

## Social Media and Mobilization of Pashtun Community in Pakistan: A Case Study of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement

Muhammad Shahid\* & Bakht Zaman\*\*

### Abstract

*This is very much difficult to deny the increasing role of technology in expressing one's views, opinions and ideological convictions. Social media has the power to affect the political, economic and social choices of the people. The objective of this study is to assess the impact of social media in the mobilization of Pashtun community. In this connection, we study the role of social media in the formation of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). We collect primary data through random sampling. The findings of our study indicate that social media proved highly instrumental in the mobilization of people to attend Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). We also find that combination of factors including history of deprivation, the discriminatory behavior of the state institutions, humiliation at check posts and demands for the recovery of missing persons lead to the formation of PTM. We conclude the presence of these other factors as necessary but not the sufficient condition for the mobilization of people. Social media provide the sufficient condition to motivate and activate the masses to attend these gatherings.*

**Keywords:** Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), Social Media, Mobilization, Case Study.

### Introduction

One of the fundamental human rights is to have access to information. This is very much difficult to imagine the freedom without the freedom of expression and equally difficult is to deny the increasing role of technology in expressing one's views, opinions and ideological convictions. The increased influence of social media is visible in the exponential growth of social media and its impact on our lives. The development of social media and the frequent use of social media sites like face book, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram and so many others influence the

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political, economic and social choices as well as cultural values and norms. Social media allows people to get latest information and get updated. The upward trend of using social media is also caused by the entertainment and other related videos. The popularity of social media among people, particularly youth gains more approval and acceptance in the contemporary age of information.

We know that a new power has been emerged and that is the undeniable power of social media. The nature of power of the social media has the potential to mobilize masses protesting against state oppression. The availability of instantaneous information allows the people to get together and sparked the agitation as we have witnessed in Arab Spring and uprising in many other countries. Social media allows the dissents to raise their voices and convey their deprivation and miseries not only to the national leadership but to the global powers as well. The influence of social media is increasing and transforming the lives of the citizens globally. The presence of undeniable power of social media has brought unthinkable changes in the lives of the people. The number of people who are using social media is increasing globally and there is a common perception that society and social media are indivisible now. The use of social media has increased public awareness and liberates the people by giving voice to the voiceless. But the extensive use of social media and the absence of regulatory mechanism have negatively affected the significant role of gatekeepers in newsrooms. People promote their own ideological convictions without any respects for those who dissent which increases polarization and fragmentation in the society. This deep division in the society created by the use of social media is not good for the societal cohesion and communal life. Another challenge is the elimination of distinction between true and false despite the democratization of news. In this age of technology, any policy inaction on the part of government or miscalculating the power of social media, a single tweet or Facebook share could create extremely anarchic and chaotic situation.

This study investigates the influence of social media on the mobilization of people for social movements. There are numerous factors that ignite people and can create agitation against governments and state's institutions. For instance, social movements and mobilization of people at mass level may be caused by state oppression, economic deprivation and political alienation, and marginalization of people by extractive and exploitative institutions. Buechler (2000) reveal that

deprivation of the people and inequality in the society are the necessary conditions but not the sufficient conditions for mobilization of people and mass movement. The emergence of social media and the incorporation of this mean of media as an influencing factor proved instrumental in altering people's behavior. Pakistan has majority of youth population and have access to the cheap and easily available internet technology. The reform-minded and educated youth are now quickly turns to social media for spreading the message and dissemination of information both nationally and internationally. The strategy of the group to use social media proved very effective. This was visible from the exponential growth in number of people on daily basis. A virtuous cycle was generated by the dissemination of videos of Dharna. This was further stimulated by the speeches of many important personalities and big guns from the parliament and civil society. The galvanizing visuals on social media motivate people from all walks of life to participate in Dharna. The instant circulation and propagation of electrifying videos forced people from all parts of the country including Zhob Balochistan. In this research study, we have conducted survey to assess the impact of social media on Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). Our findings reveal that majority of the participants in these gatherings were influenced by social media particularly Facebook, You Tube and Twitter.

### **Literature Review**

Extensive literature is available on the impact of social media on shaping social movements. Stimulating the debate on the role of social media, Lim (2012) investigated the impact of social media and social movement's finds that the waves of protest in the Arab world and its gradual spread to other countries shift the focus from conventional media to social media. The use of social media is relatively new concept in the current decade but the exponential growth has been experienced in the use of social media causing social movements. The literature reveals that social media plays very important role as organization in the mobilization of people in different movements (Leenders&Heydemann 2012). The available literature is highly skewed and mainly focused on the role of social media in the Arab Spring but ignores the process of mobilization. Huntington (1968) findings give interesting insights stating that institutions of the state are not responsive to the changing economic and social condition of the people that ultimately cause frustration and resentment among the people. This will lead to a kind of institutional set up that is more responsive to the people's need. Gurr

(1968) explained the marginalization of the people experienced the inability of the state to meet their economic, social and political demands. The disadvantageous position of the people caused by past deprivations forces them to organize and mobilize even when institutions of the state are quite responsive. Gurr (1970) also find that the presence of inequality in the country also allow people to start movement against the state. The well-known theory of deprivation and modernization describe that frustration and desperation caused by grievances spur social mobilization. Oleinik (2012) provides some interesting insights and finds that relative deprivation and modernization theory explain the motives for social mobilization as a function of individuals' grievances and anger. The exclusionist policies of the state provide the foundation for social movement and the inability of the state institutions further deteriorate the conditions. Buechler (2000) explains that the rational thoughts particularly the growing interests of the more educated and politically aware people forces people to work for collective cause. This class of people is willing to provide resources, time expertise and other facilitating role. The effectiveness and successful formation of such movements significantly depend on the availability of these resources. Buechler (1993) revealed that availability of resources is not enough to make a movement successful but the channelization of such resources is the real issue required rational behavior. Jenkins (1983) indicated that the social movements are only transformative and effective with the optimal use of available resources. Osa&Schock (2007) find that the threats make it difficult for many people to join civil society and play effective role in social movements.

Stekelenburg & Klandermans (2007) investigated the issue and find that identification of the people or groups is instrumental in pursuing people for collective cause. Lim (2012) revealed that the identification of these different groups considerable depends on the level of interaction between ordinary people. His discussion concluded that social movements depend of the degree of interaction and social networking of the society. The spreading of social movement of discontent requires the ability to link the different cluster of people having greivences and concerns against the oppression or deprivation caused by the institutions of state.

Besides the above mentioned factors, considerable literature is also available on the role of communication in the spread of social movements. Lawson (2010)

indicated that uneven development cause societal unrest. He observed that means and role of communication is highly instrumental in shaping public opinions. The concept of public sphere explains that formation of public opinion is hard to control institutionally. This is also true that such formation of public opinion is free from the influence of private interests. The shaping of public opinion for the greater cause is dominated by public interest and not by private interests. Reasoned based and logical discussion on critical issues of public interests is the beauty of well- functioning democracies.

Butsch (2007) indicated that besides the kind of governance structure in a country, media is among the dominant source in promoting such constructive debate and discussion. The provision of space of by the media results in a series of debate and range of diverse opinions for the optimal solution of the issue at hand. The different means of communication including social media stimulate the interests and abilities of the citizens. Different researchers identified different role of media in social movement. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) specify three major role objectives of media in these movements including mobilization, validation and scope enlargement. The mobilization of the people for collective cause by the media increases the scope and provides the foundation for bring more and diverse mind into the movement. The creation of sympathy for the collective cause depends significantly on the support of media. The creation of social networks and development of social movements need sound organizational and communication means. Literature on the role of social media considers media as the key conditions for success of social movements.

Clay (2011) worked on the role of social media in social movements and indicated that media has increased the participation of masses in collective cause. The significant improvement in the means of communication and reduction in the cost allow the people get easy access to information and engage in the discussion on collective goals. The discussion of growing demand for change in state policies is encouraged by the use of social media in public spheres including tea clubs, schools, colleges, universities and private group meetings. This also enhanced the abilities of the people to think more deeply and independently. The emergence of internet in the decade of 1990s brought a paradigm shift in the world of communication. The emergence of different forms of social media like blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and others means became an integral part of

the everyday life. Kidd (2002) finds that communication level has increased among the common masses with the increased transformation of communication means. The spread of social media has also created many challenges for the vertical nature of mainstream media. The role of communication in the organization and mobilization of masses at large scale cannot be denied. The absence of interactive quality in the mainstream media along with the large lags in response made it less advantageous compare to social media. Social media is more efficient and productive in terms of its interactivity and speed.

Eltantawy & Wiest (2011) identified that traditional media or sources of mobilization like leaflets, posters and banners lack the aspects of interactivity and speed. The speed of information spreading and diffusion of beliefs and ideas through social media is much faster than the conventional communication sources and media outlets. Millions of people get informed immediately after the events happen and unfold. Social media is now the emerging source and force for the common people and to give voice to the ordinary citizens.

The new and powerful social media is transforming the societies politically, economically, socially and culturally by mobilizing people by reducing the bias of official as well as mass media. Clark (2012) developed the idea of abundant information and free from chains of government barriers. Downey and Fenton (2003) revealed that the social media is promoting social networks and causing social movements. Gladwell & Shirky (2001) that the current surge in movements would not come to realize in the absence of social media. This is also very much important to discuss that social movement happened throughout in history in the absence of social media. There are people who criticized Shirky arguing that people are mobilized and revolutionized even when there were no signs of social media. But this is also evident that the emergence of internet and social media provide the space to ordinary citizens to play a more proactive and productive role in mobilizing masses. Beside social media, the degree of economic and political deprivation creates such an environment that is conducive for the uprising of social movements. The presence of endless miseries of the disadvantaged segment of the society coupled with the advent of social media generated multiplying effects.

The grinding poverty and growing difference between the rich and poor stimulate the debate for the creation of social movements. Leenders&Heydemann (2012) identified the interaction among political and economic aspects with social media. Their findings revealed that social media worked as a catalyst for the transformation of discussion and debates into popular movements.

The cultural, social, economic and political aspects shape the behavior of the masses and social media provide the platform to struggle for the materialization of the aspiration and dreams of the ordinary people. From this discussion, we can deduce that social media is the intervening variable. This implies that social media is not causing social movements but can only facilitate and stimulate the already existed pre-requisites for social movements. The massive networks created by social media connect people around the globe. The attributes of the social media like low cost and speed allow masses to share their opinions. This increases the abilities and capabilities of people to find people of the same views and ideas for increased coordination and cooperation. Another advantage of the social media is the low cost of spreading information among the people who are of the same views. The people are normally not well organized and disciplined and the use of information through social media helps in connecting and interacting. Serafeim (2012) reported that technology has changed the entire phenomenon of the creation and spreading of news. Clark (2012) investigated the impact of social media in Occupy Wall Street movement. He finds that mobile phone has enabled the people to get unbiased and unedited content of the event. Lim (2012) examined the use of social media in different social movements and finds that using smart phones to capturing videos and photos at the spots make news more portable.

### **Theoretical framework, Methodology and Analysis**

Substantial literature seeking the impact of social media on social movements has used different theoretical model. Controversies rage as to what particular theory is needed to support the findings of empirical assessment of social media effects. The basic objective of this research is to find the impact of social media in the context of contemporary issues raised through the extensive use of information technology. Despite all the conflicting views and evidences, the researchers, academicians and communication specialists are agreed on the causal linkages of social media and social movements. The theoretical construct of the use of social

media and its impact in Pakistan is in embryonic stage. The use of different communication theories by different researchers is based on their ideological convictions. The available literature on the impact of social media on social movements used Social Media Theory (SMT), Connectivism by George Siemens and Stephen Downes (2004), Social Network Theory (SNT), Social Information process (SIP) of Joseph Walter, Diffusion of innovation theory.

We use the Media Ecology theory as a theoretical formulation for this research to assess the impact of social media on Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). Media ecology theory explains that communication technology is the primary cause of social change. We designed a comprehensive questionnaire to examine the relationship between social movements and social media. We collected data through random sampling. We have conducted survey around and filled the questionnaire in PTM's public gatherings in Peshawar and Swat. We have also conducted interviews with students across different universities who have participated in these gatherings. Keeping in perspective the scope of the study, our sample size is 110. We first enter the data in excel sheet to make the data base. We then estimate and conduct analysis in SPSS. Our findings provide very interesting insights for academic analysis as well as for government in making policy and legislation about the use of social media in future.

### **Findings and Discussions**

In order to assess the impact of social media, we have asked questions about the origin of the respondents. In appendix, figure 1 indicates that 25.5 percent respondents were belonging to the FATA<sup>†</sup> while the significant number 74.5 percent were not belonging to FATA. This indicates that PTM become popular through social media in other parts of the province and across the country to attract non-tribal Pashtun. The question related to the sources of information about Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), figure 2 shows that 5 percent of the respondents declared electronic media as the source of information. 12 percent of the respondents are of the view that print media is the source of their information. 29 percent of the respondents told that they became aware of PTM through words of mouth. The considerable portion, 54 percent of the respondents became

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<sup>†</sup> (The Federally Administered Tribal Area) has recently been merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the National Assembly of Pakistan passed 31<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act. The President of Pakistan signed the bill on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2018.

familiar with PTM through Social media. This support our hypothesis that social media play a significant role in the mobilization of the people and a source of gathering people to raise their voices in the absence of coverage by the mainstream media.

Our findings reveal that PTM has attracted sizeable number of people from different political parties. The following figure 3 indicates that people from different political parties attended PTM gatherings. 31.8 percent participants responded that they had political affiliation with ANP, 14.5 percent respondents were from PPP, 4.5 percent respondents belonged to PML(N), 10.9 percent respondents were associated with JUI and considerable number of the respondents 38.2 percent were associated with PTI.

Different people from different political parties attended PTM's gathering to show solidarity and provide strength to the movement. This is also pertinent to note that statistics indicated that many respondents were associated with ANP and joined the movement despite the fact that ANP leadership were not allowing them to join these gatherings. Participants revealed that this is not a political gathering and PTM is a legitimate movement for the protection of the lives of the Pashtun people. The next Figure 4 shows that 27 percent of the respondents joined PTM gatherings for the arrests of Rao Anwar. 30 percent were there to register their protest against the military operation in KP and FATA. 33 percent of the respondents were there to complain against the discriminatory behavior of the state institutions against Pushtoons while only 10 percent of the participants said they join PTM against humiliation at check posts. The next figure 5 shows that the sources or causes for the creation of PTM.

Our survey indicates that 57 percent of the respondents were of the view that sense of shared frustration is the main reason of PTM creation. They were of the view that this is a voluntary association indicate the pluralistic behavior in society to change the behavior of state's institutions towards pushtoons. The survey further indicates that 30 percent respondents were of the view that sustained history of deprivation and endless miseries of the Pashtuns provided the foundations for the formulation of PTM. They were of the view that PTM wants reforms in the system and this is not a revolutionary movement at all. Only 10

percent of the respondents are of the view that PTM is created by social media. They term social media as the critical component in the mobilization of people. Another question is asked about the use of sources to keep oneself updated about the activities and gatherings of PTM. Figure 6 shows that none of the respondents used TV, Radio and Newspaper as a source of information for keeping oneself updated about the activities of PTM.

They reveal that coverage of PTM gatherings or related activities on the mainstream media is next to none. Our statistics further reported that 13 percent of the respondents in PTM gatherings used to watch You Tube for movement's activities and speeches while 25 percent updated themselves using twitter. The significant number of respondents, 43 percent, used Face book for PTM activities and messages. We can say that Face book is the most popular social media tool among the youth. This means that Face book has the potential to make people aware and mobilize them for good as well as for protests and demonstration. This can create extremely anarchic situation and can potentially destabilize the country by creating social unrest. Another dimension to investigate in this study is to analyze the association of participants with any civil society. Figure 7 shows that 14 percent respondents were belong to the civil society organizations.

This indicate that significant number of the participant, 86 percent haven't any association with civil society organization. Next we have examined the level of satisfaction with coverage provided by the mainstream media. To our surprise, 100 percent of the respondents were not happy or satisfied with the coverage provided by the mainstream media. The electronic and print media have ignored Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). Participants were of the view that continued and complete blackout of peaceful gathering will stimulate anti state as well as anti-media sentiments. Avoiding peaceful movements and their legitimate and constitutional rights at such a large scale is not a good sign for the societal cohesion and this will further add to the deprivation and marginalization of Pashtun community. Members of PTM are expressing their sentiments on Facebook, You Tube, Twitter and other social media sources.

Our next figure, figure 9, indicates that 34 percent of the respondents were of the view that they are not following mainstream media on regular basis while 66 percent revealed that they are using mainstream media regularly. The followers of

PTM are actively using social media for propagating their demands on social media in the absence of any coverage on mainstream media. The following figure 10 shows that 65percent of the respondents revealed that they are using social media to write posts on Face book to share information about PTM's gatherings. They also said that we use Face book to communicate our genuine and constitutional demands to the policy makers and to the world. The followers of PTM actively use social media to motivate people in the country as well as around the globe for shared cause. Participants responded that You Tube and Face book is highly effective in communicating information and sharing videos of PTM gatherings. The written post and videos of PTM are "watched", "liked", "shared", tweet and re-tweet by millions in a very short period of time.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The objective of this research study was to investigate the role of social media in the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement PTM. Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) was not familiar to the world before the gathering in Islamabad. PTM organizers and supporters gathered in Islamabad to stage protest against the extra judicial killing of Naezebullah Mehsud. PTM has few other legitimate demands including the elimination of forced disappearances, extra judicial killings, removal of landmines, release or presenting the missing persons before courts, an end to the discriminatory behavior and humiliation at check posts. The response of the mainstream media to this popular disaffection was highly disappointing. The complete blackout of the mainstream media shaped the perception and perspectives among the charged youth that entire state machinery is against them.

The immense power of social media bestowed by the revolution in communication technology provides the opportunity to PTM organizers and followers. The members and followers of PTM turned to social media and mobilize people of Face book, You Tube, twitter and whatsapp. The use of social media in this connection proved highly effective in mobilizing and bringing people from all walks of life to the gatherings in Islamabad, Peshawar and Swat. The participants in PTM gatherings labeled state's institutions as repressive and dictatorial and try to suppress the voices of the already marginalized Pashtun. They complained about the government turning blind eye to the genuine and legitimate demands of PTM. Personally we do believe that situation from the

state's institutions is not that much worse but the absence of response is fueling the charged youth against the state.

Our findings reveal that social media proved highly effective in the dissemination of PTM messages and videos. Social media also proved deeply instrumental in the mobilization of people not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA but also attracted people from other parts of the country. Our findings reveal that majority of the respondents of the survey who participated in PTM gatherings and rallies were young and highly educated. This could either be a blessing or be a potential threat. They were of the view that state or policy makers needs to understand that PTM is not the anti-state movement.

They coined new term “youth quake” in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa having legitimate demands. They said the issue needs serious attention and immediate action because negligence and suppression in the age of social media would not work anymore. Some of them used opted very harsh words like genocides of pushtoons by state organs on the name of military operation against militants and terrorists. There are considerable evidences that denial of the basic human and political rights, deprivation, exploitation and suppression force the people to revolt against the state. There are chances that any failure on the part of government to pacify the charged PTM worker and newly awakened Pushtoons will allow foreigners to capitalize this opportunity and use them against the state.

The impact and effectiveness of social media is also visible in meeting many of the PTM's demand by the government. The government has already started the removal of landmines and eliminated majority of the military check posts across the province. The government has formed apex committee to talk to Pashtun Tahafuz Movement to address their genuine and constitutional demands. The influence of the social media is also visible in the withdrawal of support by many PTM's supporter when the video of national flag not allowing got viral on social media. The anti-army and slogans against state's institutions on social media also questioned the credibility of PTM as a political struggle and annoyed many of PTM supporters.

We do believe that increasing use of the social media for addressing grievances and deprivations by the ethnically motivated movements needs serious attention

from the state organs including judiciary. The government also needs to draft a comprehensive social media usage policy in the country. Social media has allowed PTM doing the unthinkable in this country while openly accusing army and military establishment. The number of PTM supporters increased exponentially with the help of social media within a short period of time. The respondents were of the view that this was a peaceful gathering of people. The coverage on national television screen was next to absent. The print media also ignore the event at large. The participants said that state's institutions should not force media houses to refrain from broadcasting rights-based movements. Similarly there are instances when the print media denied publishing articles of different writers. Latter these articles were published by online websites and many of them were taken down by the authority. This shows the constant fear of printing and disseminating material online. People in these gatherings also condemn and place allegations against PEMRA for not allowing coverage by the mainstream electronic media and newspapers. This further strengthened the belief that media in Pakistan is controlled by some invisible hands. Respondents were also of the view that media only pay attention when something happens in Punjab or Sind while mainstream media ignore the plight of other ethnicities in the country and the complete blackout of PTM is one such example.

We are safe to conclude that social media helped significantly the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement to emerge as a rights-based movement not only nationally but internationally as well. This youth-led PTM struggle is declared as social media-powered movement. In the presence of social media, this is not any more possible for the state to suppress and oppress the deprived and marginalized segments of the society. Social media forces the political leadership and military to engage PTM leadership in political dialogue to meet their genuine and legitimate demands. FATA is merged in KP with the initiation of political reforms in FATA.

This will allow the people of the area to have access to fundamental human rights and to the judicial system. From policy perspective we can say that social media has the potential to force the government to develop new legislations and capabilities to understand the growing use and influence of social media. The creation and dissemination of information through social media evolves risks that need serious attention from the state's institutions. We strongly recommend the

establishment of social media analysis unit in every government department in Pakistan.

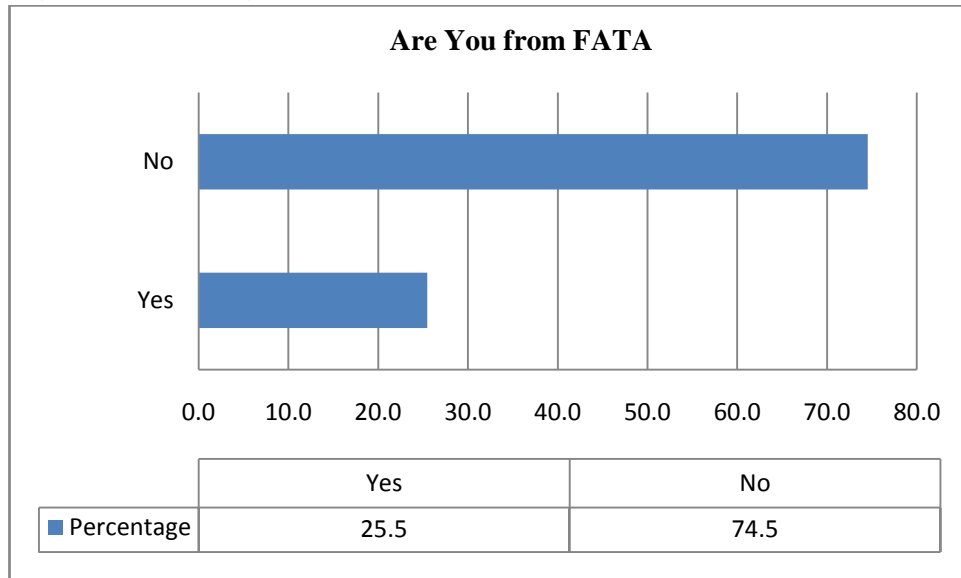
Social media is a very useful and effective tool to transfer the knowledge from academicians and researchers to policy makers. Social media generate useful insights for public policy makers. The tools of social media like Face book, twitter and You Tube will become important actors in the process of public policy formulation. The most important dimension of the use of social media is the participation of ordinary citizen that shrink the gap between common people, policy makers and their leaders. The proliferation and the subsequent use of data on social media to get useful insights will enable govt to develop better and more effective and informed policies.

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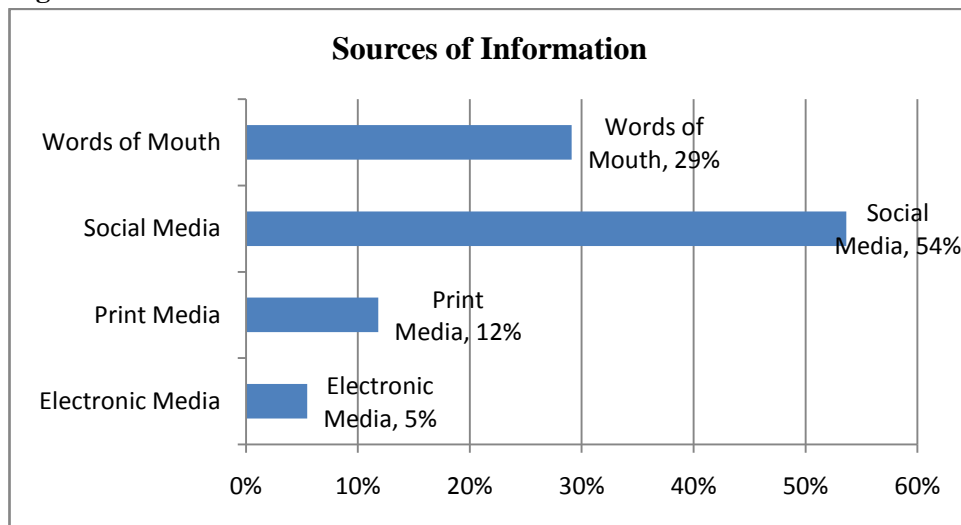
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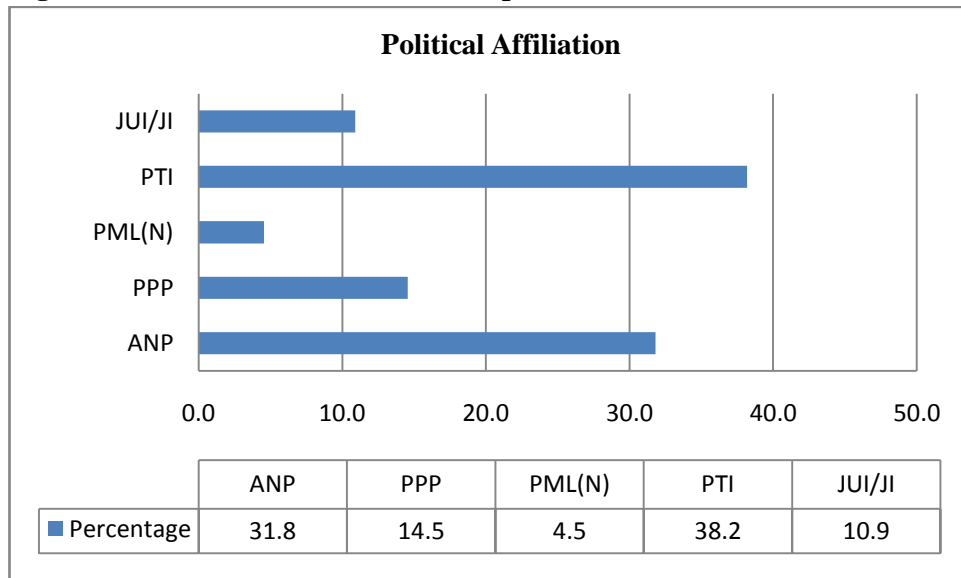
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**APPENDIX:****Figure 1: Percentage of FATA/Non-FATA Resident**

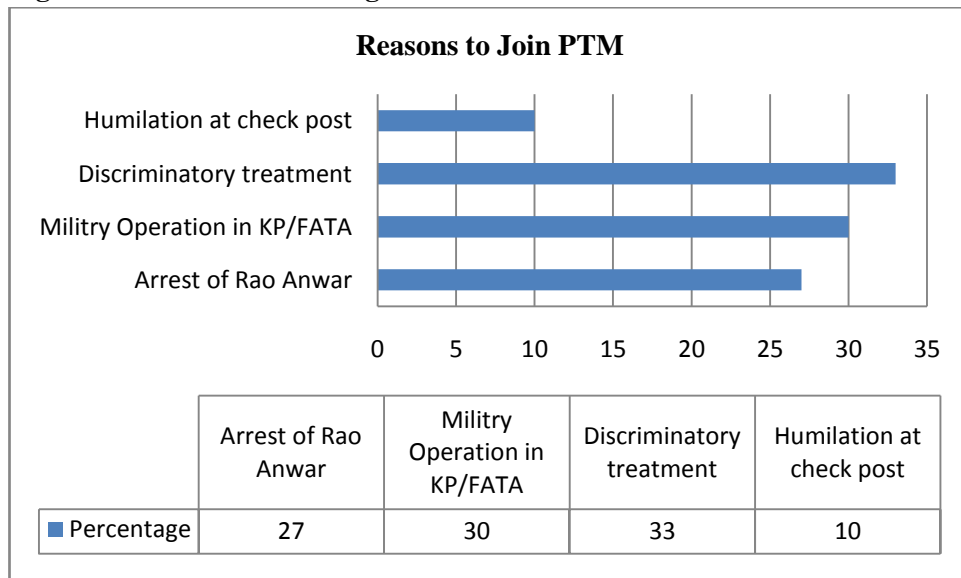
*Sources: Author's Estimation*

**Figure 2: Sources of Information about PTM**

*Sources: Author's Estimations*

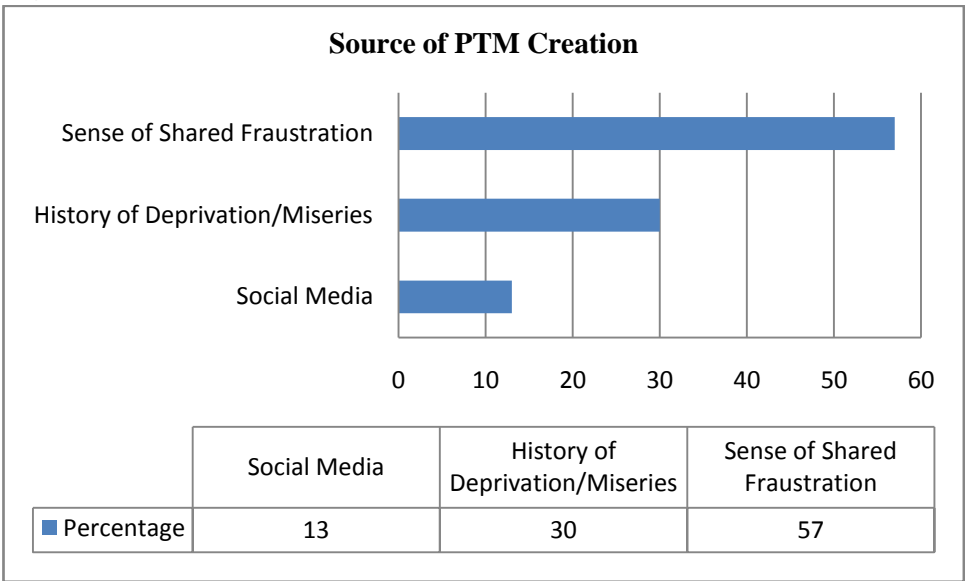
**Figure 3: Political Affiliation of the Respondents**

Sources: Author's Estimations

**Figure 4: Reasons for Joining PTM**

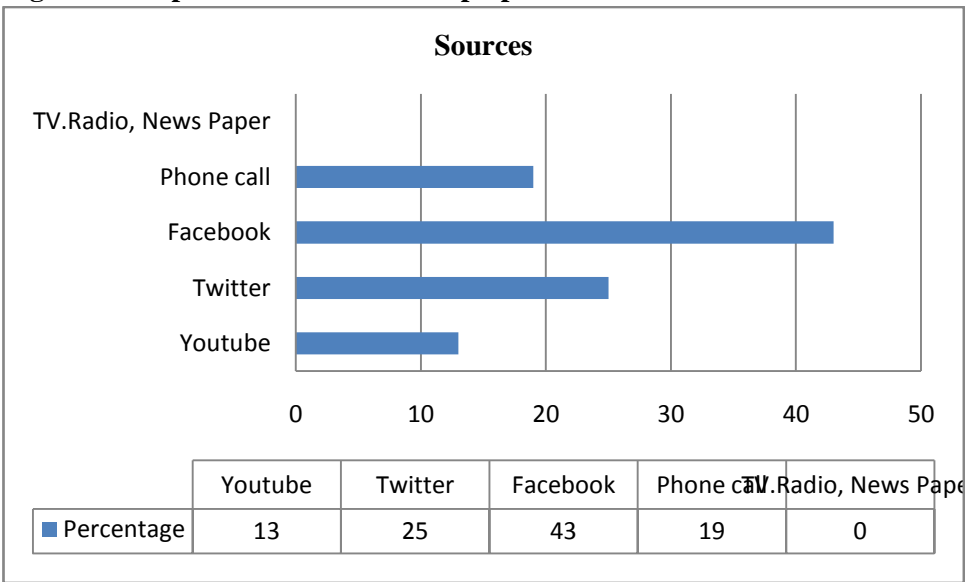
Sources: Author's Estimations

Figure 5: Sources/Causes of PTM Creation



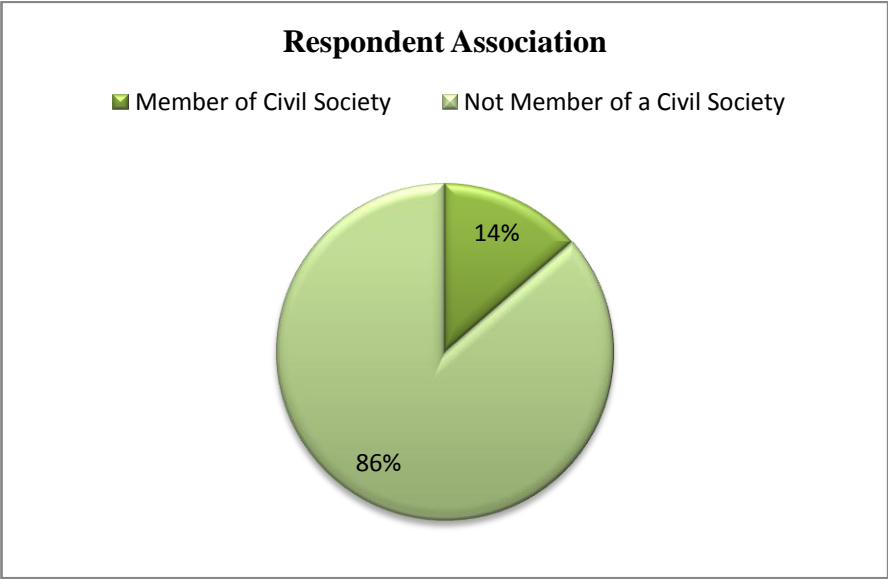
Sources: Author’s Estimations

Figure 6: Respondent Sources to keep update about PTM Activities



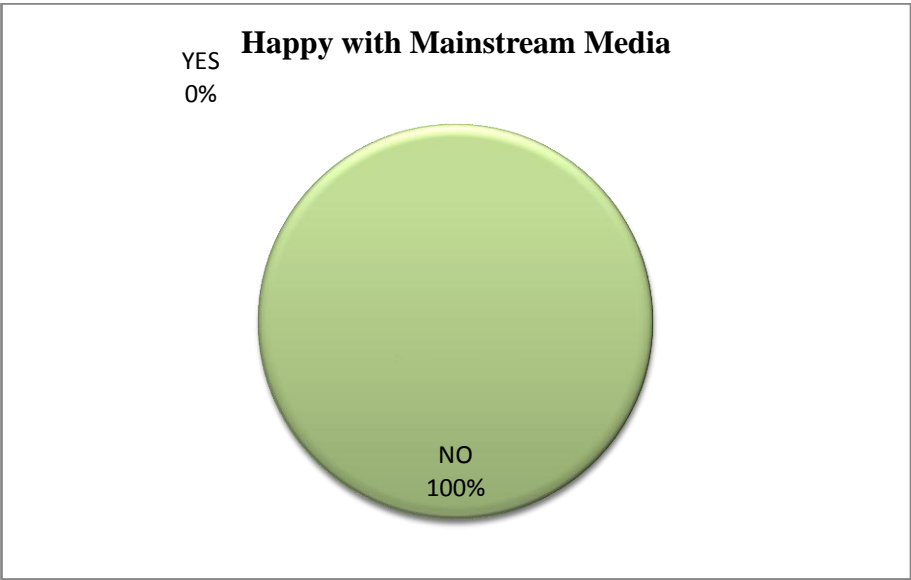
Sources: Author’s Estimations

**Figure 7: Percentage of Respondents Association with Civil Society Organization**



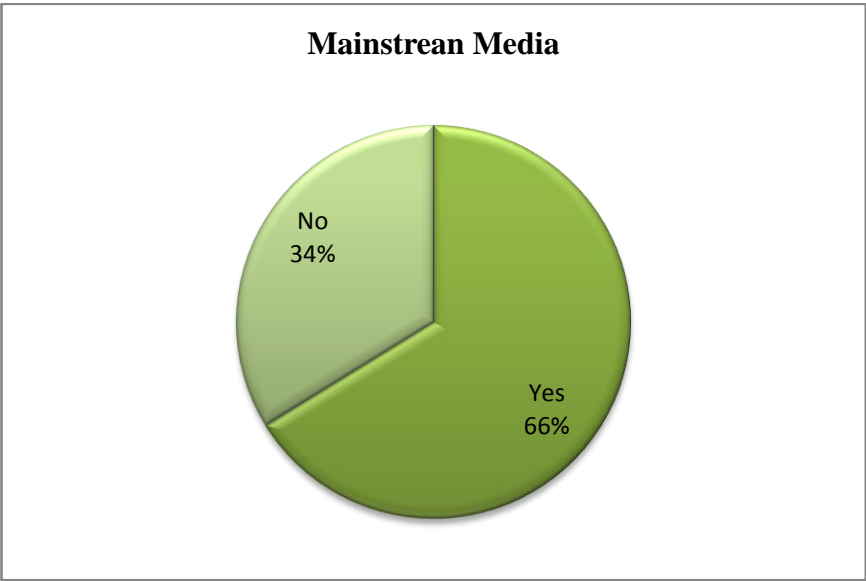
*Sources: Author's Estimations*

**Figure 8: Level of Satisfaction with Coverage by Mainstream media**



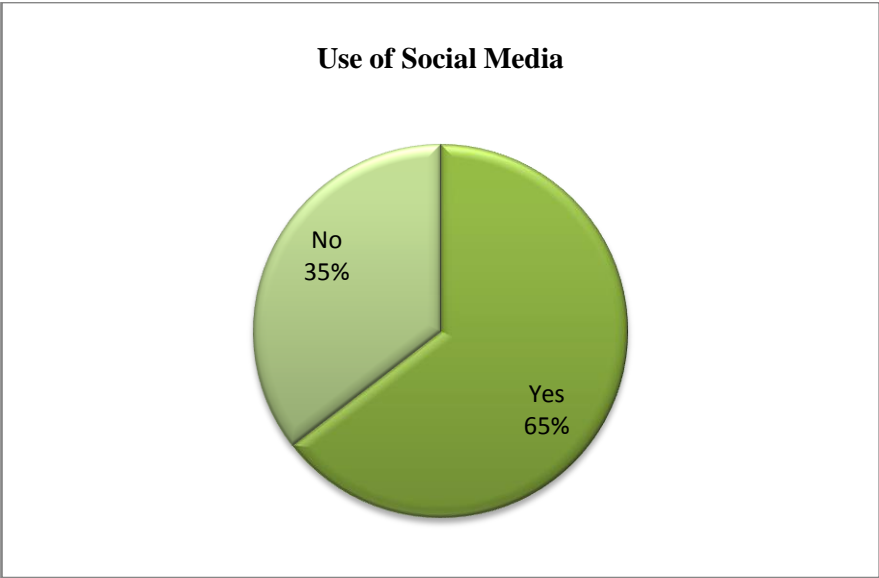
*Sources: Author's Estimations*

**Figure 9: Respondents Following Mainstream Media**



*Sources: Author's Estimations*

**Figure 10: Percentage of People Who Write Posts about PTM on Social Media**



*Sources: Author's Estimations*