Analyzing Impact of Social Media (X Platform) on Ethnic Identity: A case study of Pashtun identity in Terrorism Affected Areas of Pakistan

By

Jamila Fatima

(Registration No: 00000401957)

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies

Center for International Peace and Stability

National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST)

Islamabad, Pakistan

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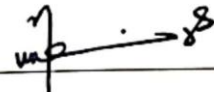Center for International Peace and Stability

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Islamabad, Pakistan

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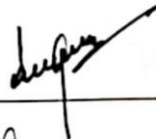
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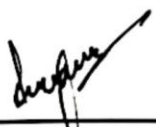## MASTER THESIS WORK

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2. Name: **Dr Najimdeen Bakare**   Signature: _____

3. Name: _____   Signature: _____

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Student Name: **Jamila Fatima**   Signature:_____

Examination Committee:
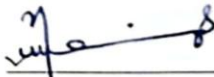
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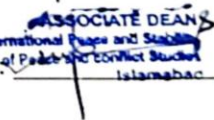
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Name of Supervisor: **Dr. Muhammad Makki**   Signature:_____

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, especially my parents. Without their support I would've never been where I am today, and I am grateful to have them as my strength in life.

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media has revolutionized the way ethnic identities are perceived and expressed. In this digitalized world it is important to understand how digital interactions seep into the real world. This research investigates the influence of social media, particularly the X platform, on shaping ethnic identity dynamics. The Pashtun community residing in tribal areas of Pakistan increasingly using social media platforms, particularly the X, to reflect on their identity, builds perceptions, and counter negative stereotypes. This study examines the close association of social media use in the emergence and expression of Pashtun identity in the digital age. Through the lens of the social constructivist framework, this research illustrates how online narrative buildings on social media can construct and reconstruct ethnic identities in the real world. With the help of theoretical perspectives, it illustrates the role of social interactions in shaping reality, addressing issues of marginalization, and responding to stigmatization. It documents how Pashtuns use social media platforms to express their problems, raise awareness, and challenge negative stereotypes. Additionally, this study also explores how social media platforms enable Pashtuns especially residing in terrorism affected areas to engage in public discussions and circulate critiques that may be censored in traditional media. Because the Pashtuns are often under-represented in traditional media including newspaper and broadcast media. The findings of this study underscore the profound impact of social media on ethnic identity dynamics, revealing both the opportunities and challenges faced by the members of Pashtun community in the digitalized world.

Keywords: Social Media, Ethnic Identity, Pashtuns, Social Constructivism, Stigmatization, Grievances, Discrimination, Ethnic Violence, Ethnic Conflicts, Marginalization, Socialization.

Chapter 01

1. Introduction

Since the development of social media, social networking sites have grown to be an essential part of the lives of contemporary people, who use them for daily interactions and socialization (Muhammad, Dey, & Weerakkody, 2017). According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013), certain users may find that a significant portion of their social circle and daily interactions center around the virtual networking spaces. In today's digitalized world, social media platforms have the potential to shape identities, communications, and perceptions. Digital communication and interactions have replaced human interactions. These platforms offer both opportunities and challenges for ethnic groups for the preservation of their ethnic identity. They play an important role in shaping and redefining ethnic identities, offering a virtual space for communities to express, celebrate, and negotiate their cultural narratives. Ethnic identity is a building block of an individual's self and collective perception. It encompasses a sense of belongingness, shared history, and cultural heritage. An individual's ethnic identity might change over time and can have a negative or positive association with a certain ethnic group. Pashtuns, the second largest ethnic group primarily living in Pakistan and Afghanistan; have a long history marked by great cultural traditions, language, customs, and a distinct sense of identity. However, with the rise of social media a new dynamics explaining how this identity is perceived, expressed, and contested is introduced.

Through online platforms, Pashtuns can navigate the complexities of their identity representation, reclaiming agency in shaping how their culture is portrayed and perceived. Despite having all these opportunities, Pashtuns are also facing many challenges over social media platforms. These challenges include; stereotyping, hate speech, false representations, cultural annexation, and the commodification of their traditions. Social media platforms are like a double-edged sword where Pashtuns must draw a line between preserving their cultural authenticity and adapting to the demands of a globalized audience. Online platforms like Twitter provide Pashtuns with a virtual space for sharing their opinions, cultural narratives, connecting with the global diaspora, and engaging in discussions about their heritage and ethnicity. These communication and interactions can create a sense of harmony, community, and cultural pride. Conversely, social media also has a negative side. It can expose Pashtuns to negative stereotypes, discrimination, and stigmatization,

which can undermine their sense of identity and belonging. This sense of marginalization often leads to deprivation. The main aim of this research is to explore the dual nature of social media impacts on Pashtun ethnic identity. In particular, this study draws on Goffman's concept of enacted stigma, which describes overt discrimination based on certain attributes, to understand how Pashtuns experience and respond to discrimination on social media. Additionally, it also explores how economic grievances and social discontent, often exacerbated by poverty, are expressed through social media platforms, contributing to a collective sense of identity and advocacy for change. Using the social constructivism theory this study also investigates the role of online interactions in shaping perceptions, influencing self-identity, and affecting community cohesion among Pashtuns. Using the idea that reality is not objectively given but created by social interactions, it uncovers the complex interplay between online interactions and ethnic identity. This research is based on the case study approach which helps to delve into the experiences of Pashtuns on social media platforms, highlighting the major themes of stigma, grievances, and scapegoating, and examining how these factors affect their ethnic identity dynamics. With the help of a comprehensive analysis of social media influences on Pashtun's ethnic identity, this study can also contribute to a wider understanding of the role of digital platforms in shaping contemporary ethnic identities.

2. Research Questions

1. What are the most prevalent themes in digital content regarding Pashtun's identity in terrorism affected areas of Pakistan and what are its broader implications for national integration and cohesion?

2. How do misinformation and hate speech on social media, particularly X platform play crucial role in exacerbating ethnic tensions and conflicts involving Pashtuns?

3. In what ways do Pashtun people utilizes social media, particularly X platform to express their collective grievances and issues?

3. Research Objectives

1. To examine the most prevalent themes regarding the Pashtun's identity in terrorism affected areas of Pakistan and its broader implications for national integration and cohesion.

2. To understand the role of misinformation and hate speech on social media in exacerbating ethnic tensions and conflicts involving Pashtuns.

3. To understand how Pashtun people utilize social media, particularly X platform to express their collective grievances and issues.

4. Problem Statement

The opportunities and challenges that interplay in the shaping of ethnic identity and societal representation in the Pashtun community have been critical, yet under explored in the contemporary digital era. Members from this historically marginalized group have turned more and more toward social media and other online forums in a struggle to regain their narrative and counter the negative stereotypes coursing through discourses responsible for shaping their socio-political landscape. While promising in many ways, these digital tools are troublesome in their ways, making it essential that nuanced understandings be brought in by policymakers to devise strategic responses.

The Pashtun people residing in tribal areas of Pakistan have had to suffer constant misrepresentation and stereotyping, particularly due to the low level of media visibility and unfavorable stereotyping. Such negative stereotypes have a bearing not only on the community's global profile but also on its self-image and unity. In turn, digital platforms have long served Pashtun individuals and groups well in projecting a more sophisticated image of their culture, history, and aspirations. Social media has emerged as an essential space for the contestation of harmful narratives, celebration of cultural heritage, and support-building on issues relevant to the Pashtun community. However digital empowerment is not free from challenges. While speed is held as an advantage, it often leads to misinformation and thus aggravates already existing tense situations. There is the problem of a digital divide; not all Pashtuns residing in tribal areas of Pakistan enjoy equal access to technological resources or digital literacy skills. This could mean unequal participation and representation within online discourses. Moreover, sometimes the very intensity of online engagement could also just provoke counter-reactions or further stigmatization from other communities or other actors, thereby further complicating the way to build a positive

digital identity. In this light, well-informed policy response support becomes critical on both fronts for handling these dual opportunity-challenge aspects. Policymakers need to acknowledge the potential of digital platforms for meaningful dialogue and cultural preservation, but at the same time, be aware of the dangers and limitations that exist within these spaces. Effective policies should facilitate access to and build digital literacy for all members of the Pashtun community, encourage realistic and respectful representations, and offer mechanisms for reporting online hate, harassment and misinformation.

Chapter 02

5. Literature Review

There are three key variables for the literature review of this study including; social media, ethnic identity, and is the relationship between social media and ethnic identity. . The primary goal of literature review is finding gaps in the body of knowledge that can improve understanding, increase the study's relevance, and increase its impact. The first section includes the literature related to social media, focusing on its abilities and potential to influence the individuals. The second section includes the literature related to ethnic identity, investigating how it is defined and constructed. Lastly, the literature on the correlation of social media and ethnic identity is scrutinized. This part involves the analysis of how social media platforms have influenced the construction, and expression of ethnic identities. Some case studies of different ethnic groups are also examined in this section in order to understand how those people have utilized social media platforms for their cultural preservation and broader social interactions through social media platforms. The role of social media in fostering a sense of belongingness and exacerbating ethnic tensions among members of ethnic groups was also considered. The section has also examined the potential of social media to challenge and redefine traditional notion of ethnic identity.

According to the definition provided by the World Economic Forum 'Digital Media' encompasses digital platforms, digital content, and services that can be accessed through different digital devices. It also assists the individual's social interactions and empowers them by enhancing their capabilities and learning (WEF 2016). Kaplan and Mazurek defined Social media as a group of internet-based applications that have the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. User-generated content can be created and exc hanged through the social media. Individuals use this platform for creating social networks and relationships with others who have similar ideas and interests. According to the words of Danah boyd, social media is not just an activity; it governs how people interact with each other and shapes their perceptions of reality. It can reduce social barriers and connect people to strength human values. The increasing usage of social media has significant impacts on the personal, social, professional, and academic world (Kaplan and Mazurek 2018). Matthew Guinibert has defined four facets of digital media. The 'digitization' of 'content' holds the first two characteristics of definition which indicate encoding and transmission of content

in the audio, video, and information in a machine readable format. The third facet is about 'communication', which means the democratization of media is caused by digital media which allow users to produce and consume he content according to their interests. Moreover, the digital media is deeply rooted in information and communication tenchnology (Guinibert 2021). The computer system has become key infrastructure for every aspect of life. The transformation of new media has entailed an evolutionary process which involves cooperation and competition among various media outlets (Delfanti and Arvidsson 2018). In contrast to traditional media and print media, digital media includes digital soft wares, tools, audios, videos, and data bases (Peakson2016). In the early 2000s a large number of social networking sites were introduced and in the late 2000s social media gained wider acceptance and the number of users also increased. The quick rise in social media usage can be attributed to several factors. Among these are technological elements like the expansion of broadband accessibility, enhanced software tools, and the creation of stronger computer devices. With these enhanced technologies people can collaborate and discuss with each other in many ways (Dewing and Michael 2010). Social media can be broadly categorized as the following: social networking and blogging, book marking sites, virtual gaming, community platforms like You tube and Facebook, and communal databases like Wikipedia etc. (Richard et al 2013, Chan 2013). The emergence of social media is a turning point in the history of the internet. In the early ages of the Internet, the use of social media was limited because the technology was intensive and it required expertise from users. People were using social media just to watch and read the content. But over the period, new platforms developed like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc, where users from any background without any technological expertise can read, share, and modify the content. Now people don't have to be dependent on print and broadcast media to get news and information, it can all be obtained from the social media. Users can also communicate with each other and share their views regarding any matter. According to Glyn Mangold and David Faulds, Social media exhibits a hybrid nature that has emerged from diverse technological and media roots. It facilitate an immediate and real time communication by employing various multi-media formats on numerous platforms with a global reach, including Facebook and YouTube (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Social Networking Services (SNS) have become essential tool for everyday communication worldwide. Among users, young people show particular enthusiasm, with the majority engaging daily through computers and mobile phones. While much attention has been given to studies that highlights the negative impacts of SNS, it's

crucial to understand that research in this area is still developing. The popular media and policy discussions have often emphasized the drawbacks. However, there is substantial evidence pointing to the positive benefits linked with SNS use, aspects that have been somewhat overlooked in public debate. It's important to consider both the challenges and benefits in order to get a balanced understanding of the impact of SNS on communication and interactions (Collin et al. 2011). The report of the global web indexer indicates the shift from traditional media to social media. According to this report social networks are capturing more attention than the traditional media by the members of all age group (Global web indexer 2019).

Jan Kietzmann in his paper described social media with the help of seven functional building blocks. The seven functional building blocks include: identity, sharing, conservation existence, reputation, relationships, and groups. Social media activities have implications for all of these mentioned building blocks (Kietzmann et al. 2011). Moreover, social media can also become the catalyst of social change. It empowers people to share their views and opinions with highly responsive audiences. Social media provides people with platforms where they can raise their voices for their rights and against the injustice and inequality in society. If someone is feeling suppressed then he no longer needs to endure abuse at the hands of the powerful and live a life of injustice or unresolved issues. He can choose to reach out to social media to share his side of the story and demand compensation for his rights (Taprial and Kanwar, 2012). The difference between old media and new media is that the old media is passive in nature, whereas the new media is based on active communication. Social media entails a decentralized, two-way communication, involving an active and aware audience that can make choices and share their opinions (Miller 2020). In the contemporary era, the empowering role played by social media is undeniable. It greatly impacts the culture, and economy and shapes the perceptions of the people. It provides individuals with an online sphere where they can connect and share ideas beyond geographical boundaries. Social networking sites can create awareness among the members of societies and help them to unite for the achievement of specific goals. It can be used for noble causes such as helping needy people both morally and financially. It assists the public and semi-public communication. Political leaders can also use social media tools for their election campaigns and to create political awareness among the public. Participation and interaction are the two attributes of social media that distinguish it from traditional media (Manning 2014). In the past few years, social media users have shown increased political participation, as it provides them a platform for sharing their views

and ideas, engaging in discussions, and disseminating information regarding political matters and leaders. Through internet connectivity , technologies like mobile devices and other wearable enable interactions beyond the physical borders and expend the temporal dimensions of online interaction (Sora, Jorda, and Cordina 2017). This can lead to a more informed and politically active population. It provides the repressive people an opportunity to raise their voices and participate in democratic fashions (Siddiqui and Singh 2016). But managing the social media content, especially the user generated one, comes with many challenges. The most dominant issues in social media includes; Privacy and security concerns, proliferation and amplification of unregulated digital content, creation of echo chambers, polarization, and digital divide(Dhiman 2023, Minehane 2017, Alexander 2013).

Despite having all these positive and empowering impacts, social media also have some negative impacts. Social media have replaced human interaction with superficial interactions. People are getting addicted to social media. They are spending hours on using these social networking apps which is negatively impacting their mental and physical health. The personal space of an individual is also invaded by these social networking apps. The criminals and terrorist organizations are also using social media to fulfill their illegal aims such as gathering information and raising funds for their activities (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011). People from young age groups waste a lot of time on social media and are most likely to get influenced by the fake identities and stories of these criminal groups. Social media platforms are used by people to create groups with like-minded people. People can create false identities to recruit people for criminal and terrorist activities (Amedie 2015). Furthermore, cyber bullying, online hate speech, online fraud, and scams are also committed through social media platforms. People can deliberately use digital media to spread false information about another person, organization, or ethnic group, which can foster hostile relationships among individuals and groups. These impacts of social media are diverse, complex, and multifaceted in nature and strongly influence many sectors including health, business, education, society, and youth (Akram and Kumar 2017).

Identity is the building block of the ethnicity. Through the construction of ethnic identity, individuals illustrate their sense of attachment and define their ethnic boundaries and their meanings. Identification of an individual's ethnicity is based on how they view themselves as member of a particular ethnic group (Leong 2006). Ethnic identity is the subdivision of identity

categories and its formation is the result of structures created by ethnic groups and the larger society. The membership of ethnic identities is largely associated with descent-based attributes (Chandra 2006). The Anthropological theories have divided ethnicity into three categories. These include primordialist theories, Instrumentalist theories, and Constructivist theories. These theories broadly reflect changes of approach in anthropology over the past 20 years, i.e. the shift from cultural evolution theories, to structural-functional theories, to conflict theories, and finally to postmodern theories. According to Primordialist theories ethnicity is fixed at birth and cannot be changed. Ethnic identification is based on 'primordial' attachments to a group or culture. In contrast to primordialist theories, Instrumental theories argue that ethnicity is based on people's "historical" and "symbolic" memory. It is something that is created, used, and exploited by leaders and others in the pragmatic pursuit of their own interests. According to constructivists' explanation, ethnic identities are socially constructed and individuals are the agents that construct these identities. It is not something people "possess" but something they "construct" in specific social and historical contexts to maximize their own interests. It is therefore fluid and subjective. The actions taken by the larger ethnic groups including the social, economic, and political factors influence the process of construction and reconstruction of ethnic identities. Identity construction plays an important role in addressing the problems of ethnic boundaries (Nagel 1994). The sense of belongingness to a particular group based on common values and beliefs plays an important role in uniting people and avoiding possible conflicts and skirmishes.

Ethnic conflicts are an unavoidable feature of plural societies where ethnicity can be a source of conflict (Htun 2012). Pakistan is a country that has diverse ethnic groups and conflicts between these groups are major challenges to its internal security. The uneven growth of these ethnic identities is deteriorating the situation in the country. The growing inter-ethnic warfare has a crucial impact on the country's security and stability (Javaid and Saeed 2012). Social psychology has been focused on the study of social identity for the past few decades. Social identity theory is an influential approach that provides insights into the complex relationship between self-concept and social identities in various social contexts, shedding light on how these identities can significantly influence intergroup dynamics. In a networked society, social identity is highly impacted by the ubiquitous flow of information. This information can influence individual's attitudes and beliefs, which have implications on how they make decisions, and collaborate with people from different identity groups to solve problems. Such effects can lead to increased

polarization in society (Vaahensalo 2021). Slavka Karakhusheva in his paper examined that social media play an important role in the construction of collective identities. He demonstrated the ways Pomak communities established transnational connections with their friends by joining groups on Facebook, following YouTube channels, or subscribing to forums in an attempt to learn more about themselves, to share expertise on the culture of the community (Karakusheva 2016).

Social media plays an important role in identity construction by providing individuals with a virtual space for expression, connection, and representation. Users from diverse ethnic backgrounds can share and celebrate their cultural and traditional values and can connect with the people with same ethnic background. Cultural exchange on a global scale is facilitated on social media platforms, allowing individuals to learn about the richness of different ethnic identities. Activism and advocacy also find a voice on social media that empowers different ethnic communities to address issues related to discrimination, social justice, inequality, and cultural preservation. In an interconnected and globalized world, it acts as a digital archive for cultural preservation, documenting practices, languages, values, and traditions that are at risk of corrosion. Social media users showcase their cultural heritage, traditions, customs, and linguistic practices, contributing to the construction of a multifaceted ethnic identity. By creating and sharing content, individuals can shape how they are perceived by others and, as a result, contribute to the wider understanding of their ethnicity. The role of virtual communities on social media is also crucial in identity construction, as individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds connect to share experiences, challenge stereotypes, and navigate the complexities of their identities.

Ernest Jakaza in his paper explored the complex dynamics of identity construction on social media platforms, by using the theoretical framework of Social Constructionism. The analysis for this study is conducted at distinct levels including; verbal, textual, pragmatic, and interactional. This study examines the specific word choices and vocabulary used in social media posts, aiming to distinguish how these linguistic elements contribute to the construction of one's identity. It also delves into the broader context of language use to examine the structural aspects of posts to unravel their social meanings (Jakaza 2020). Media serve as a powerful social agent that can exert a profound influence on individuals from minority groups because they navigate their understanding of self and group identity about the majority. The distinct platforms of social media play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. For individuals who belong to minority

groups, social media exposure has become crucial through which they glean insights into their own identity. It serves as a mirror that reflects their experiences and provides them with a sense of belonging within the broader societal landscape. Notably, social media platforms also serve as a comparative tool, allowing individuals to compare their identity with that of the majority group. This comparison, as mentioned by Berry and Mitchell-Kernan in 1982, contributes significantly to the formation of social identity (Ramasubramanian 2017). The mainstream media is criticized for negatively representing minority ethnic groups. However, in contrast to traditional media social media platforms, provide a more diverse space for minority representation.

This shift from traditional media to social media is important because the positive representations within social contexts can yield positive effects on individual identity. Social media, because of its decentralized and user-generated nature, becomes an alternative and comparatively more positive source of information for the members of minority ethnic groups who are seeking reflections of their ethnic identity. The diverse narratives and positive representations of various ethnicities and cultures on social media can contribute to a sense of ethnic pride and security among minority ethnic groups. This positive representation, as a result, enhances ethnic identity by developing a more affirming environment. As social media becomes a dynamic space for self-expression and community building, it plays a crucial role in shaping a more positive and secure ethnic identity for minority members, countering the negative portrayals that are prevalent in traditional media. The 'Societies and Lifestyles' project (2006-2009) has explored the marginalized ethnic groups in post-communist countries, with the main focus on the Hungarian Roma who have a rich but underrepresented cultural heritage. This project aimed to empower young Roma influencers through social media. Nineteen female Roma influencers successfully emerged, after the training of two semesters. They were using platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to convey their cultural values in an amusing, youthful voice. The training program improved digital competence and self-assurance. Some influencers withdrew because of the aggressive tone of social media and conflicting duties. These trained influencers addressed the scarcity of authentic cultural content by appropriating ancient symbols and showcasing beauty in their environment against stimulating realities. Rather than becoming merely content providers, they also became role models for their communities, challenging stereotypes highlighting cultural achievements, and boosting personal growth. This study highlights the transformative power of social media for cultural transformation and empowerment of marginalized communities like the Hungarian Roma

(Rétvári, Kovács, and Kárpáti 2022). Social engagement, comments, likes, and other interactive behaviors on social media platforms also play an important role in portraying one's identity. It allows individuals to connect and communicate with each other to present themselves and determine how they want to be perceived (Gündüz 2017).

Social media can also be used to bridge the inter-generational differences between the different communities. In an article written by Nancy J. Hafkin, it is mentioned that the internet has been utilized by the Ethiopian diaspora as a tool for reflecting upon identity and building communities. This article delves into how information and communication technology influence the process of socialization. The Ethiopians are using new media technologies to shape and express their identities. The internet is providing them a platform where they can engage in public discussion regarding their politics and culture. By linking this narrative of the role of information and communication technology with social media utilization, it can be infrared that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, etc play an important role in providing online spaces where people can connect and socialize with each other for forging new communities and promoting cultural exchanges. According to this article, the freedom of expression and access to technology empowers diaspora Ethiopians to openly discuss and critique Ethiopian politics and culture but these actions may be constrained or limited within Ethiopia due to censorship and restrictions on digital access. Social media can provide a decentralized and accessible channel for the diaspora to express their opinions and contribute to discussions that might not be feasible in the homeland (Hafkin. 2009). The interest groups and older leaders are using social media to connect, engage, and aware the youth activists. In the existing literature, less attention has been paid to how interest groups use social media. According to the study, the more influential groups are better at using social media, whereas the groups that struggle with generational differences don't seem to be using social media effectively (Rubenzer 2015). The prominent example of this phenomenon mentioned in the study is Latinos, which is an ethnic minority group in the United States. Despite their significant demographic presence, their political and cultural participation based on social media engagement is comparatively low as compared to other groups. The sense of belongingness to the Latino community influences their political expression on social media platforms regarding immigration and Latino culture. The members believe in the strength of the Latino community, which influences whether their strong group identity translates into political expression on social media, mainly on immigration issues. The study highlighted the connection between Latinos'

group identity, media choices, and political expression on social media. It revolves around the important question of why some groups might be more or less active in discussing political matters on social media platforms (Velasquez 2019).

With the growing popularity of social media, people are completely dependent on social media for any kind of information. The downside of this increasing popularity is that easy access to information and communication can also increase the risks of dissemination of fake information and hate speech. It plays an important role in shaping how we understand ethnic, cultural, and social differences. It can also lead to discrimination and inequality in online spaces against different ethnic identities. Online racism has also gained the attention in past few years. In these online spaces, some identities are marked as superior whereas others are marked as inferior based on certain characteristics. This process produced imbalanced narratives and the superior group maintained its position and at the same time, they also tried to gain control of identity formation of the inferior group. During the initial stage of the internet, it was considered that the social web holds the power to reduce conflict and strengthen the relationship between those who are from diverse social, ethnic, and political backgrounds. But in the later stage, evidence showed that Western societies a getting polarized and divided because of the promotion of hate speech and extremism through different channels of social media. Online communication between people from diverse backgrounds can be confrontational and hostile which may lead to future offline violence. Online hate and extremism play an important role in individual perception of self-identity and opposing group identity. A study was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in which researchers looked at how Facebook affects the relationship between people from different ethnic groups. Based on prevailing beliefs, they thought that deactivating Facebook could make people like each other more. Surprisingly, the study indicated the opposite results. According to the results of the study, the effect of Facebook deactivation on interethnic relations is dependent on the level of ethnic heterogeneity by highlighting the role of local context in shaping social media's influence. The researchers also found out that these effects are dependent on the local factors such as where people lived and how many different ethnic groups were around them. If their area had more ethnic diversity, stopping Facebook made them like others even less. Additionally, not using Facebook made people feel happier for some time, but it decreased their knowledge of current events. This study explored the effects of social media platforms, like Facebook, on shaping the individual's perceptions of self and others (Asimovic et al. 2021).

Social media provides a platform where users can invite people from different and identical identities to join them and exchange information. They can also create thematic groups and exchange information. One of the prominent examples is Vkontakte, which is a powerful tool for ethnic networking. It connects the ethnic groups from all around Russia. According to the study, it connects the Tatars which is the second largest ethnic group in Russia. It also has implications for the identity construction and negotiation of the ethnic groups (Suleymanova 2009). Furthermore, another study "Cultural/Social Media Space of the Digital Generation" explored that how the digital generation shapes and analyzes its cultural media space with a case study of Kazakhstan. The foundation of this space is based on information technologies, creating a communicative media environment with a synchronized structure that controls how individuals socialize. The content is created through digital technologies within the cultural media space of the digital generation, presenting people's visual perspectives through images and signs. Moreover, this study examines that how people in Kazakhstan distinguish and communicate culture with the help of modern technology (Saparova et al. 2020). It also emphasizes the role of digital tools in shaping the cultural media landscape. By summing up one can say that interaction through social media platforms plays an important role in the construction of collective ethnic identities.
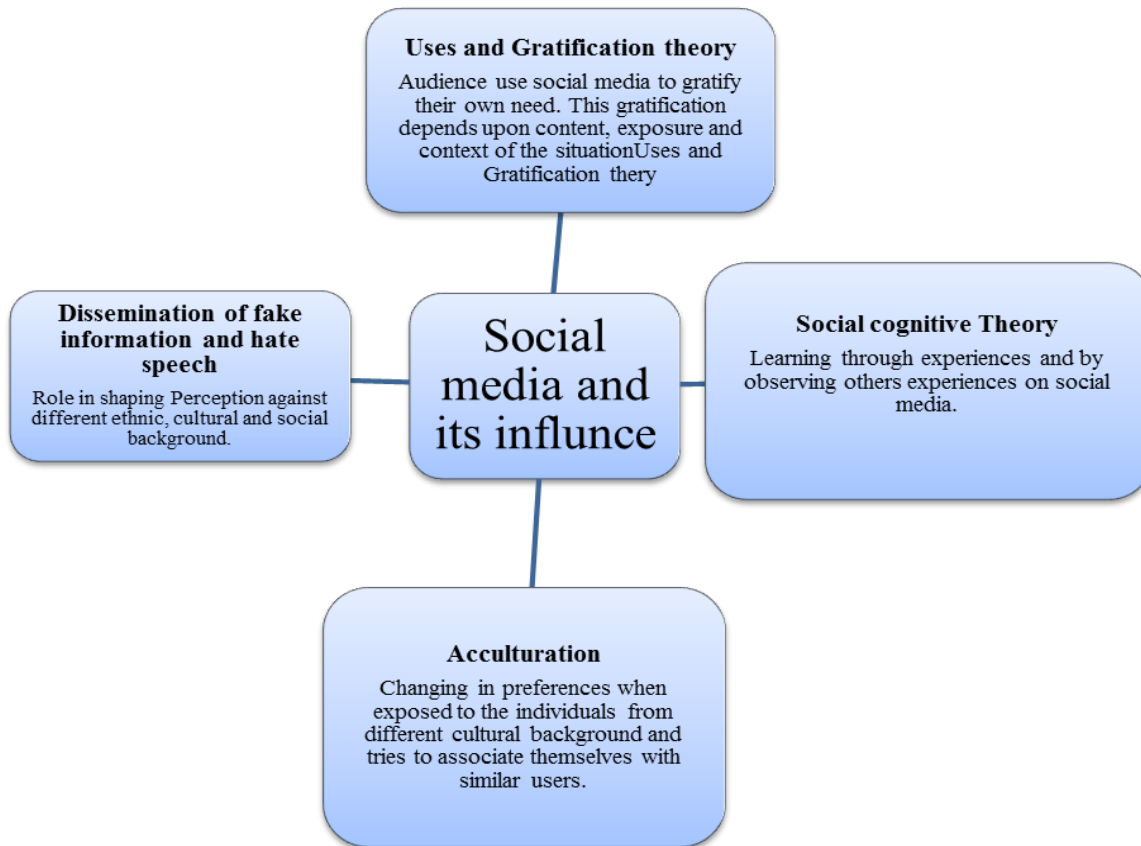
Figure 1: Social Media influence on shaping the perceptions of individuals on the basis of online interactions and experiences.

6. Theoretical Framework

This section will explain the influence of social media interactions on individual perceptions of ethnic identity through the lens of social constructivism. Under the umbrella of social constructivism, many theories are diffused to form one.

6.1. Social Constructivism

The "social constructivism" is a theory of international relations. The emergence of constructivism is often attributed to the inadequacy of traditional theories like realism and liberalism in explaining the end of the Cold War. This term was first coined by Nicholas Greenwood Onuf in 1989 in his famous book with the title "world of our making", in which he stated that human world is not

natural but, in opposing to this human world is constructed by the human actions. This theory has reshaped the debates of the international relations by challenging the domination of rationalist theories and brings a new perspective for understanding the global dynamics. It challenges the state centric approach of the traditional theories and overlook the intricate role of ethnic groups and individuals in shaping and formulating the international relations through their actions and interactions.

Social constructivism theory is mainly focused on the collaborative nature of learning. It highlights the importance of ideas, identities, and interactions in international system. Learning is an active rather than a passive process in which learners negotiate their understanding based on what they experience in the new learning opportunities (Hoover 1969). Social constructivism underscores the significance of culture and context in understanding what happens in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997). The concept is closely aligned with many contemporary theories, most notably the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Shunk, 2000). Alexander Wendt's example vividly illustrates the concept of the social construction of reality in international relations. He argues that the perceived threat posed by nuclear weapons is not exclusively determined by their quantity (material structure) but rather by the meaning attributed to them (ideational structure). He illustrated with the an example that 500 British nuclear are considered to be less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons. The crucial point is that the social relationship between states is shaped by shared understandings or inter-subjectivity. This shared understanding becomes the foundation for their relations. Wendt's example highlights that the meaning of nuclear weapons is not inherent rather it depends on the social context and the ideas and beliefs held by the involved states. Nuclear weapons, on their own have no fixed meaning. Their significance is influenced by broader social and ideational context. This perception aligns with constructivism in international relations, which goes beyond material realities to consider the role of ideas and beliefs on global politics. Notably, it implies that reality is not fixed but continually under construction. This dynamic understanding suggests that meanings are not fixed and can evolve over time based on the changing ideas and beliefs of the actors involved, providing opportunities for transformation and shifts in international relations (Theys 2017).

Constructivism stands as a truism asserting that social reality is not inherently given but it is actively constructed and recreated by human agents through their daily interactions and practices. This notion aligns with the concept of "the social construction of reality," as articulated by Berger and Luckmann in 1966. It holds the claim that international system is socially constructed on the basis of human rational and interactions. In essence, it posits that the reality we perceive is not an objective truth but a product of ongoing social processes and interactions. There are three basic ontological claims of constructivism. First claim is that the ideational structures play an important role in shaping how individuals and societies perceive the world around them. It highlights the importance of Ideas, beliefs, and values and their influence on people's interpretation of different events and phenomena. This claim is totally different from other theories of international relations such as realism and liberalism. Second claim, is that identities are crucial determinants of actor behavior. According to this perspective, identities play an important role in shaping the interests of actors, whether they are individuals or states, influencing the issues they prioritize and the goals they pursue. Constructivists argue that actors cannot act without identity, asserting that how individuals or states define themselves is intricately linked to their behavior. In the realm of international relations, constructivism theory challenges the traditional perspectives of realists and liberals by contending that state behavior is not solely determined by material interests but is deeply influenced by ideas, norms, and identities. It highlights the inextricable connection between identity and global interactions. The third claim, is regarding the relationship between agents and structures. According to this claim agents and social structures are not separate entities but are instead mutually constituted. In other words, individuals both shape and are shaped by the social structures in which they are embedded. This perspective challenges a simplistic view that either individuals or structures are the primary drivers of social phenomena. Human relations are inherently social; individuals actively participate in the creation of social structures, and in turn, structures influence individual behavior.

The constructivists approach to ethnic identity development is totally different from the traditional stage models. They proposed more nuanced and dynamic perspective regarding the ethnic identity development. The traditional stage models are based on the idea that ethnic identity is linear and predetermined whereas constructivist approach emphasizes on the idea that identity is a continuously evolving narrative influenced by the interactions with various elements in an

individual's life, including his family, friends, institutions, organizations, and the broader cultural environment across the globe.

Social constructivist views ethnic identity as a product of social interactions and processes. Ethnic groups emerge and disappear according to their social, political and economic requirement. Sometimes the ethnic groups also merge into each other or involve into conflict according to their requirements This approach delves into the richness and diversity of experiences that influence the individual's behaviors. Unlike the traditional theories and models, which may oversimplify the complex nature of identity development, the constructivists approach follows a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of factors that shape an individual's sense of self and others. According to constructivists point of view ethnic identities are influenced by the interactions and social media is a place where individuals interact and communicate with each other. It serves as a prominent arena where individuals can actively participate in the construction of their ethnic identities. Through interactions with others, users can contribute in ongoing dialogues regarding the culture, traditions, and shared experiences. Within the framework of social constructivism, ethnic identities are viewed as emerging through social interactions, and social media provides an online space for these interactions to take place and identities to evolve. Users can present their ethnic identities by content creation and sharing. The interactions and feedback on their content regarding their culture and ethnicity further contribute to the shaping of these identities, backing the social constructivist notion that identity construction is an ongoing process, persistently influenced by the social interactions within the digital sphere.

6.2. Language lies at the heart of social constructionism process

Language and its use, has far more impacts than simply describing the world around us, it can also construct the world because people perceive it (Burr 2015). Language is the most crucial system that provides humans an opportunity to construct reality (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). It is like a double-edged sword while it can unify the people, it can also divide and marginalize. This concept is significantly relevant to the context of social media because on social media platforms, the use of language can influence perceptions and identities. The exposure of Pashtuns to derogatory language and hate speech can mark them out for discrimination and can reinforce prejudice about their ethnic identity. Many other aspects of language that influence an individual's perception of ethnic identity also come under the social construction of reality. For instance, the language used

to discuss social problems and injustices experienced by Pashtuns shows feelings of relative deprivation. This discourse can fuel the grievances. It can also motivate the collective actions to address perceived injustices and inequities. Social media users can also engage in debates and discussions on social media platforms, where they can share their perspectives and views regarding each other ethnic identity. These interactions can help in the formation of collective ethnic identities. In this way, one can say that the use of language in social communication and interactions plays an important role in shaping reality and constructing the world around us. By understanding the power of language in communication, People can challenge negative stereotypes, and false allegations, promote positive representations, and construct a unified society. Social constructivism is the most relevant theoretical framework that provides a lens for understanding these processes, by highlighting the role of language in shaping social reality

Chapter 03

7. Case Study of Pashtuns

Pashtuns are an ethnic group based in Pakistan and Afghanistan, most commonly called with names such as Afghan Pashtuns, Pathans, Pashtuns, Pakhtoons, etc (A. S. Ahmed, 2013). Pashtuns comprise 15% of the total population of the country and are the second-largest ethnic group in Pakistan. They are living in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces, along with tribal areas of the Pak-Afghan border, which is known as the Durand line. In colonial literature, Pashtuns are mostly described as "warrior-like because of their brave characteristics. They are also named savages because they tend to be violent and have fearless behavior during the colonial period. The war in Afghanistan has created a volatile situation for the Pashtuns residing in Pakistan's tribal areas including FATA and North Waziristan. After the 9/11 incident when the United States started the war on terror and invaded Afghanistan, many Taliban took refuge in these tribal areas of Pakistan (Wazir 2019). The Taliban fighters used this area as a base of operations for their military activities in neighboring Afghanistan and as their starting point for their violent attacks on Pakistani civilians and government targets. Pakistan's government has made an alliance with the United States against these insurgents. Since then, many military operations have carried out in the tribal areas causing severe collateral damage and instability in the region. The negative stereotypes and assumptions are often linked with Pashtuns because of two main reasons. The first one is Pashtun insurgencies against British rule during the colonial period, and the second one is the role that Pashtun Mujahedeen's have played in the Afghan-Soviet War of 1979(Hanifi 2016).
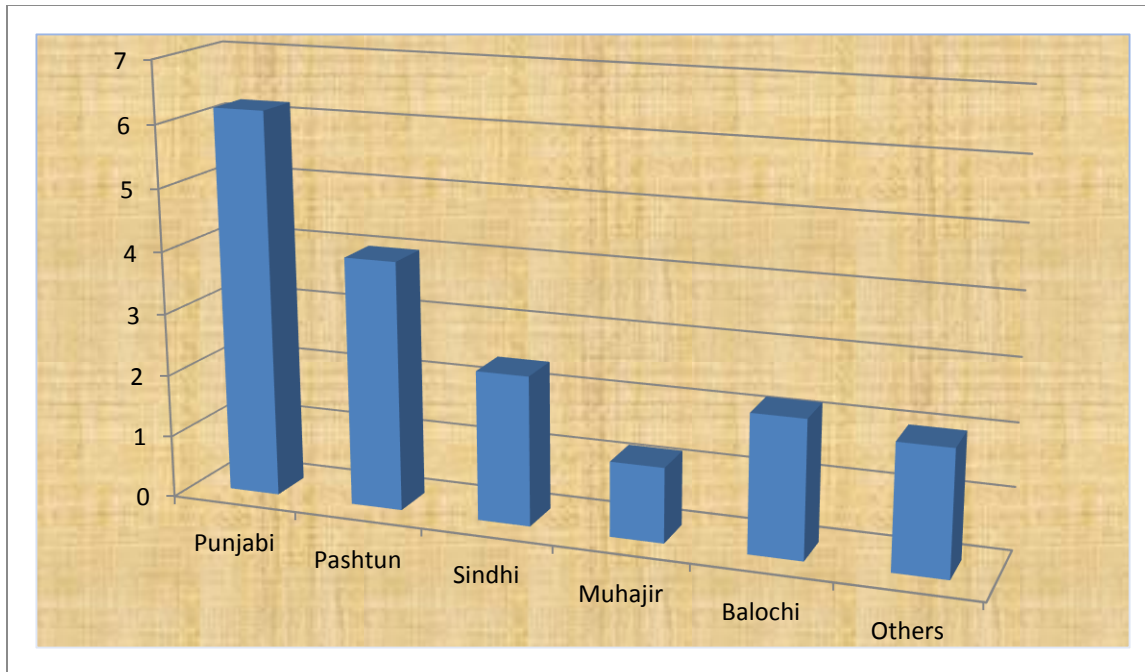
Figure 2: Ethnic composition of Pakistan

In the contemporary era, the rise of extremist groups such as Pakistani Taliban in the tribal areas including the FATA (federally administrative tribal area), and the strengthening of the anti-U.S Haqqani network (Afghan Taliban) has further contributed to the negative perception of Pashtuns. But it is important to recognize that Pashtuns have been victims of violence, with thousands of Pashtuns losing their lives in the former-FATA region and tribal elders are being targeted by the militants and extremist groups. The lives of Pashtuns are directly or indirectly affected by military operations, U.S. drone strikes, and the rise of militancy in tribal areas including FATA and North Waziristan (Ahmed, Yousaf, and Zeb 2018). Therefore, this research is focused on the violent representation Pashtuns of Pakistan on social media platforms.

7.1. Why Pashtuns are generalized as violent tribe?

Pashtuns are often represented as a violent and extremist ethnicity. According to many scholars, the role of Pashtuns is misrepresented because of absence of their voices in literature. There are limited or no counter-narratives by Pashtun scholars on their misrepresentation (Hanifi 2016). Mountstuart Elphinstone and Louis Dupree's writings are most influential in perpetuating the Orientalist portrayal of Pashtun culture and ethnicity. According to their literature, the high spirit is the basis of Afghan tribal culture which means that they are always ready to defend their country

against any foreign invasion or tyrant (Manchanda 2017). Therefore in colonial literature, Pashtuns are often defined as "warriors" and "semi savages". Enriquez (1921) has criticized colonial and orientalist literary narratives about Pashtuns, but he made a similar mistake when he suggested that Pashtun tribes might still be living in the "tenth century" by making a comparison between them and early English tribes. Furthermore, a number of British politicians and military officers also built their opinions about the Pashtuns on the basis of colonial literature, in addition to the writers themselves. The Pashtun tribes were described as "animal-like" by Winston Churchill, and also defines as most barbaric of all races, bloodthirsty, and bigoted" by Denzil Ibbetson. Additional evidence for this portrayal comes from more than 100 British military campaigns against the Pashtuns culture and traditions. The excessive reliance on colonial literature for understanding Pashtuns has led to a distorted and negative depiction of Pashtun ethnicity (Zahab 2016). Charles Lindholm is known for extensively criticising these negative stereotypes of Pashtuns, claiming that they are the norm rather than the exception and that Pashtuns are considered in binary terms like brave and honourable (Lindholm 1980).

By using the recent militancy and violence that have been concentrated in Pashtun's tribal areas; various works have linked Pashtuns to violence centered on the basis of their historical accounts (B. S. Kakar, 2012). One such example is a 2001 Irish Times news article titled "Meet the Pashtuns," which discussed the Pashtun tribes in FATA region and described them as " People steeped in a political culture of guns and violence." In another example, Kronstadt (2003) asserts that the "majority of the Pashtuns sympathized with the Al Qaeda and the Taliban" in a report written for the U.S. Congress in 2003, generalizing the entire FATA region of Pakistan. So one can easily say that these misconceptions and false narratives regarding Pashtuns are not limited to foreign academia and the media, but the colonial-style treatment of Pakistan has not altered. If we talk about the mujahidin of Afghanistan war, then it was not only the Pashtuns who took part in this war, but also the Punjabis and Muhajirs who took part in these violent activities. The literature about Pashtuns being allied with the Afghan Taliban has also been criticized in the past when retired military officers in Pakistan have admitted to creating the Taliban in Afghanistan.

However, the absence of Pashtuns in existing literature and lack of counter narratives from Pashtuns have given rise to the negative stereotyping of Pashtuns ethnicity. The association of Pashtuns tribes with the terrorism and extremism is still persistent (D. S. G. Khattak, 2017). In

today's digitalized world, social media platforms has provide individuals an online space for marginalized communities to share their narratives and advocate for their rights. The Pashtun people often misrepresented in mainstream literature and media are now utilizing these platforms to build perceptions and give voice to their grievances against injustices and inequalities they face. Thousands of Pashtuns have gathered for peaceful protests and rallies, but none of major electronic media have given coverage to any of these protest or rally (Hayat 2018).

As mentioned above, colonial and modern literature traditionally had an adverse view of the tribal Pashtuns. This false perception is the result of a number of factors, including Pakistan's use of the former-FATA for the anti-Soviet Jihad, the British occupation of the Pashtun tribal frontier, and the joining of some tribal Pashtuns by militant groups. By summing up one can say that it is not acceptable to attribute this perception solely to the actions of the Pashtun militant group and jihadi fighters. The potential impact of digital activism on ethnic identity dynamics is greater than that of traditional literature and mainstream media. Social media, on one hand, may reduce animosity between various ethnic groups by raising awareness, encouraging communication, enabling grassroots mobilization, and building understanding and empathy. However, by fostering echo chambers, disseminating false information and hate speech, and emphasizing identity politics—which may give rise to and accelerate negative stereotypes and polarization—it may exacerbate feelings of otherness. The impact of digital activism on ethnic identity dynamics is thus dual-faceted, capable of both bridging and widening divides between ethnic communities.

7.2. Pashtuns as a victim of conflict

Pashtuns residing in tribal areas of Pakistan became the direct victims of war and violence in four ways. First, they live in the conflict zone, and during strict curfew time, their access to food, water, and necessities of life is blocked. The indiscriminate attacks and air strikes on civilian populations and infrastructures have led to massive displacement. Second, the unemployed graduates of the Pashtun ethnicity are targeted by the Taliban members. They radicalize them and encourage them to fight for the Taliban rule in the region. The elder members of the Pashtus ethnicity denied this oppression of their youth but the Taliban started assassinating and attacking them and their families. Third, the Pashtuns residing in tribal areas have become the victims of anti-Taliban policies of the state. The Pakistani security forces have created local militias by joining the defectors from TTP and local co-opted youth. The main aim behind the formation of these militias

was to drive out the bad Taliban from the region. Instead of stabilizing the region, these militias have killed the traders, shopkeepers, and many other civilians who have no link with the Taliban. This extortion and killing have further worsened the situation in the region.Last but not least, Pakistani security policy that frequently conflates ethnicity with extremist ideology has resulted in punitive measures against Pashtuns (Jafri 2012). Internally displaced persons have encountered new obstacles and restrictions since returning to the region after receiving government assistance, such as extortion, landmines, harassment at security checkpoints, forced disappearances of local men, and targeted killings of tribal elders(Mehsud 2016).

Chapter 04

8. Research Methodology

Research methodology is an important part of social research. The assumptions about how research should be carried out influence the outcomes of the research (Bryman, n.d.). Understanding the dynamics of social media impacts on ethnic identity formation is an intricate phenomenon.

8.1. Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is a type of social science research which is used to quantify the data and generalize results from a sample to the population of interest. It can also be used to measure the occurrence of various views and ideas in selected dataset (DeFranzo 2023) . This methodology is split into several steps. As a starting point, the identification of a slur frequency analysis is conducted on a limited initial set of selected posts from the X platform. It is grabbed by using a custom dictionary of specific key terms. This initial step has enhanced and refined the data selection process. This can include positive terms related to culture, history, and identity, as well as negative slurs and derogatory terms.

8.2. Sampling

This study is based on the quantitative content analysis of the data set collected from the X platform (formerly known as twitter). The selection of platform is based on its immense popularity among masses, and its capability of disseminating dynamic and interactive content.   The inclusion criterion for the sample is that the main focus of the posts/content must be relevant to ethnic identity and ethnic conflicts. Purposive sampling techniques are used. The posts are identified and selected based on their relevance to research objectives regarding ethnic identities and ethnic conflicts. Platform-specific sampling was employed for this research to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Pashtun ethnic identity in any digital environment. The main focus is on groups, pages, and profiles with emphasis on Pashtun on the X platform, where discussion of ethnic identity prevails. This approach aims to capture the content whose contributions can provide valuable insights into the nuances of Pashtun ethnic identity on the X platform. On the X platform, the focus is to find relevant hashtags and statistics related to ethnicity.

8.3. Data Collection

Data collection involves the data gathering from selected samples to address the research objectives. It is based on a descriptive approach, encompassing three key dimensions. Firstly, a

comprehensive review of prior studies was conducted, offering insights into existing literature on the role of social media in shaping ethnic identity. The exploratory phase of research is based on the comprehensive literature review associated with social media, ethnic identity, and social media influence on ethnic identity. It allows the researcher to identify the gaps in the existing literature. Secondly, data collection has transpired through X platform which is commonly used social networking social media platform, aiming to discern the viewpoints of a selected sample regarding the influence of social media on their ethnic identity. The user-generated content including posts, comments, and discussions related to Pashtun ethnic identity were extracted. Content analysis is used to analyse the selected data set of posts. Content analysis is the technique of systemically quantifying the data to extract the pattern themes and trends in data. The search function of the X platform is divided into four categories; words or hash tags, places, dates, and people (Pavelko and Grabe 2017). In the first section the exact phrases, words, or hashtags are used to find the posts related to ethnic identities specifically Pashtuns.

		Searched Hashtags on
#Pashtuns	#End forced disappearances	
#Pashtun identity	#Genocide#Traitors #Terrorists	**X platform**
#Marginalization #KPK #Negative portrayal #Ethnic identity	#Ethnic groups #Unequaltreatment #Social media #Poverty	
#Ethnic violence Oppression #Discrimination	#FATA #Chaman #Extra Judicial Killing	

Secondly, for collecting the relevant posts the people search function is used. This function allows three options: "from these accounts," "to these accounts," and "mentioning these accounts"(Pavelko and Grabe 2017). So, accounts that have mentioned some Pashtun users or commented something related to ethnic identities in someone's post are also analysed. If we talk about extracting tweets from a particular time period, then there is no such rationale for data collection in this research. The content is selected solely based on its relevance to the Pashtun ethnicity, irrespective of any time period. An opportunity to include re-tweets was also used in data collection as it provides content analysts with information about the frequency with which a specific tweet was shared.

This research has utilized a large set of tweets specifically related to ethnic identities and Pashtuns. The total number of collected tweets is 200. The data set includes both Pashtuns and non-Pashtun authors indicating a diverse range of voices on certain issues. Out of 200 authors 104 are identified as Pashtuns and rest are non-Pashtuns. These tweets are gathered by using keywords such as Pashtun, ethnic identity, Pashtun rights, Pashtun discrimination, Ethnic conflicts, otherness, ethnic violence Marginalization etc. The majority of the posts are in text format, with some including text, video, and and images. This variety suggests different approaches in order to engage the audience. The collected tweets are manually annotated to ensure high quality for data analysis. The researcher has labelled the tweets into three categories; hate, counter hate, and neutral. Firstly, tweets are labelled as hate if they contain ethnic slurs, scapegoating, or anti-Pashtun rhetoric. Secondly, tweets are labelled as Counter-hate if they criticize the anti-Pashtun language or actions and if they are raising voice against the in just policies of state towards Pashtuns. While, the rest of the tweets are labelled as neutral. During the analysis stage, the researcher has created and released manually curated dataset. There are thousands of tweets available regarding the ethnic identity but, only 67 hate tweets, 59 counter hate tweets, and 74 neutral tweets were manually curated in this dataset (as shown in table).

Category	Description	Total no. of tweets	Likes	Reposts
Hate	Ethnic slurs, Anti Pashtun Rhetoric,	67	2617	960
Counter hate	Criticise anti Pashtun language and actions	59	2198	1021
Neutral	Equality, Justice	74	4087	1237

Table 1: Categorization of content

Ethical considerations and adherence to platform terms were prioritized during the data collection process.

9. **Data Analysis**

Upon the completion of data collection from Social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter), the next step is data analysis. Data analysis is concerned with data reduction, which means extracting specific and meaningful data. During this step, a meticulous content analysis was undertaken to uncover patterns, themes, and nuanced perspectives related to Pashtun's ethnic identity. This analysis is focused on employing the content analysis that allows for a comprehensive exploration of the data. Through this process, a diverse range of emergent themes, patterns, key terms was captured, reflecting the complexity of Pashtuns' perspectives as expressed in their online interactions. The tweets are curated based on their content, for example, Positive cultural expressions; Negative slurs and hate speech, and Neutral include content related to equality and awareness about ethnic identities. As a distinctive methodology adopted for crystalizing themes, the content analysis of posts collected from the X platform was conducted by repeated textual and visual examination and recording the salient of recurrent themes. After examining the collected dataset, the data was put into the web frequency indexer, to get the frequency of each word within a particular issue of Pashtuns. In the next step, the word cluster cloud was created by using the word cloud. The main objective for creating this cloud is to make data processing easy by showing the size of a particular word corresponding to the frequency(the higher the frequency larger the size of a word in the cloud). This analysis not only uncovered the multidimensional nature of Pashtun ethnic identity but also explained the potential factors within digital discourse that may play a role in exacerbating or eliminating the ethnic tensions.

10.Frequency analysis of key terms

A web frequency indexer is a tool that is designed to check the frequency and indexers of specific words. It gathers information on how often words appear on web pages. The use of a web frequency indexer is highly relevant when we study the social media impacts social media on ethnic identity dynamics. A Web Frequency Indexer can track the frequency of terms related to Pashtun identity on social media platforms. This can include the use of specific hashtags, keywords or terms like "Pashtun," "terrorists" or "Pathan," "Traitors" "Slaves" "Victims" etc. and words that were allied with Pashtun culture, traditions, and social movements. The table below summarizes the frequency of terms related to Pashtun identity that are extracted from the web frequency indexer. The table below summarizes the frequency of results on some of the terminologies in association with the Pashtun identity extracted through the web frequency indexer. This

information confirms the preeminence of numerous key words, hashtags, and terms generally associated with Pashtun culture, identity, and social issues on social media.

Format: Text

Ratio: 0.2905

Sort: descending

RANK	FREQ	COVERAGE		WORD
		INDIVIDUAL	**COMMULATIVE**	
1.	283	6.96%	6.96%	PASHTUNS
2.	38	0.93%	34.70%	PAKISTAN
3.	37	0.91%	35.61%	PUNJABIS
4.	37	0.91%	36.52%	STATE
5.	24	0.59%	39.07%	KILLING
6.	23	0.57%	40.23%	ETHNIC
7.	18	0.44%	43.26%	ARMY
8.	16	0.39%	43.65%	ETHNICITY
9.	14	0.34%	45.16%	HATE
10.	13	0.32%	46.16%	BALOCHS
11	12	0.30%	48.36%	BALUCHIS
12.	12	0.30%	48.96%	KPK
13.	11	0.27%	50.07%	OPRESSION
14.	11	0.27%	50.34%	RIGHTS
15.	11	0.27%	50.61%	TERRORISTS
16.	9	0.22%	52.93%	RESOURCES
17.	9	0.22%	53.15%	TRAITORS
18.	9	0.22%	53.37%	VOICE
19.	8	0.20%	53.97%	PROTESTORS
20.	8	0.20%	54.77%	VOILENCE

21.	7	0.17%	55.31%	BLOOD
22.	7	0.17%	56.16%	JUSTICE
23.	7	0.17%	56.33%	OTHER
24.	7	0.17%	56.50%	PTM
25.	7	0.17%	56.67%	RACIST
26.	6	0.15%	58.08%	MARGINALIZED
27.	6	0.15%	58.23%	MEDIA
28.	5	0.12%	60.39%	DESCRIMINATION
29.	5	0.12%	60.51%	DOLLARS
30.	5	0.12%	62.07%	SOLELY
31.	5	0.12%	62.43%	UNITY
32.	5	0.12%	62.79%	VICTIM
33.	4	0.10%	63.25%	ABDUCTION
34.	4	0.10%	63.35%	ATTACK
35.	4	0.10%	63.75%	BRUTALITY
36.	4	0.10%	63.95%	CONFLICTS
37.	4	0.10%	64.05%	CRIME
38.	4	0.10%	64.65%	FREEDOM
39.	4	0.10%	66.15%	RACE
40.	4	0.10%	66.25%	REVENGE
41.	3	0.07%	68.04%	DESTROYED
42.	3	0.07%	68.60%	GENOCIDE
43.	3	0.07%	68.95%	HOPELESS
44.	3	0.07%	69.02%	IDIOT
45.	3	0.07%	69.44%	INFERIOR
46.	3	0.07%	71.12%	SECURITY
47.	3	0.07%	71.19%	SERVANTS
48.	3	0.07%	71.47%	STARVATION
49.	3	0.07%	71.54%	SUFFERING
50.	2	0.05%	73.19%	ATROCITIES

51.	2	0.05%	75.19%	DOGS
52.	2	0.05%	75.69%	EXTREMISTS
53.	2	0.05%	75.79%	FEAR
54.	2	0.05%	76.54%	IMPRISONED
55.	2	0.05%	76.59%	INDEPENDENCE
56.	2	0.05%	76.64%	INJURED
57.	2	0.05%	76.69%	INJUSTICE
58.	2	0.05%	78.29%	OPRESSED
59.	2	0.05%	79.29%	RESENTMENT
60.	2	0.05%	80.24%	SUFFER
61.	2	0.05%	80.74%	TYRANNY
62.	2	0.05%	80.79%	UNITED
63.	2	0.05%	80.84%	UNREST
64.	2	0.05%	80.89%	VOICELESS
65.	1	0.02%	81.76%	ANIMALISTIC
66.	1	0.02%	81.78%	ANIMALS
67.	1	0.02%	82.04%	AWARNESS
68.	1	0.02%	82.48%	BETRAYING
69.	1	0.02%	82.56%	BLAMING
70.	1	0.02%	82.86%	BULLETS
71.	1	0.02%	82.88%	BULLSHIT
72.	1	0.02%	82.90%	BURDEN
73.	1	0.02%	82.92%	BURNED
74.	1	0.02%	82.94%	BURNING
75.	1	0.02%	83.26%	CHAOS
76.	1	0.02%	84.60%	DEPRIVATION
77.	1	0.02%	84.62%	DEPRIVED
78.	1	0.02%	84.64%	DESCRIMINATON
79.	1	0.02%	84.66%	DESERVE
80.	1	0.02%	84.68%	DESTABILIZING

81.	1	0.02%	84.74%	DETENTION
82.	1	0.02%	84.76%	DEVELOP
83.	1	0.02%	84.96%	DISAPPEARANCES
84.	1	0.02%	85.96%	EXPLOIT
85.	1	0.02%	87.20%	HARRASMENT
86.	1	0.02%	87.76%	HUMILIATION
87.	1	0.02%	94.62%	SUSPENSION
89.	1	0.02%	94.64%	SYMPATHIZERS

Table: 2 Frequency of words

Above mention is the list of most frequent and selectable words from the selected data set of X content. By tracking the frequency of these keywords, indexer shows the trends and patterns of how Pashtuns are discussed on social media platforms. These words are mostly commonly used while discussing Pashtuns on X-Platform. The results helps in identifying the key themes of the content related to Pashtuns on social media platform. It also indicates a significant increase in discussions about "grievances", "Stigmatization" and "discrimination" following the recent political and social crisis in the country The sentiment analysis of content related to Pashtun identity shows a predominantly negative tone, which indicates the widespread feelings of frustration and anger within the community.

11.Visual Representation of key terms
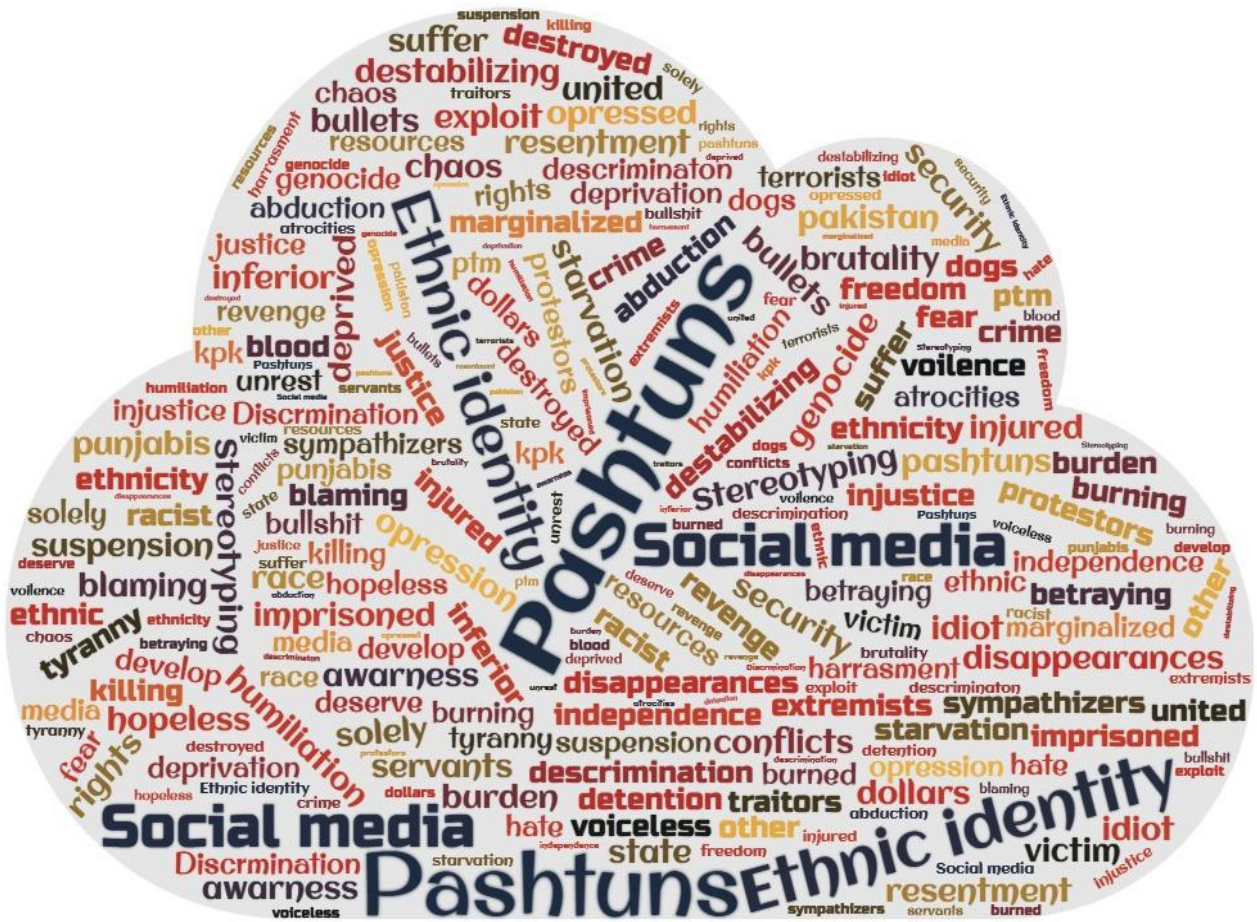
Figure 3: Word cloud for key terms extracted from the data set

The word cloud also known as tag cloud, is the visual representation of the most frequent and important key terms used in the collected data set of social media content. The size of each word in the cloud is proportional to its frequency and usage in the data set. In the first step of word cloud creation, the data was processed. This means that all the data is split into tokens or individual texts.

All commas, conjunctions, prepositions, and auxiliary words were deleted to proceed with a clean document. In the next step, the frequency of each step was set in the word cluster cloud. This frequency determines the importance and use of every word in the collected dataset. The word cloud is then generated based on frequency counts. Many words like Pashtuns, social media, ethnic identity, etc. appear more frequently in the dataset. They are displayed in a greater font than other words, making them more visible in the cloud. The least frequent words are smaller in size or some of them are not included in the cloud at all if there is a threshold for inclusion. The word cloud provides a quick, at-a-glance outlook of the most prominent key terms in the collected dataset. By summing up, this cloud is useful for providing assistance and identifying major themes, or concepts that are central to the social media influence on Ethnic identity dynamics.

Chapter 05

Discussion and Findings

Question 1: **What are the most prevalent themes in digital content regarding Pashtun's identity in terrorism affected areas of Pakistan and what are its broader implications for national integration and cohesion?**

Major Themes

By analysing the frequency of content from the dataset of 200 posts, three major themes have been identified. These themes were identified on the basis of collective ideas and posts shared by the individuals. According to analysis, the most prevalent themes in the X space are Stigma, Grievances, and Scapegoating. The themes and their sub categories have been explained in detail in the following text;

1. Stigmatization of Pashtuns

The first theme identified from the content analysis of dataset is labelled as stigma. If we talk about discrimination then it is a worldwide matter that is based on the tangible and intangible characteristics of people's division into different classes on which some people become superior and some become inferior. Social media platforms have the potential to challenge and perpetuate the stigmatization of ethnic identities. Ervin Goffman wrote a famous book titled "Stigma", and the subtitle is "Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity". In his book, he wrote about the spoiled identity. His aim was to show through case studies and interviews, that how people achieve their social identities when they get disqualified from social acceptance. The word stigma is rooted in ancient Greek, which means bodily signs or marks on someone's body for example wounds, scars, etc. When we think about the stigma now, it is more like a metaphorical term that means a mark on someone's identity. The major components for defining the term stigma includes; labelling, stereotyping, separation, degrading, and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001). Ervin Goffman has categorized stigma into three forms which includes;

1)The experience of mental illness faced by an individual.

2)A physical form of deformity or an undesired difference.

3) An association with a particular group, race, religion, or ethnicity (Goff man 1990).

Goff man's concept of enacted stigma is highly relevant to the Pashtun's experience of social media interactions. They belong to a specific ethnic group that has been stigmatized by others on the bases of its characteristics. They are facing discrimination through derogatory language, exclusionary rhetoric, and negative stereotypes on the basis of their ethnicity. These discriminatory acts are further contributing to the stigmatization of Pashtuns' culture and ethnicity by making them feel marginalized and less than normal. The Goff man perspective towards those who are stigmatized is that they are anxious about entering into mixed social situations. They become defensive in their posts, and try to find others that share their stigma. In case of Pashtuns they are doing the same, by creating groups and uniting with the people having same ideology. They defend themselves against the outside definition create by other. They have also created social movements and developed sub-culture.
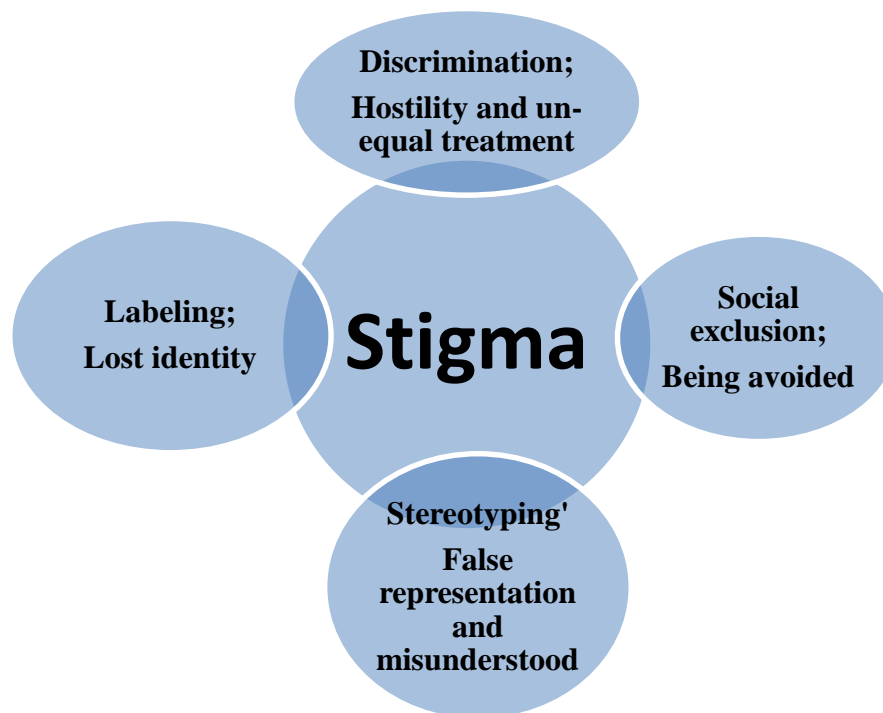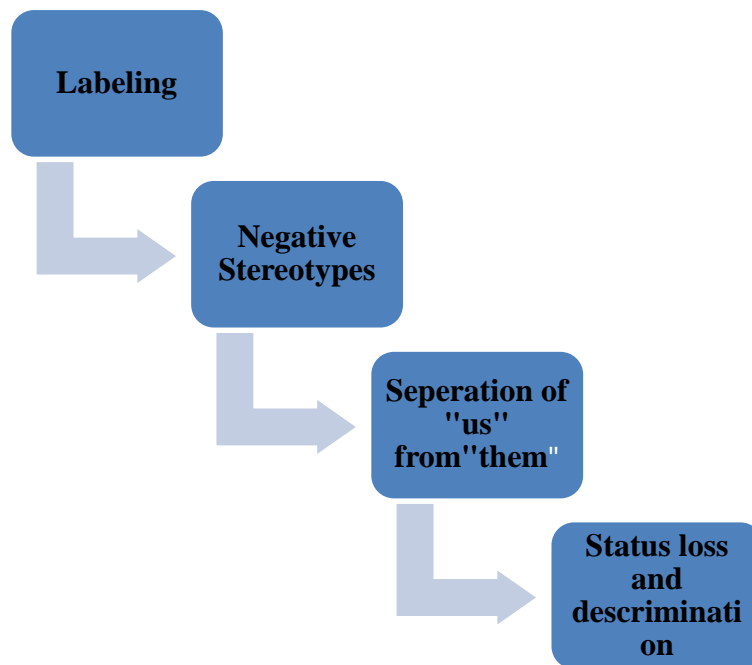
Figure 4: Visual representation of stigma domains.

1.1.Ethnic disgrace

Ethnic disgrace is a term used to define the collective dishonour experienced by ethnic groups based on negative perceptions imposed by others. It is inter-linked with stigmatization. People are divided into different categories in which some are considered as superior and others as inferior. According to Link and Phelan (2001) components of stigma are as follows:

```
Labeling
    ↓
    Negative
    Stereotypes
        ↓
        Seperation of
        "us"
        from"them"
            ↓
            Status loss
            and
            descriminati
            on
```

For the Pashtun people, social media platform like X (formerly known as twitter) exacerbate ethnic disgrace by providing individual with an opportunity for exposure to discriminatory and stigmatizing narratives. Tweets and comments that mock Pashtun's culture and practices by calling them backward, Terrorists, Traitors, illiterate, and humourless people, often contribute to the collective sense of shame among the Pashtun community. This ethnic disgrace and dehumanizing tactics erode the sense of ethnic pride, rather it promotes the negative stereotypes. Continuous exposure to this kind of stigma is causing Pashtuns to be ashamed of their ethnicity and making them have an inferiority complex. This negative self-perception is a direct image of constructed realities propagated through social media interactions. This is affecting their self-esteem and diminishing the sense of collective unity and harmony. This theme is prevalent in almost 35% of the collected dataset.

2. Grievances of Pashtuns

The second theme identified from the collected dataset of tweets is labelled as Grievances. According to Cambridge's definition of grievances, it is a complaint or strong feeling of being marginalized or being treated unfairly by others on the basis of their ethnicity, culture, race or religion. Social media platforms including X serve as virtual spaces where individuals can share their grievances including their experiences of marginalization and inequalities. Relative deprivation theory can provide the best explanation of this theme. Relative deprivation explained by Townsend (1987, p. 125) as

"A state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage, relative to the local community or the wider society or nation to which an individual, family or group belongs".

This definition is most commonly used in social sciences to identify and measure the forms of inequality in human societies on the basis of physical and societal conditions (Fu, Exeter, and Anderson 2015). The main focus of this theory is on defining the causes of poverty. In most of the cases it is observed that poverty has structural causes rather than individual's bad choices and behaviours. The most famous paragraph about poverty is written by Peter Townsend. According to his concept of relative deprivation poverty can be measured by:

"Objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation….. The term is understood objectively rather than subjectively. Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the society to which they belong" (1979, p 31)

From these words regarding poverty one can analyze that poverty is basically a sociological phenomenon which can be measured with respect to the society in which a person is living. There are certain universal needs which are required in every society irrespective of their size, population and location, e.g, food, clothing, shelter, health facilities, children education, job opportunities, active social and political participation. The exact way of these needs might vary in different societies but the core idea of universal needs remains the same in every society. The poverty in any society can leads towards the deprivation. Townsend idea of poverty is not only associated

with unequal distribution of resources in the society but institutions also play an important role in structuring the power and privileges. According to his word:

"The institutions which create or disadvantage the poor at the same time as they create or advantage the rich are institutions which have to be reconstructed"(1988:59). According to the analysis of selected data set from X platform, poverty is a significant source of grievances among the Pashtun community. Pashtuns specifically residing in FATA and North Waziristan are living below the poverty line. They have expressed in their posts that they are facing poverty and social issues because of negligence and unfair policies of the state. The economic issues experienced by the Pashtun community e.g., lack of access to education, healthcare facilities, absences of good educational institutions, bad infrastructure, and less employment opportunities often lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among them.

2.1.Relative deprivation Theory

Samuel Stouffer was the first scholar who coined the term relative deprivation. At a later stage, many scholars have incorporated this term into larger models of social comparison and equity theory. According to the definition, relative deprivation is an upward comparison, it happens when an individual perceives that he or his group is at a disadvantageous position as compared to the other groups. However, the perceived disadvantage must be regarded as unfair. The person who made the comparison thinks that he or his group deserves better, and this results in offensive resentment (Smith, Pettigrew, and Huo 2019). Pashtuns especially residing in FATA and North Waziristan often perceive their socio-economic status as inferior when compared to other ethnic groups within their region. This perception is fueled by social media interactions, where comparisons are readily made and shared. When Pashtuns specifically those who are residing in FATA and North Waziristan are exposed to content that highlights the relative advantages of other ethnic groups on social media platforms, might experience relative deprivation. This exposure to disadvantages can come in various forms, it includes tweets showcasing economic prosperity, political stability, or social privileges enjoyed by others but not by the Pashtuns. Many Pashtun social media users have tweeted that they are facing poverty and deprivation because of unjust and unfair policies of the state institutions. Their households are demolished and they have lack of economic, health, and educational facilities. Their living conditions are below average. Pashtun users have frequently encountered the posts that highlight the success and prosperity of other

ethnic groups. It has also heightened the sense of social injustice and increased the deviance among Pashtuns such as increased aggression and anti-social behaviors. According to the analysis of the collected dataset, Pashtuns living in FATA and North Waziristan are being marginalized and targeted by both extremist groups and security forces, leading to a never-ending cycle of violence. They have mentioned that government is looting their resources without their consent and now they are being deprived of basic necessities of life.

2.2.Terror, Frustration, and Grievances

The sentiment analysis of X content reveals a complex emotional landscape dominated by negative sentiments such as anger, terror, frustration, and despair. These sentiments collectively reinforce the relative deprivation narrative, reflecting that there is terror and anger among users and it require assistance. The prevalence of negative tone in the content is the a reflection of natural emotional reaction of people to the suffering their fellow citizens having same ethnicity. The concern is the dominant sentiment evident in the content capturing the progression of inter-ethnic warfare. These sentiments shows a growing anger and awareness of negative stereotyping of ethnic groups in Pakistan specially Pashtuns. Frustration, another commonly observed sentiment, is manifested in dissatisfaction and critique of social media representation of Pashtuns. Similarly grief and despair emerge from the posts showing the profound loss of lives of Pashtuns, extra judicial killings, and enforced disappearances. This latter can be seen in the forms of personal stories of people about experiencing discrimination and marginalization on the basis of their ethnicity on social media platforms.

3. Scapegoating to deflect from the real cause of societal issues

The third theme that has been identified from the collected data set is labelled as scapegoating. According to the Cambridge definition, scapegoating is the act of blaming an individual or group for something bad that is done by someone else. The term scapegoat was initially used by René Girard (Girard, 1982), who derived this term from the work of Burke (1940) The mechanism of scapegoating is often used by people or groups in order to shift responsibility to the members of other groups and to save themselves from condemnation and to shift blame (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010). According to the literature scapegoating usually emerges from anger, frustration, unfulfilled needs, guilt evasion, and an inferiority complex, which is directed at a scapegoat to

deflect the real cause of the issue. Pashtuns residing in FATA often face socio-economic challenges and marginalization because of poor management and planning of the state. Their frustrations and sense of marginalization provide a landscape for scapegoating on social media platforms. For example, fewer economic opportunities, lack of employment and educational options, lack of political representation, etc. making Pashtuns blame other ethnic groups for their plight. Another aspect of scapegoating is that many individuals from other ethnic groups are blaming Pashtuns for societal issues including terrorism and increasing drug usage in the country. Pashtuns become scapegoats for individuals who avoid accepting and dealing with their shortcomings and causes of societal issues.

Figure 5: Non-Pashtun user blaming Pashtuns for exploitation and distribution of Pakistan.

3.1. Attribution Theory

Attribution theory provides a framework to understand how individuals explain why certain events happen in their environment (Heider 1958). The main focus of attribution theory is to explain the following things:

1) How ordinary people explain the causes of events and justify their behaviour.

2) The implications of these attributions on their future behaviour with other individuals (Schmitt 2015).

For understanding the Pashtun situation on social media platforms, this theoretical framework is highly relevant. According to data analysis , Pashtuns often face discrimination and derogatory

language on X platform. From the data set of 200 posts, in more than 30 posts individuals from different ethnic groups have attributed the causes of societal problems (e.g., terrorism, drug smuggling, security issues, etc.) to the actions of Pashtuns.

In many posts, Pashtun users have mentioned that a large number of operations in the name of eliminating terrorism have destroyed and marginalized the Pashtun land. This discrimination and marginalization based on false claims is leading to scapegoating of Pashtuns. When users frequently encounter negative tweets that attribute social issues and negative events to Pashtuns, it can solidify the already existing prejudices and negative stereotyping about Pashtun's ethnic identity. These online negative attributions are leading to offline discriminatory behaviours. There is much evidence in the collected data set that the X users who blame Pashtuns for terrorist activities and drug smuggling around the country are found to be engaged in hate speech, negative stereotyping, cyber bullying, or support the policies and actions that marginalize Pashtun communities. This theme is prevalent in almost 30% of the analysed dataset.

Question 2: How do misinformation and hate speech on social media, particularly X platform play crucial role in exacerbating ethnic tensions and conflicts involving Pashtuns?

Through social media platforms misinformation and disinformation can be spread quickly in conflict zones. To degrade the Pashtun people, Social media users have dispersed disinformation on social media in which they accused members of the Pashtun Protection Movement of colluding with Indian and Afghan intelligence services and exploiting Pakistan.

1. Hate against Pashtuns from other ethnicities

Under this category, the main focus is on the nature of hate speech directed towards Pashtuns from the members of other ethnic groups based on their ethnicity. By analysing a dataset of tweets related to this theme, the researcher has identified the accusations formed against Pashtuns and their broader implications for ethnic relations and social cohesion. The misconception and false portrayal of Pashtun culture and policies are widespread practices in the Twitter stream. Many non-Pashtun users are accusing Pashtuns of oppressive behaviours, such as banning girl's education, oppressing minorities, and forcefully marrying women of minority ethnic groups. Some of the posts on Twitter indicated Pashtuns as liars and asked them not to play the victim cards. If we talk about the frequency of this theme, it is one of the prevalent themes, appearing in approximately 40% of the analysed tweets. These accusations without any context or evidence reflect the deep-rooted negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the Pashtun culture and practices. The emotional tone of such tweets is highly negative and often express with anger.

1.1. Denial of Victimhood

This category includes posts from X platform mainly focused on undermining the grievances and claims of oppression and violence by state authorities towards Pashtuns. The non-Pashtun users accuse Pashtuns of exaggerating their victimhood and making false claims about experiencing oppression and violence. Many users mentioned in their tweets that Pashtun are not real victims but are exploiting victimhood status. They need to take responsibility for their terrorist actions instead of playing victim cards. The narrative of Pashtuns being oppressed by government is encountered by the assertion that they are getting unnecessary attention and resources. According to tweet by non-Pashtun user, "Pashtuns are the most racist identity in the country, but won't stop crying to keep their premium victim ethnicity status intact". Assertions including "Pashtuns are

just trying to keep their premium victim ethnicity status intact" challenge their legitimate grievances and demands. This theme is identified in 25% of the selected tweets. . The emotional tone for such tweets is accusatory, often undermining the legitimacy of Pashtun grievances and victimhood.

1.2.Spread of misinformation and disinformation due to absence of fact-checking

Misinformation is defined as false information spread regardless of intent to deceive, whereas disinformation is deliberately misleading or biased information for deceiving someone. Disinformation is based on manipulated facts and narratives for propaganda. The limited fact-checking abilities of social media allow posts with misinformation and false accusations against different ethnic identities to go viral. Deliberately misleading or biased information can affect public perception and behaviour. For example, in many posts, non-Pashtun users labelled Pashtuns as destructive to country. They asked for Pashtun's exclusion from the Punjabi institution. Social media platforms like X struggle to monitor the posts in native languages so the posts in the Pashtu language sometimes remain unlocked causing conflicts among the members of different ethnic groups. Many non-Pashtun users have blamed Pashtuns for smuggling drugs without any fact checking. These false accusations are negatively impacting the perception of Pashtun identity among the diverse users.

2. Major Concerns about inter-ethnic warfare on social media Platform

This category includes all tweets from the dataset that express concerns about on-going ethnic warfare in Pakistan. Many tweets attribute blame to Pashtuns for exacerbating tensions and pushing Pakistan towards ethnic conflicts. They underscore the perceived threat posed by Pashtuns to national security and social harmony. Some users have shown their concerns about inter-ethnic warfare. According to reports, ethnic conflicts are increasingly becoming a major threat to Pakistan's national security and peace. People are so obsessed with racism against each other. Pashtuns hate Punjabis and similarly, Punjabis hate Pashtuns for no reason. The emotional tone for this kind of tweets is alarmist and almost 10% tweets from the selected data set fall in this category.

2.1.Anonymity and reduced accountability of Users

Many users were hiding behind the anonyms profiles and engaging in hate speeches and racism against the other ethnicities. They found engaging in real harassment and online hate speeches without facing the real world consequences. According to social constructivism theory, reality is not objectively given rather it is created through social interactions. The anonymous users have shared their extreme views and opinions against different ethnic groups in their Twitter posts. This act fosters the environment for building negative narratives about different ethnic groups and can further create the sense of otherness while constructing a hostile social reality. Nancy J. Hafkin in his article explained that how the internet has been utilized by the Ethiopian diaspora as a tool for reflecting upon identity and building communities (Hafkin 2011). This article delves into how information and communication technology influence the process of socialization. Similarly, Pashtun's expression of ethnic identity on twitter have significant implications on how their identity is perceived by others, potentially reinforcing or challenging existing narratives about their ethnicity.

Question 3: In what ways do Pashtun individuals utilizes social media, particularly X platform to express their collective grievances and issues?

In order to analyse the issues and problems faced by members of Pashtuns ethnicity, various hash tags, posts, images, videos, and texts shared by Pashtuns and non-Pashtun users on the Twitter platform were examined. These problems are multifaceted including the cultural, social, and political aspects. The main purpose of this analysis is to uncover the recurring content and narratives used by Pashtun and non-Pashtuns members on X to highlight the issues of injustice, inequality, oppression, extra judicial killing, lack of social services, political marginalization etc. . The most predominant problems that have been identified from the dataset are as follows;

1. **Poverty and lack of adequate economic opportunities**

Pashtuns are using X platform to share their collective narratives of marginalization and inequality. As a result of this collective narrative of economic marginalization, Pashtuns' perception of their financial situation and their mobilization for resources and rights are shaped. In this way, X platform serves as an umbrella for creating a common social reality of Pashtun's injustice and economic hardship and serves as an expression of individual grievances. Many Pashtuns have shared content about the poverty and less employment opportunities for Pashtuns residing in FATA based on their ethnicity. They have shown resentment through posts that the government is looting their resources but in return, they are not providing them adequate economic and job opportunities. They are given limited access to resources, and their infrastructures are underdeveloped and are always neglected by the central government. This ruthless behaviour of the government and deprivation of necessities of life would leave Pashtuns defenceless and weak.

2. **Discrimination**

According to the posts collected from X platform, Pashtuns were most commonly stereotyped as tribal, warlike, misogynous, humourless, traitors, illiterate, conservative, and backward people. The diversity in Pashtun's culture and values was not acknowledged by the users. Some people call Pashtuns natural allies of the Taliban and call them opportunistic people. A large number of ethnic Pashtuns have tweeted about experiencing discrimination from the members of other ethnic groups including the Sindhis, and Punjabis. From the collected data set it is evident that many non-Pashtun users (from different ethnicities) called Pashtuns uncivilized, uncultured, barbaric,

and uneducated people in their Social media posts. In 26 posts, the users mentioned that Pashtuns are destroying the country. Non-Pashtun Authors in their posts demanded that Pashtun students should be kicked out of Punjabi universities. These hostile posts toward Pashtuns reflect the broader societal frustration and marginalization of Pashtuns. This discrimination and frustration is major threat to national integrity of Pakistan.

3. Stereotyping and dehumanization

This category includes all those posts from X platform in which derogatory language and slangs are used to stereotype and dehumanize the Pashtuns. In these posts, Pashtuns are portrayed as violent, uncivilized, and devoid of values people. Pashtuns have also shown their frustration over the Punjabi's opinion of banning Pashtuns from their colleges and universities. According to them, Pashtuns go everywhere and destroy the country. The emotional tone of such tweets is Contemptuous and dehumanizing. This is specifically used to strip Pashtuns of their dignity and humanity. In the selected dataset of tweets many Pashtun users have shown their resentment regarding the Speech of Maryam Nawaz(current chief minister) of Punjab, in which she used the word terrorists for Pashtuns. Users said that Pashtuns, who liberated parts of Kashmir are now being targeted in a racist campaign by the traitors from PMLN. The tweets contain frequent use of terms that dehumanize Pashtuns culture and values, such as "traitors," "savages," and "terrorists." Pashtuns are portrayed as inherently violent and extremist, with references to animalistic behaviour and association with terrorism. Statements like "Rape and animalistic male behaviour is a part of Pashtun culture" are used to strip away their humanity and represent them as barbaric. According to the user's opinion shared through tweets, the other ethnic groups are discriminating against the Pashtu language against other languages. Students are warned that they will be fined if caught speaking Pashtu in schools. Users have also showed the concern that the ethnic hatred between the Pashtuns, Sindhis, Punjabis, and Muhajirs is now getting out of hands. According to Pashtun users, Punjabis considered themselves as a superior ethnicity and they have started their reign of terror and expansion. Approximately 20% of the tweets in selected data set falls in this category.

4. False representation in dramas and the film industry

Pashtun users have shown their concerns regarding the false portrayal of Pashtuns in Pakistani dramas and films. According to the analysed posts from X platform, Pakistani media made dramas to display misdeeds and immoral images of Pashtuns. In more than fifteen posts users have mentioned that the Pakistani drama industry is negatively impacting the essence of Pashtun culture and tradition. For instance, Pashtun characters are often depicted in a negative light, which does not accurately reflect the diversity of Pashtun's culture. Media frequently presents Pashtun in one-dimensional light. They are always presented as traitors, homosexuals, thieves, and inferior. The female Pashtun characters are often represented as submissive and subjected to patriarchal control. They fail to reflect the modernization and diversity of Pashtun culture and ethnicity. Pakistani media has also failed to cover the protests of Pashtun for freedom of movement, expression, and their basic rights. Moreover, some posts from the collected dataset suggested that an impetus toward greater Pashtun representation in the production of media is needed so that there can be more authenticity and variety of portrayal. Another precondition for the media is the thorough coverage of social and political issues concerning the Pashtun ethnic group—amplifying voices and bringing their voices into the realm of consideration.

5. Under Representation in main stream media

Many Pashtun users have criticized the Pakistani mainstream media for not providing enough coverage to the peaceful protests and demands of Pashtuns. One of the most prominent examples of this negligence is of Chaman protest. Despite knowing the significance of these peaceful protests, which highlight issues such as economic rights, and social justice, mainstream media in Pakistan provided minimal to no coverage. This lack of visibility in traditional media channels prevents the broader public from understanding and engaging with the grievances and struggles of the Pashtun community. So, in return to this blackout by mainstream media, Pashtun people are now increasingly moving towards the social media platforms including X platform to raise their voices against oppression and marginalization and to portray their image to world. According to users opinion Social media is more easily accessible and democratic as compared to the main stream media.

6. Human rights violation

There is much evidence that social media has facilitated the construction of many narratives in history. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States is also facilitated by social media platforms. It has played an important role in the construction of both supportive and oppositional narratives regarding this movement. Similarly, in the case of Pashtuns, they are using social media to raise their voices. This category encompasses all posts that highlight human rights violations, political marginalization, extra-judicial killing, enforced disappearances and many other problems faced by Pashtuns. A movement known as PTM (Pashtun Tahafuz Movement), has significant importance in highlighting the issues of Pashtuns. Many Pashtun users on X platform have expressed their love for PTM for highlighting the Issues of Pashtuns and raising awareness about how civilian population is getting affected by military operations. These issues have remained a significant point of contention in the regions of FATA and North Waziristan, where most of the Pashtuns reside. According to Pashtun users, the state of Pakistan is using the tool of enforced disappearances to silence the critical voices of Pashtuns in the name of national security. Pashtun and Bloch journalists are severely restricted from the freedom of expression. Many posts have mentioned the name of Noor Ullah Tareen (a well-known Pashtun activist) who was imprisoned in Karachi jail for several months for raising voice for Pashtuns. Some users have also argued that Bloch and Pashtun Youth disappeared from the campuses of Punjab University without any trace. In addition to the enforced disappearances, Users have also shared the reports of extra-judicial killings. Many Pashtuns have been killed and abducted in the past in the name of eliminating terrorism. In seven posts videos of opening fire on unarmed Pashtuns were shared by users. This act of killing Pashtuns is a grave crime against humanity. These videos depict a massacre where 13 individuals lost their lives as a result of this violence. These actions possessed a grave crime against humanity, disregarding human life and basic rights including the right to life. These acts of violence and killing must be condemned to uphold justice and protect the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their race or ethnicity. Some users have posted images and videos of their destroyed houses. According to them, drone Aircraft are targeting the houses of residents in Waziristan. Many people were killed and injured by these attacks. A Pashtun professor named Arman was killed by the forces in the daylight. Both Pakistan armed forces and extremist groups are targeting the Pashtuns, leading to a never-ending cycle of violence against Pashtuns. The state barely investigates the rampant abduction and killing of Baluchs and Pashtuns. A Pashtun user shared his thoughts in his tweet by saying that this nation is crying over Gaza, but no one is talking

about the killing of innocent Pashtuns. Users have demanded the government of Pakistan to look into the atrocities against the marginalized communities specifically Pashtuns and Baluchs.

Social Construction of Reality

"Digital aggression doesn't just linger online; it seeps into the real world."

Social constructivism theory holds the argument that knowledge and understanding are constructed through social interactions. Social media platforms, like X, serve as a virtual space where identities and relations between ethnic groups are shaped. These interactions become part of collective consciousness of how ethnic groups perceive each other. The use of Language also plays a significant role in shaping the collective and individual realities. The broader implications of dehumanizing language on twitter stream against Pashtuns can be analysed through the lens of social constructivism in order to understand that how these negative narratives are constructed, propagated, and internalized. This digital aggression doesn't just linger online; it seeps into the real world, fostering divisions and perpetuating stereotypes. It is severely impacting the ethnic relations and social cohesion in many ways. First, the consistent dissemination of hate speech and negative stereotypes regarding Pashtuns on in twitter posts reinforces the existing prejudices and biases, leading to heightened mistrust, animosity, and otherness between Pashtuns and other ethnic groups. This persistent portrayal of Pashtuns in a negative light can solidify ethnic boundaries and diminish opportunities for positive inter-ethnic interactions. Many historical and contemporary examples serve as stark reminders of the dangerous consequences of using dehumanizing language and negative stereotyping. For example, when we portray certain groups as inherently violent or inferior, it provides a dangerous justification for discriminatory actions and policies against them. In the worst cases, it can spark ethnic violence, leading to prolonged conflicts and unrest. Similarly, in the case of Pashtuns hate and negative stereotyping can lead to ethnic violence and unrest in the country.

Second, the divisive content on social media platforms often generates more engagement. As a result, users are more likely to be exposed to extreme views that confirm their biases because of social media algorithms. So, users are more likely to engage in divisive content and further polarization of ethnic groups. Third, hate speech and negativity never impact the efforts for social cohesion and national integrity. Social cohesion is basically a socially constructed phenomenon

which relies on the shared norms, values and ideas. Trust and positive relations among the members of diverse ethnic groups are a basic foundation for building a cohesive and peaceful society. However, hate speech undermines this trust by continually emphasizing and amplifying the differences between groups. It disrupts the process of fabricating shared values and leads to the fragmentation of society along ethnic lines. This creates obstacles for communities in uniting and working together towards common social, economic, or political objectives. Such a divided society is less resilient to external threats and less capable of collective actions towards national interests. Fourth, every individual on social platforms is directly or indirectly influenced by hate speech and negative stereotypes. The effectiveness of government policies aimed at integration and equality hinges on addressing the influence of hate speech and negative stereotypes on social cohesion. Without mitigating these factors, efforts to create inclusive policies and their effective implementation will face significant challenges. And in the last, all these factors have psychological impacts on the members of different ethnic groups specially Pashtuns. The factors mentioned above can lead to feelings of exclusion and marginalization among Pashtuns. This will make them believe that they are not equal members of society or equal citizens of this country. Because Pashtuns are consistently portrayed negatively, it can make them feel hopeless and make them think that their circumstances will never change. Because of this, Pashtuns may experience a decrease in their belief of self-worth and a sense of powerlessness, which may hinder their capacity to interact with society.

12. Conclusion

The relationship between social media and ethnic identity is a complex phenomenon. In today's digitalized world it is a critical yet under-explored research area. In the past, more attention was given to the positive implications of social media but it is like a double-edged sword. It also has negative impacts on the ethnic identity dynamic. It has the potential to reinforce or eliminate the ethnic difference based on user-generated content. The impact of social media on ethnic identity dynamics among Pashtuns especially living in the terror-afflicted areas of Pakistan is deep and multi-dimensional. With the incorporation of digital platforms into everyday life, their effects on the shaping of Pashtun identity positive and negative alike-must be properly assessed and intervened in. The analysis chapter has highlighted the opportunities and challenges faced by the members of the Pashtun community in this digital era. The members of the Pashtun community are utilizing digital platforms to reclaim their narrative, counter negative stereotypes, and engage in online discussions that can shape their ethnic identity in the contemporary digital landscape. They have also expressed their concerns through social media platform and the government should use this opportunity and makes wise policies for their fair demands. Social media, on one hand, acts as a great agent in strengthening cultural ties among the Pashtuns. It has helped people express their culture and celebrate their heritage by sharing traditional music, literature, and historical narrations as tools to spread and uphold Pashtun culture. Through social media, people can get in touch and share similar cultural backgrounds irrespective of geographical location, hence reinforcing community bonds and a sense of collectivity; it reinforces the cultural values and practices digitally, adding resiliency to the Pashtun identity against external pressures and threats. It has provided people an online space for raising voices against collective issues and grievances. It has also created virtual communities, providing an outlet for the expression of identity and experiences of the Pashtuns, thereby encouraging a sense of solidarity and mutual support. These networks online facilitate the exchange of ideas and resources that can be used toward taking care of each other in the event of crisis and in starting various other initiatives. This kind of digital solidarity strengthens social cohesion and opens up space for collective action and other advocacy related to issues affecting the community.

The impact of social media is, however, not all positive. Very media that facilitate the cultural expression can also be misused to exaggerate previously existing ethnic and sectarian tensions. This can mislead through misinformation, hate speech, or inflammatory content, biased opinion, stereotyping, thus fanning conflicts between different groups. In regions affected by terrorism with

pronounced ethnic divisions, social media often turns into a battleground for rival narratives and antagonistic exchanges. It is in this way that biased or inaccurate information spreads quickly to feed distrust and hostility and acts counter to reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. The diffusion of misinformation and provocation materials via social media poses a great threat to community cohesion. Altered perceptions from false narratives or sensationalized descriptions may converge with misguided actions and raise tensions.

13. Counter Measures

The counter measures for promoting an inclusive virtual space on social media platform including, strong measures against misinformation, and to promote media literacy among the People, would be required to meet the challenges of digitalized world. Some of the most important steps taken toward reducing negativity from the effect of misinformation include encouraging critical engagement with digital material and building a fact-checking culture.

Social media, however, potentially holds the key to effecting dialogue and cooperation among the Pashtun. Social media, a platform of free communication and sharing of ideas, can be harnessed to ensure that constructive discussions related to identity, conflict resolution, and community development take place. Initiatives of this nature make use of social media toward positive engagement, such as intergroup dialogues and collaborative projects that close gaps in understanding. Promotion of the good use of social media would be in line with supporting initiatives that bring about the preservation of culture, constructive dialogue, and the resolution of conflicts. This will encourage the development of content projecting shared values and experiences, thus countering the divisive agenda and narratives with a called identity. It will also involve investment in digital literacy and critical thinking, which places the individual at a better level to navigate through the complexities of social media and engage with content in an informed and more discerning way. Thus, the dual nature of the impact of social media on the Pashtun ethnic identity underlines that it requires a holistic approach, one in which intervention of policy and community-driven efforts are needed. To this end, strategies for responsible social media use are called for, especially on the part of policymakers and community leaders who have to fund digital literacy programs and develop mechanisms to monitor and eliminate any harmful content. This will require cooperation from government departments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities to individually develop an effective response to the challenges that come with

social media. Community-cantered solutions hold the key to actualizing the potential benefits of social media and mitigating its risks. Local, grassroots organizations or leaders can lead on the front line to promote digital literacy through responsible social media use and build community activities online. These initiatives go directly into the communities and deal with their specific needs and concerns, creating a more resilient and cohesive Pashtun community in the digital age.

Further research and discussion must ensue in the future to gain a better understanding of how social media and Pashtun ethnic identity continue to evolve. Probably, with continued changes in digital platforms and technologies, their impact on ethnic identity will change accordingly. Continuing to monitor these changes and adjust strategies based on that will be important in ensuring that social media continues to act as a positive force in cultural preservation, community cohesion, and conflict resolution. In sum, though social media is home to raising significant opportunities for strengthening Pashtun ethnic identity and community solidarity, specific dangers are involved in this that must be addressed at the opportune time. Only if one is responsive to opportunities for positive engagement and takes decisive action to reduce associated risks of misinformation and divisive content will be the key to treading troubled waters of identity in the digital age. To foster inclusive online communication, we must promote the platforms that facilitate positive inter-ethnic dialogues. However, the moderation of these platforms is important for ensuring positive and constructive conversation. Digital literacy can play an important role in navigating hate speech, biased narratives, and misleading information regarding any matter. It can help eliminate ethnic tension and build a cohesive and peaceful society.

14. Limitations of Study

This study is conducted by selecting data from only one social media platform i.e., X platform. This research offers valuable insights for understanding the social media impacts on national cohesion and integrity, but it is essential to acknowledge that several limitations can also influence the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. Some of the major limitations that can influence the generalizability and validity of the research are as follows;

14.1.   Representation issues

The results are based on the data collected from only one social media platform, which might not be representative of the entire Pashtun population. Users active on these platforms may have

diverse characteristics from the other Pashtuns, potentially introducing sampling bias. The social media users might be younger, and cannot reflect the experiences of old members of community. Social media platforms employ algorithms that can influence the visibility of content. Biases in these algorithms could impact the representation of Pashtun perspectives, affecting the study's outcomes.

14.2.   Reliability and Validity of data

The study is based on the content analysis of online discourse which may lack the depth of understanding that could be gained through direct interviews or ethnographic research. Social media interactions might not fully convey the cultural and historical context of Pashtun identity. People can manipulate the information for to their own benefits, making it challenging to verify the validity and reliability of the analysed data.

14.3.   Language Barrier

This study is based on the content analysis of posts regarding the Pashtun's ethnicity. Many Pashtun users have posted in Pashtu language, so it was a difficult task difficult to translate and understand such posts. This was a major hurdle in the data collection and analysis.

14.4.   Platform dynamics

Each social media platform has different dynamics and limitations. This study is only based on the data collected from X platform of social media. So, it might not capture the unique features and challenges that are associated with each platform and cannot be generalized on other social media platforms, which have impacts on the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

14.5.   Contextual restrictions

The findings of the study are specific to the online context only and cannot be generalized to the offline experiences of Pashtun communities. The social media interactions cover only one aspect ethnic identity and cannot cover the full spectrum of experiences of Pashtuns ethnicity. So, the study's applicability to the broader Pashtun population might be limited.

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