

The Power of Place: Community and Newswork at Lahore's City 42 Channel
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After 2002, along with military ruler Pervaiz Musharraf's overall liberalizing policies, especially the privatization of the media, Pakistan saw a rapid influx of commercialization as the media, banking, and telecommunications industries all mushroomed and transformed. A new market-driven and politically-charged television news industry emerged, an industry constrained under the threatening eye of the Pakistani army, religious, and political groups, yet at the same time freewheeling and unpredictable, with media groups engaged in cutthroat competitions for ratings. Pakistan's television news industry emerged in connection with the global rise of 24-hour television news, a genre characterized by corporate ownership, short-term mentality, lack of analysis, and a focus on emotion and newness to constantly earn ratings. While Pakistan's 24-hour television news channels do bear resemblances to the global 24-hour news genre and its 'disposable' market-oriented news; Pakistan's television news channels stem from the country's unique history and political situation and are run by practitioners with their own locally situated ways of responding to the contradictory demands of the industry. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at Lahore's City 42 news channel, this paper explores how City 42 employees' understanding of themselves as a 'community' creates a working environment that foregrounds practices of trust, personal responsibility, and humor which creates possibilities for confidence, motivation, and enjoyment of daily news work. This paper argues that newswork at City 42 is part of a larger emerging newswork culture that challenges the expectations of an industry typified by corporate values like superficiality, competition, and efficiency. In the City 42 team's commitment to their idea of themselves as a community, can we find a site of possibility for a regeneration of what the news can be and do? Or perhaps optimism that the powerful forces of capitalism and politics in Pakistan can be grappled with through seemingly small everyday choices?