Hasht-e-Subh, established in 2007 and Afghanistan's most widely circulated newspaper until the Taliban's rise to power, and the web portal affiliated with Zawia Media. Additionally, the discontinuation of Radio Azadi's broadcasts, as well as the cessation of the rebroadcasts of BBC, VOA, and Deutsche Welle (DW) in Afghanistan's indigenous languages by local media, has further hindered the dissemination of information throughout the country.

Indeed, the Taliban's suppression and marginalization of private and independent media outlets in Afghanistan have created an environment conducive to propaganda and disinformation dissemination through national organizations under their control. Notable examples of such organizations include the Bakhtar News Agency and RTA (Radio and Television of Afghanistan), which have a widespread presence with staff in all provinces. Despite their dominance over these national media organizations, the Taliban have continued to expand their influence through a network of conservative and radical media groups that share their ideology and have been active over the past two decades. This strategic use of like-minded media groups and their experienced personnel has further facilitated the Taliban's monopolization of information by sidelining and suppressing independent media.

Over the past two years, regulatory interference has posed a significant challenge to the functioning of independent media. The absence of well-established institutions and specific regulations governing media activities has provided fertile ground for the implementation of the Taliban's preferences through a series of decrees. These decrees have included bans on music, criticism of the government and officials, and entertainment programs, as well as restrictions on women journalists. This regulatory environment has not only stifled independent journalism but has also reinforced the Taliban's control over the narrative and information flow in Afghanistan, making it difficult for alternative voices to be heard and for accurate information to be disseminated.

3.3. Expat Afghan Media

While some Afghan diaspora media outlets have historically operated from abroad, the extent and significance of their operations have notably expanded in recent times. With the collapse of the Afghan Republic and the subsequent rise of the Taliban to power, a substantial number of media companies and their personnel faced unprecedented challenges, leading them to shift their focus to online activities. These activities encompassed websites, social media platforms, and even satellite digital channels operated from locations outside Afghanistan. This transformation can be attributed to several key factors: Firstly, safety concerns emerged as a paramount motivator, prompting Afghan journalists and media professionals to seek refuge abroad. The events following August 15, 2021, intensified these concerns, with violence and intimidation becoming pervasive threats to their work and personal safety.

Secondly, Afghan diaspora communities, consisting of individuals who left Afghanistan due to conflict, economic hardships, political persecution, or in pursuit of better opportunities abroad, have assumed a significant global presence. Among these communities, a notable contingent includes journalists, media professionals, and activists who maintain deep-rooted connections to their homeland. The imperative of upholding freedom of speech has played a pivotal role not only in establishing media outlets but also in fostering their commitment to contributing to Afghanistan's evolving media landscape.

Thirdly, advances in technology and communication tools have empowered individuals and groups to establish and manage media outlets remotely. This encompasses the creation of online news websites, active engagement on various social media platforms, and the establishment of digital radio and television channels. Such technological innovations have facilitated the rapid dissemination of information to a global audience, including those residing within Afghanistan.

Fourthly, collaboration among international media organizations, journalists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foreign governments, and experts has significantly enhanced the quality and credibility of the reporting produced by Afghan diaspora media outlets. These collaborative endeavors not only elevate journalistic standards but also attract global attention to pressing Afghan issues. With the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and the subsequent disruption, suppression, and restrictions of traditional media outlets, these expat Afghan media outlets serve as advocacy platforms, raising awareness about the situation in Afghanistan and championing human rights, press freedom, and gender equality. They play a crucial role in keeping domestic and international audiences informed about developments in Afghanistan.

Afghan diaspora media outlets operating from abroad have emerged as vital sources of both news coverage and entertainment programs, particularly in light of the constraints placed by the Taliban on indigenous media within Afghanistan. In terms of news coverage, these outlets provide alternative information sources, offering diverse perspectives and reporting on issues that may be suppressed or overlooked by local-based media outlets under Taliban-controlled media.

Operating from abroad affords them a degree of journalistic independence, enabling critical analysis of events, human rights reporting, and political developments without the immediate threat of censorship or retribution. The safety afforded to journalists and media professionals in the diaspora allows for more comprehensive and in-depth reporting, while their global reach disseminates news to an international audience, raising awareness of Afghan issues worldwide. Additionally, these outlets often serve as platforms for advocacy, spotlighting human rights abuses and women's rights issues, thereby keeping these concerns on the global agenda. In the realm of entertainment programs, Afghan expat media outlets play a pivotal role in preserving Afghan culture. The Taliban's bans on music, art, dance, and other entertainment programs through local media organizations have created a void that expat media companies, especially satellite-based digital televisions and radios, have filled as reliable alternatives for offering entertainment programs to audiences inside Afghanistan. It's important to note that access to satellite-based TVs is limited compared to local-based media outlets, but they still serve as crucial sources of entertainment. These expat media outlets also serve a broader cultural purpose by maintaining ties among the diaspora, offering a source of cultural identity amidst Taliban-imposed restrictions on cultural expression. Operating from countries with greater press freedom, they uphold the principles of free speech and journalism, enabling Afghan citizens to express their views without fear of repression. Furthermore, these media platforms preserve cultural and historical context, connecting the Afghan diaspora with their homeland, countering propaganda, and leveraging digital platforms for global outreach. They provide a window into Afghan culture and traditions for those within and outside Afghanistan, helping to keep the Afghan cultural heritage alive.

However, it's important to acknowledge the challenges these outlets face, including limited resources and security concerns for their on-ground reporters. The complexity of their mission is underscored by these obstacles. Nonetheless, their impact in keeping the Afghan population informed, connected, and culturally engaged is significant, particularly in the face of the Taliban's restrictions and limitations on cultural expression through traditional media outlets.

3.4. Challenges Faced by Afghan Journalists and Media Outlets

Authoritarian governments often employ a range of tactics to suppress independent media outlets, including censorship, legal harassment, and intimidation. As discussed by Richard L. Clutterbuck in his book "Media and Political Violence," says " these tactics create an environment of fear and self-censorship among journalists, effectively eroding media freedom". In Afghanistan, under Taliban rule such tactics have had a significant impact on media freedom. Over the past two years, Taliban rules have blocked the way for free speech and independent work by private media outlets. According to reports from Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 51% of male journalists and a staggering 78% of female journalists lost their jobs, with many facing security threats and forced to emigrate to neighboring countries or Europe.

For Afghan journalists who chose to remain in the country, there have been numerous daunting challenges. Their personal safety is a constant concern, given the history of violence perpetrated against them by various groups, including the Taliban. An example is the beating and torture of reporters from Etilaatroz [Etilaatroz was one of the famous investigative newspapers before takeover of Kabul by Taliban and forced to cease off terrestrial running on September 2021.] who were covering a women's protest in Kabul. for example , Khalid Qaderi, a former presenter for Radio "Nowruz" because of a criticizing face book -post , was detained on March 17, 2022, in the western city of Herat and sentenced to one year on April 26. He was not given access to a defense lawyer and was forced to sign a statement waiving his right to appeal, according to reports (AFJC,Jan 2023), in another case Faizullah Jalal, a professor at Kabul University, was detained by the Taliban after the group claimed he was responsible for a series of messages on social media attacking them(the Gurdian , Jan 2022) . Censorship and self-censorship are pervasive issues, as journalists must tread carefully to avoid retribution from authorities, leading to difficulties in reporting on sensitive issues. Access to information is another hurdle, as government officials frequently prove uncooperative.

Female journalists face gender-based obstacles due to restrictions on women's rights, such as being forced to cover their faces on air and having separate working offices from male colleagues. According to the Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization (AJSO) report published on (August 2023) Afghan female journalists are prohibited from working in 21 provinces. Additionally, in 14 provinces, they face restrictions on covering news conferences, and in remaining areas, they are compelled to wear hijabs and cover their faces while on the air[AJSO,18 August 2023). Digital and social media surveillance heighten concerns about privacy, with many journalists, public society activists, and writers being detained and tortured by Taliban officials over the last two years for criticizing their policies on social media platforms. Economic hardships, displacement, and a range of challenges faced by both local and international media outlets have created a

daunting environment for Afghan journalists, with women journalists experiencing particularly severe constraints due to the resurgence of the Taliban.

Taliban restrictions on media and media content, using the excuse of Sharia law, have led to a crucial impact on media content over the past two years. They have banned music and entertainment and limited the roles of women. This has caused a significant impact on media content. Additionally, by controlling national media outlets and sources of information, the Taliban has pushed media organizations to align their content with their ideology, essentially turning them into propaganda instruments. Consequently, many dominant media outlets have transformed their programs and contents and engaged in self-censorship to avoid Taliban reprisals, resulting in reduced reporting on sensitive topics. While the internet and social media have provided alternative platforms, self-censorship has persisted. Overall, these factors have reduced media diversity and restricted free expression in Afghanistan, creating a media landscape marked by ideological conformity.

3.5. Media Transition to Online Platforms

The media landscape in Afghanistan has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, characterized by a shift to online platforms. While some media outlets had previously operated through digital networks and social media platforms, the Taliban's takeover in Kabul brought about severe restrictions on media activities and freedom of expression. Consequently, a substantial number of media organizations were compelled to shut down, with some relocating their operations abroad and relying on online networks and social media platforms to sustain their work. Prominent media outlets like Payek, Etilaat Roz, Rukhshana Media, 8am (Hasht-e-Subh Daily), and others have primarily operated online from outside Afghanistan. Notably, 8am (Hasht-e-Subh Daily) and Etilaat Roz were among the most popular newspapers in Afghanistan before August 15th. However, due to threats, intimidation, and mistreatment of their staff, they were forced to discontinue their print editions and transition to online activities. Moreover, on September 25, 2022, the Taliban-controlled Ministry of Telecommunications claimed to have blocked the domains of 8am and Zavia news websites due to alleged rule violations.

In this challenging environment, diaspora journalists and media activists have played a vital role in disseminating information and representing the public voice when local media faced constraints imposed by the Taliban. Following the events of August 15th, a significant number of professional journalists who had emigrated to foreign countries continued their work in support of free speech and freedom of expression. They collaborated with various foreign-based media groups, such as Afghanistan International and Amu TVs, as well as independent Persian outlets, providing comprehensive coverage of events inside Afghanistan without being subject to the Taliban's media restrictions.

In addition to Afghan exile media outlets, numerous international media organizations, including VOA, BBC, DW, and CGTN, had to adapt to Taliban-imposed rules by focusing on online and social media platforms to reach audiences within Afghanistan. Despite the challenges, there has been a notable increase in the number of internet users, reaching 9.2 million by July 2022, constituting 22% of the population (Internetworldstats.com). This growth is particularly significant, considering the critical economic situation in Afghanistan.

The proliferation of new information and communication technologies, such as smartphones, satellite TVs and radios, websites, and social media platforms, has facilitated access to news, information, and entertainment programs for audiences in Afghanistan. Online media has emerged as a highly effective means of reaching these audiences, offering diverse perspectives, real-time updates, and opportunities for advocacy, awareness-raising, and cultural expression. Despite persistent challenges such as censorship and disinformation, online platforms, including social media and news websites, have become vital sources of information and communication for Afghan citizens. Independent journalism and citizen journalism have flourished, providing diverse perspectives and real-time updates on events. Online media has also empowered Afghan activists, civil society organizations, and artists to raise awareness about critical issues, advocate for human rights, and express cultural creativity. It has played a crucial role in educating and connecting Afghan communities, both within the country and with the global audience. However, ongoing challenges, including censorship and the spread of disinformation, underscore the need for continued vigilance in utilizing online media effectively in Afghanistan.

Expat media outlets have emerged as alternatives due to the lack of free media and channels in Afghanistan. They provide a platform for reporting without fear of intimidation or attack by the Taliban, making them increasingly popular among the oppressed people of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime who have had limited opportunities to have their voices heard.

3.6. Comparative Analysis

After the arrival of the Taliban and their strict regulations on the activities and content of media programs, local media in Afghanistan have faced significant challenges. There are notable differences in the content and coverage between local media outlets under Taliban control and expatriate Afghan media. These differences stem from the distinct environments in which they operate, their objectives, target audiences, and the constraints they face.

Local media outlets are expected to align with the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law and ideology, leading to substantial limitations on the content they can cover. The Taliban often dictates what can and cannot be reported, resulting in a heavily controlled media landscape subject to government directives. Consequently, local media outlets, especially national ones, tend to serve as instruments for propagating the Taliban's messages and viewpoints. They prioritize reporting on Taliban achievements, policies, and activities while downplaying or omitting content that might contradict the Taliban's narrative.

Coverage of conflicts and resistance is typically one-sided, with a focus on presenting the Taliban's perspective. Independent reporting and critical analysis of events are rarely seen due to the risk of censorship, punitive measures, or even the shutdown of media outlets. Additionally, there is limited reporting on human rights abuses or violence perpetrated by the Taliban, as these topics are sensitive and potentially dangerous to cover. In essence, local media outlets under Taliban control cater to a local audience living within the areas governed by the Taliban, with content revolving around religious matters, local news, and information relevant to daily life under Taliban rule.

In contrast, expatriate Afghan media, operating from abroad, enjoy a significantly higher degree of editorial independence and freedom from Taliban censorship. These media outlets provide a diverse range of news, analysis, and perspectives on Afghan affairs. They are not bound by the constraints imposed by the Taliban and can freely cover a wide spectrum of topics, including human rights issues, dissenting voices, and critical examinations of Taliban policies.

Expat Afghan media often serve as platforms for advocacy and activism, using their global reach to raise awareness about critical issues such as women's rights, freedom of speech, and human rights abuses in Afghanistan. Unlike their counterparts operating within Taliban-controlled territories, journalists and contributors working for expat Afghan media can report more freely without fear of direct reprisals or violence. Furthermore, these media outlets primarily target the Afghan diaspora and international audiences interested in Afghan affairs, serving as valuable sources of information and engagement for a global audience invested in understanding and contributing to discussions about Afghanistan's evolving situation.

The disparities between local media outlets under Taliban control and expat Afghan media have far-reaching consequences for public information and discourse. Local media, constrained by censorship and potential repercussions for deviating from Taliban narratives, often provide a limited and biased perspective, stifling diversity and freedom of expression. In contrast, expat Afghan media, operating with greater independence, can present a wider range of viewpoints, fostering a more informed and open discourse.

Moreover, while local media may struggle to engage with international audiences and maintain credibility, expat Afghan media serve as vital channels for sharing unfiltered information about Afghanistan with local and global communities. These differences in access, diversity of perspectives, freedom of expression, and credibility profoundly impact how the public receives, processes, and discusses information about Afghanistan's complex and evolving situation.

3.7. Role of International Media

International media outlets assume a pivotal role in covering events in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul. They act as the primary conduits for disseminating timely information to a global audience, harnessing their extensive networks and on-the-ground correspondents to provide real-time updates on the rapidly evolving situation. Moreover, these outlets are committed to balanced reporting, striving to present diverse perspectives, including those critical of the Taliban, thus promoting a more nuanced understanding of Afghanistan's intricate dynamics. Their presence not only amplifies the visibility of events but also holds various actors accountable, potentially deterring human rights abuses and violence by subjecting them to international scrutiny.

International media also serve as protectors of local journalists and sources, safeguarding their safety in a hostile environment. Extensive humanitarian coverage by these outlets spotlights the dire conditions faced by Afghans, mobilizing international aid efforts. The influence of their reporting extends to shaping diplomatic endeavors and policies of foreign governments and international organizations, which can have far-reaching consequences. Despite the challenges posed by

security risks and Taliban-imposed restrictions, international media outlets remain dedicated to providing accurate information and contextual analysis, thus playing a crucial role in informing the global community about the multifaceted crisis in Afghanistan and influencing international responses to it.

4. CONCLUSION

The media landscape in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover has experienced profound transformations, bearing significant implications for information dissemination, freedom of expression, and the role of journalism. The rule of the Taliban imposed severe restrictions and challenges on local media outlets, leading to self-censorship, closures, and the suppression of independent journalism. The resultant decline in the number of media outlets and journalists, along with the limited scope of reporting, has given rise to a media landscape characterized by ideological conformity and a lack of diverse perspectives. On the contrary, expat Afghan media outlets operating from abroad have emerged as vital sources of news coverage and entertainment programs for both Afghan and international audiences. These outlets enjoy editorial independence and can provide a wide range of perspectives, including critical analysis of Taliban policies and human rights issues. They also serve as platforms for advocacy, effectively raising awareness about the situation in Afghanistan. However, there is a legitimate concern about potential manipulation in the neutral role of expatriate media, which requires vigilance. A comparative analysis between local media under Taliban control and expat Afghan media underscores the stark differences in their content, objectives, and constraints. Local media tend to align with the Taliban's narrative and limitations, whereas expat Afghan media operate with greater independence and offer a more diverse range of viewpoints. International media outlets, in collaboration with Afghan expat media, play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the situation in Afghanistan. They act as conduits for disseminating information to a global audience, providing balanced reporting, influencing diplomatic endeavors, and mobilizing international aid efforts. Their coverage holds various actors accountable and contributes significantly to international responses to the Afghanistan crisis. In this challenging media landscape, Afghan journalists and activists, both within the country and in the diaspora, have demonstrated remarkable resilience and bravery in their pursuit of truth and their commitment to informing the public. Despite facing threats to their personal safety, censorship, and economic hardships, they continue to fulfill their crucial role as watchdogs and storytellers in a rapidly changing Afghanistan. Their dedication to upholding the principles of journalism and free expression remains an essential force in the face of adversity.

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