

**RESEARCH PAPER**

The Role of Soft Power in Modern Diplomacy: A Case Study of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate and highlight the role of soft power in modern diplomacy, focusing on international relations, exploring economic and intellectual influence to meet diplomatic goals. Soft power itself is an undermined paradigm and currently, it requires more understanding than ever, because unlike sophisticated coercive power, it strengthens a country's image and makes its policies more acceptable globally, advocating the message of peace and prosperity not oppression and compellence. This study in particular explores Pakistan's soft power strategies, enlightens its effectiveness in achieving foreign diplomacy objectives and discusses loopholes. Strengthening soft power can enhance Pakistan's image at international level. This study demonstrates Pakistan's soft power resources, initiatives and challenges making it clearer that what's have been done so far in shaping the country's global identity and what are the areas, still to focus on.

Keywords:

Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Influence, Diaspora, Cultural Diplomacy, Sports, Consistency

Introduction

Unlike the old days, countries with large reserves and powerful armed forces were considered to be more dominant over others. These days, a country's influence does not depend solely on this hard power, rather the balance of hard power and soft power is what drives a country's overall identity. The concept of soft power was introduced by a political scientist named Joesph Nye, highlighting the quiet strengths which might not be considered as impactful before, but the importance of soft power is non-negotiable. In comparison to traditional power structures, soft power works by attraction and persuasion, making it a valuable tool in modern diplomacy. Acknowledging the importance of soft power, countries are now focusing more on employing it, as it fosters long-term relationships, maintaining trust and promoting mutual values and interest via cultural engagement, knowledge exchange programmes, and foreign assistance. On the contrary, analysts contend that this approach is uncertain to quantify and incoherent actions can hinder influence strategies, resulting in a decline in legitimacy and leverage (Yaseen, Muzaffar, & Khan, 2022; Duarte & Ferreira-Pereira, 2022).

Pakistan's global identity often portrays outdated assumptions. In the past few years, Pakistan gave the impression of its real and true image of being stable, safe and hospitable country, to the global communities, by the effective use of soft power. The culture and tradition of Pakistan have always been the centre of attention, stunning scenery, food, music and entertainment industry are for sure assets to its influence. Soft power enables the exchange of culture, food and language among nations making them familiar with other countries norm and values that develop a sense of acceptance and warmth rather than believing the stereotypes. Soft power is highly effective in conflict resolution, peace building and crisis management and recently, it has been seen that Pakistan emerges as the mediator

in different peace treaties around the world and it was only because of trust and positive image stem from soft power. Diplomacy gives the expected outcomes when people across the borders feel connection and love.

As being a third world country, the opportunities in Pakistan are limited, but how to utilize the available resources are the key in determining the present and future of country. This study demonstrates Pakistan's soft power resources, initiatives and challenges making it clearer that what's have been done so far in shaping the country's global identity and what are the areas, still to focus on. Also, there's a need to understand the role of soft power in communication, cultural and educational exchange, promoting the feel of progress and prosperity. To conclude, the study of soft power is significant to gain understanding of modern diplomatic relations and the ever-changing nature of power globally. Although the strategic and effective implementation of soft power is a challenge, its potential benefits are undeniable.

Literature Review

Idrees and Khan (2024) stated that with the use of soft power, the state is important for foreign affairs. Pakistan's efforts to become a soft power examined in this article. This study highlights the potential for people to see the difference between the government and soft power. The researcher addressed issues and examined the actions of the government, institutions, and agencies, particularly during the period when the nation was referred to as a "failed state." An argument for the potential of soft power to improve Pakistan's standing abroad has been made through a thorough academic analysis.

According to Saifullah and Qaisrani (2022), due to the power distribution and transition, the political landscape is shifting. Pakistan enhances their foreign policy as soft power to overcome forced agreements and culture. The global soft power to give student scholarships, support peace, and provide humanitarian aid in emergencies. The purpose of this study is to explain how soft power functions in Pakistan's foreign policy. Additionally, it seeks to clarify the extent to which Pakistan benefited from the incorporation of soft power in foreign policy as well as the potential new approaches. The study employs primary and secondary data, a qualitative research design, and Joseph Nye's conceptual framework of soft power.

Warraich, Rehman, and Ahmed (2023) examine Pakistan's hard power perception and investigate methods to transform it into a soft power image. Pakistan's strategic location, large population, powerful military, and nuclear weapons make it impossible for the world community to overlook the country's developments. The military leadership has a big say in how policies are made. In this study, qualitative methods are used. Pakistan's reputation as a "hard power" has created diplomatic problems across the globe. Because of its violations of human rights, extremism, terrorism, and military meddling in domestic affairs, it has a poor reputation among civilized nations. Global audiences are increasingly influenced by rapid digital communication through the internet and other means. Soft power tools are used to create narratives. Among the suggestions for enhancing Pakistan's reputation are the strengthening of civil governments, cultural and educational exchange initiatives, electronic media, human rights advancements, trade, regional connectivity, and public diplomacy (Asghar, et. al., 2025).

Ali Shah (2022) points out that the discussions of soft power in the contemporary interstate system are critically examined in this essay. It proposes the idea that the home infrastructure of soft power construction is the cultural ecosystem, which is made up of a wide range of interconnected cultural organizations. High domestic performance and the internationalization of the national cultural environment are requirements for a vibrant foreign cultural strategy that is founded on the effective pursuit of a country's cultural interests. This strategy is absent from Pakistan. It is suggested that the best course of action

is to develop cultural ecosystems and create cultural values and connect them to various forms of suitable diplomacy.

According to Giulio and Gallaroti (2022), Nye's groundbreaking paper from 1990 has been followed by a wide range of literature and references in policy circles, which speak to the outstanding significance of soft power in the study of international politics. However, a lot has been overlooked. The articles in this special edition of the *Journal of Political Power* offer state-of-the-art analyses of understudied topics and problems in the field of soft power, and they mostly discuss the methods and effects of soft power. These contributions shed light on crucial subtleties in the manifestation of soft power. They also show how soft power has a profound and important influence on global politics.

Shah, Khattak, and Attiq (2016) contend in the article "Soft Power and its Efficacy: A Case Study of Pakistan" that a nation's influence in the contemporary global system depends not only on its economic or military might but also on its capacity to attract and persuade through foreign policy, culture, and values. This study examines how political instability, poor diplomacy, and misconceptions are related to security and government issues. Pakistan utilizes its soft power with the help of rich culture, Islamic identity, sports work, and media; these play strategic roles in the global world.

According to the past study, soft power plays an important role in strengthening the diplomatic relations among emerging and mid-tier countries. Researchers such as Idrees and Khan (2024), alongside Saifullah and Qaisrani (2022), plus Shah, Khattak, and Attiq (2016), examine how Pakistan strengthens its diplomatic relations using soft power through culture-based learning institutions and aid production. Pakistan's image at the international level is shaped by different factors such as diplomatic connections, opinion-based or military and economic power, and might. Few researchers study deep-rooted problems that are blocking Pakistan's growth globally for strengthening soft power, such as security concerns, old views on military strength, and economic challenges noted by Warraich, Rehman, and Ahmed in 2023. Ali Shah pointed out that weak institutions and a lack of a focused plan also present challenges in soft power. These tools impact diplomatic relations that is scattered and unpredictable. Starting fresh, Gallarotti (2022) builds on Joseph Nye's idea and examines how soft power is fragile and complex in a digitalized world. These factors—soft power built on steady policies, believing stories, and trust—are all one-off moves. Moreover, Pakistan's ability to strengthen its soft power is hindered due to security issues that affect how it is seen internationally.

Material and Methods

This study is qualitative-based and uses the descriptive method to investigate the role of soft power in modern diplomacy, using Pakistan as a case study in particular. The study is based on secondary sources such as books, official documents, journals, & policy documents. This research focuses more on Pakistan's soft power that strengthens the diplomatic relation and challenges and also discusses the suggestion. This approach enables us to understand how Pakistan uses its soft power to strengthen its diplomatic relations in development.

Results and Discussion

Joseph Nye's Concept of Soft Power and an Analysis of Pakistan's Diplomatic Actions within the Framework of Modern Diplomacy:

This study examines Pakistan's current worldwide operations, building on Joseph S. Nye's concept of soft power. Soft power, according to Nye (2004), is the ability to influence others without using force or money. It creates an alternative to the old-fashioned idea that power can only be obtained through money and weapons. As a result of instantaneous

knowledge and worldwide links, nations today shape objectives by changing the perspectives of those in other countries.

According to Nye, there are three main sources of soft power:

- Culture
- Political Values
- Foreign Policies

Culture wins respect when others see it as rich and worth noticing. Values gain trust only when practiced at home and demonstrated abroad too. When policies are fair and ethical, they attract others. These factors determine how countries are perceived across borders. Influence is built silently, through charm rather than force. Countries like Pakistan - modest in military power but powerful in terms of heritage and geography - often bank on this combination more.

Nye explains how soft power operates - through activities such as cultural outreach, open communication between governments and people, student exchange programs, international media presence, and the kind of informal networks developed among people across borders. It is not just nations anymore; cyberspaces, people's movements, and non-governmental organizations have become major players in determining diplomatic influence. As a result, the ability to tell interesting stories, build mutual trust, and project a likable image has become more important than before in order to achieve objectives abroad. On the other hand, the concept also emphasizes combining military power and economic power with soft power - a combination that he calls "soft power."

From this angle, Pakistan's traditions, Muslim roots, overseas communities, schools, peace missions, and cross-border infrastructure may pull others closer. Still, hard-line ideas, shaky leadership, and inconsistent moves on the global stage might weaken that appeal. With the Nye's view show efforts in global reach, travel promotion, aid work and new development factor shape how Pakistan strengthen its image in global world.

Soft Power Resources of Pakistan

Soft power resources refer to the cultural, social, and ideological elements through which a country can attract and influence others without using force. These resources have the potential to significantly improve Pakistan's image and diplomatic influence at a global level. Pakistan possesses many such resources that enable it to attract cooperation from other countries and make its voice important in international affairs. The following section discusses the key soft power resources of Pakistan:

Cultural and Civilizational Assets

The entire world is aware that Pakistan has a rich and ancient culture. The Indus Valley Civilization, which is one of the oldest in the world, like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, which are 4,500+ years old, always attract archaeologists and tourists, creates pride for Pakistan all over the world, and influences all other countries that Pakistan is not a new state; it stands on a rich ancient culture. This builds respect for Pakistan among intellectuals and academics globally. Others like Mughal and Islamic architecture, which attracts Muslim tourists and creates honor for Pakistan in the Islamic world, also enhance and strengthen the leadership of Pakistan's culture in the Muslim world—the Gandhara civilization, which strengthens the ties of Pakistan, especially with China and South Asia. The SUFI culture of Pakistan put forward the reflection of Pakistan as spiritually rich, not extremist. Regional diversity reflects Pakistan's multicultural identity and helps promote tourism.

Cultural heritage helps Pakistan in:

- Tourism revenue
- Academic collaboration
- Cultural diplomacy
- International respect
- Identity building
- People to people connections

Diaspora Community

The Pakistani Diaspora is one of the strongest soft power tools of Pakistan. The Diaspora is the name given to Pakistanis living in foreign lands like the UK, USA, Canada, the Middle East, and Europe. About 10 million Pakistanis live in foreign countries, making it one of the largest Diasporas in the world. Soft power is the name given to influence, attraction, and image-building, and all these can be achieved through the Diaspora. When Pakistani doctors, engineers, and other professionals perform well in foreign countries, they tend to represent their country in a positive manner and remove the negative impressions about their country. The change in the impression about a country tends to begin with people. When a person from Britain develops a positive view of someone from Pakistan, their perception of the country can change. This is real soft power at work, like a transformation. Pakistani nationals hold government positions in foreign countries. These seats make it easier for issues like Kashmir to be discussed internationally. Without exerting pressure, influence develops subtly via presence. Money brought home by Pakistanis living overseas creates connections that lead to new business opportunities around the nation. These flows, which are almost free to control, subtly influence economic direction without requiring significant expenditure.

Media and Entertainment

Media and Entertainment industry is one of the finest soft powers resources a country could ever have. Fortunately, Pakistan is blessed with the globally recognized artist and plays. Media and entertainment allow people to get to know more about the culture, traditions, customs and rituals of a country. Entertainment Industry is a unique soft power asset because it allows artists, dramas and films to shape narrative and project them globally. International audience watching Pakistani dramas and films have this curiosity of knowing more about the country and people. Stories based on real-life incidents, emotions and feelings evoke strong sense of relatability thus causing global impact. Some famous Pakistani Dramas and Films include Maula Jutt, Choorian, Ainak Wala Jin, 50-50, Zindagi Gulzar Hai etc. Pakistan's Music is one another paradigm which has always been popular and is still making masterpieces that are loved by millions across the borders. Global stages have hosted Pakistani legends include Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen, Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, Atif Aslam, alongside rising global sensations like Arooj Aftab, Young Stunners and many more. These artists connect nations with their lyrics and tracks.

Nowadays, no one can deny the popularity and impact of social media, Instagram reels, videos, posting pictures is the new trend. There are number of Influencers including some overseas that are representing the cultural heritage, amazing scenery and positive aspect of Pakistan. Irfan Junejo and Mooro are among the leading YouTube Influencers recognized all over the world for their amazing story telling and facts. Pakistan's Comic side is also making its way globally, overseas artists like Zaid Ali, Shahveer Jaffry and others are making country proud. Media journalists and anchors like Hamid Mir, Kashif Abbasi, Saleem Safi and Aftab Iqbal hold great influence in International Media.

Education and Knowledge Diplomacy

Learning is frequently the source of a nation's quiet power, since common ideas spread well beyond national boundaries. Pakistan's schools and universities are scattered throughout its cities, accepting young minds from far-flung locations like Central Asia, Africa, and even Afghanistan, which is just next door. These students experience everyday life outside of reference books while studying here. Some go on to play influential positions in influencing public opinion, commerce, or policy back home. For many years to come, their perception of Pakistan may be subtly influenced by the nostalgia they made while still students. Pakistan enhances its reputation by offering scholarships to other nations, such as a certain number of scholarships for Afghan students. For these reasons, Pakistan enhances their alliances with neighboring countries without the use of power. In this way, education plays a powerful role that increases global respect for Pakistan, improves its image, promotes goodwill, and creates long-lasting international relations, which may seem quiet but is a powerful resource of soft power.

Tourism and Natural Beauty

Soft power means gaining what you desire through attraction, and nothing is more attractive than natural beauty, which draws tourists from across the world to visit Pakistan. When foreign tourists visit Pakistan, it changes the perspectives they may have formed through various misleading propaganda. The landscapes, hospitality, and culture positively influence their perception. K2, the world's second-highest mountain, Hunza Valley, Fairy Meadows, Swat Valley, Skardu, and Gilgit-Baltistan are among the places that attract the most tourists. Pakistan also has some of the most beautiful mountain ranges in the world, such as the Karakoram, the Himalayas, and the Hindu Kush. The image of Pakistan at the international level has often focused on security issues. However, after visits by foreign tourists, vloggers, and mountaineers who share their positive experiences, global perceptions change, and the world begins to see Pakistan in a completely different light.

Soft Power Initiatives of Pakistan

To building trust, encourage partnerships, and enhance the country's global reputation, Pakistan has undertaken several initiatives that have gained recognition worldwide. As we know that Pakistan is facing serious internal and external challenges but even in these circumstances, Pakistan carefully utilize its soft power assets. These initiatives differ in size and effectiveness but they collectively reflect Pakistan's efforts to strengthen its international image and diplomatic influence through non-coercive means. The following are a few extraordinary initiatives that Pakistan has taken:

Educational Diplomacy

Education is the most important tool for any state. It is a fundamental right of every citizen and should be accessible to all. It helps nation to build long-term relations with other countries. Students act as a bridge between two states. In future, when these students will hold positions in different Government sectors, tech companies, media, and business, then of course they will showcase Pakistan's positive image at global level through their work. Our Higher Education Commission is working efficiently. They have initiated many programs through which students from other countries study in Pakistan. Few notable examples are:

- Allama Muhammad Iqbal Scholarship For Afghan Students
- Pak-Bangladesh Knowledge Corridor
- Pak-Sri Lanka Higher Education Cooperation Programme
- Commonwealth Scholarships Teaching Faculty (PHD)
- OIC Scholarships at Islamic University of Technology (IUT) Dhaka, Bangladesh

Pakistan has collaborated with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Hungary, and China through scholarships and student exchange programs, as well as with OIC member states such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mozambique, and Niger. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan offers scholarships to students from Commonwealth countries to study in Pakistan and also give opportunities to Pakistani students for Master's and PhD. (Higher Education Commission [HEC], n.d.).

Media and Digital Diplomacy

Media is like an open window through which country's achievements and flaws can be visible to international community. So, media should fulfill its responsibility efficiently. Media and digital diplomacy means that a country uses TV, radio, online social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, instagram to engage with people who live in abroad. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019; Salam, et. al., 2024). Our entertainment industry has produced so many extraordinary dramas such as Dastaan, Humsafar, Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Ehd e Wafa, Kabhi Main Kabhi Tm, Parizaad and so many other blockbuster dramas. Our television dramas have reached audiences beyond South Asia, gaining viewership in countries such as India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, as well as in the Middle East and among Diaspora communities worldwide. Music is a feeling that does not require any connection between people to be understood. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow famously said, "Music is the universal language of mankind" (Longfellow, 19th century), highlighting the power of music to connect people across cultures. A modern example of this is Coke Studio, which produces exceptional songs and showcase Pakistan's musical heritage while reaching global audiences. If we talk about film making then we lack in this sector. But there are few movies which get recognition globally. For example, The Donkey King is a Pakistani animated film that became the country's highest grossing animated feature and has been dubbed in multiple languages, reaching audiences beyond national borders. Other than this, films like Khuda Kay Liye, Bol, Cake, Laal Kabootar, and Zindagi Tamasha have been showcased at international film festivals and have received praise for their storytelling. For the very first time, a Pakistani drama, *Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo*, will be aired on Netflix, featuring Fawad Khan, Mahira Khan, Sanam Saeed, and Ahad Raza Mir.

Religious and Peace Diplomacy: Kartarpur Corridor

Pakistan has always shown respect for other religions, and the most visible example is the opening of Kartarpur Corridor. It was inaugurated by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan on November 9, 2019. Pakistan showcases religious tolerance by allowing Sikh pilgrims from India to come to Pakistan to visit one of their Holy places without any visa. This portrays positive image of Pakistan worldwide. At that time, the relation between India and Pakistan were not that good and this initiative served as a trust building and peaceful gesture. It is regarded as a rare example of cooperation between these two nations. With this Pakistan set an example that religious and humanitarian concerns are no above than political disputes. Although in the long run this initiative had a limited diplomatic benefit but it served a great significance in terms of soft power. This initiative of Pakistan not only paved the way for religious harmony among different religions in Pakistan but gave a loud and clear message to the world ensured every minority in Pakistan is free to practice their religion and culture. Moreover, as a gesture of respect and tribute to Sikh Heritage, the Government renovated and expanded the Gurdwara complex, shows its commitment and goodwill to preserve Sikh heritage.

Abhinandan's Release as a Diplomatic Gesture

In 2019, after the military escalation Pakistan captured an Indian Air Force Pilot Abhinandan Varthaman, conveying the whole world that whenever it will come to the honor and sovereignty of Pakistan every eye dared to look Pakistan with evil, will bleed. Pakistan decided to release the Pilot, as a gesture of peace, this demonstrated Pakistan's use of Soft

Power in alarming circumstances. This gesture aimed to de-escalate the tensions across the borders, Pakistan emerged as a responsible state as the international community and media praises Pakistan's gesture and shift the whole narrative of being conflict-oriented to recognize it as a proponent of peace and cooperation (Muzaffar, et. al. 2020). This step of Pakistan proves that Pakistan always prefers peace and wants to solve issues and conflicts through soft action rather than taking steps that generate anarchy and conflicts in the state and region.

Environmental Leadership and The Billion Tree Initiative

Environmental changes and global warming are causing critical risks to human life. Pakistan has repeatedly experienced the consequences of environmental changes including floods, heatwaves– resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of people. To contribute to overcoming the factors causing global warming and climate change Governments of Pakistan launched different programs. The most noticeable initiative in this regard was taken by the former Government's Prime Minister Imran Khan who launched the Billion Tree Initiative and succeeding Ten Billion Tsunami Program. These initiatives for addressing climate change, deforestation, and global warming received recognition globally. Validations from foreign bodies raised Pakistan's environmental reputation and supported the opportunity to connect national policy with global climate standards. The positive aspect of this program is that all governments acknowledge that climate change is real, and they always adopt the proper initiatives which could minimize the effects of climate change. No matter what the government in power is, all adopt measures to reduce or reverse the adverse effects of climate change, which shows the world that Pakistan is actually serious about day-to-day climate change and is adopting measures which are the need of the hour.

Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Contributions

Pakistan's persistent engagements in United Nations Peace Keeping programs and operations are one of its most major Soft Power assets. Being one of the leading providers of peacekeeping troops, Pakistan always aimed to soothe situations, protect non-combatants and alleviate tensions. Pakistani peacekeepers working under UNMISS in South Sudan were recently recognized for protecting civilians and strengthening flood barriers is one of the most compelling evidence of contributors to both security and humanitarian protection. In order to strengthen its reputation as a cooperative and security-providing state in the global framework, Pakistan also sends personnel on active missions in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Western Sahara. Furthermore effective policy making of Pakistan enables UN relief supplies to enter Afghanistan for urgent humanitarian needs which are also an irrefutable proof of its commitment to international peacemaking organizations. For Gaza Peace talks, truce between Pakistan and India, attempt to facilitate Ukraine and Russia war, Pakistan nominated US President Mr. Donald Trump for Nobel Peace Award, showing its honest intentions for praising those who work to make this world a better place.

Tourism Promotion and Visa Facilitation

Pakistan's culture and natural scenery have its own place when it comes to tourism. Over the last decade, there is emerging trend of promoting tourism in Pakistan as Governments are fully aware of the fact that tourism is the key factor in shaping Pakistan's soft power and gaining international outreach. Pakistan Tourism policy enabled to present a more hospitable image to tourists acknowledging tourism as a source of public diplomacy. For promoting tourism and to overcome administrative problems, Governments has implemented e-visa systems and visa-on-arrival services for specific nations. Tourism serves as a soft power technique that helps build narratives via real-world experiences rather than sophisticated interpretations. One of the most current initiatives by the Government to revive the cultural heritage of Pakistan is Basant festival. Under the

supervision of Government Basant Festival is taking place after eighteen years and it has attracted many tourists to visit Pakistan, and the government invites everyone to come, celebrate and be part of this historic cultural event. Other festivals like Shandur Polo Festival, Kalash Festival and Lok Virsa Festival enable harmony among diverse religious communities; revive the culture, and presents to the world how rich Pakistan's heritage is.

Sports Diplomacy and Symbolic Engagement

Along with other soft power efforts of Pakistan, sports diplomacy has emerged as a symbolic but significant component which servers the baseline of apolitical avenue for global engagement and a mean of improving the country's international image. Among sports, cricket has a significant part in shaping Pakistan's International identity and has always been a forum for delicacy during time of diplomatic uncertainty. Pakistan projected images of warmth, endurance and stability by hosting foreign players and teams. In this regard, Pakistan Super League (PSL) is a great initiative aiming at reclaiming and enhancing global profile. Being a nation stigmatized by terrorism and extremism, it was the utmost strategic and diplomatic efforts which enabled Pakistan to host such huge international event while showcasing Pakistan's true image to international community, which contributed significantly to Pakistan as a safe and sports loving nation. PSL shifted external perceptions by complementing Pakistan's foreign policy outcomes to restore its global reputation. Pakistan never appreciated politics in sports particularly in cricket and to support this proposition one example is, Pakistani Government allowed players to participate in T20 WC 2023, which was hosted by India despite Pak-Ind conflict.

The Government of Pakistan is fully aware of the fact that Sports are a window for empowering its soft power, as a matter-of-fact Pakistan Cricket Board issues NOC for its player to participate in different cricketing mega events around the world like BPL (Bangladesh Premier League) and the BBL (Big Bash League) hosted by Australia. Other than cricket Pakistan is keenly dominating in different globally renowned sports like Squash, Javelin Throw, Weightlifting, Snooker etc. E-sports are the new trend and Pakistan's Arslan Ash, 7 times EVO champion along with team represented and triumph events in Japan, Las Vegas and France. Pakistan persistently upholds the true spirit of the game and confronted those who try to politicize the sport. As for the record, Government of Pakistan announces that Pakistan will not play with India, after India's fierce response of terminating Bangladesh from T20 World Cup 2026 on raising security concerns in India and requested to change the venue. ICC responded by replacing the match in Scotland, but Pakistan, as a sport ambassador, took a stand for Bangladesh and withdrew from the match against India. This decision was globally appreciated by many sports lovers and recognized Pakistan as one of the biggest supporters of sports.

Challenges and Limitations in Pakistan's Soft Power Projection

Whenever the phrase "Challenges and Limitations" in respect to Pakistan's Soft Power Projection at International forums, come across to eyes we associate it with Terrorism, Political Instability and Economic Insecurity but they do not fully capture the severity of the problem, there are number of other factors that are blameworthy in this context. To grasp the complete picture it is crucial to acknowledge these often-overlooked aspects.

Brain Drain and Loss of Human Capital

Brain drain - the expatriation of highly skilled and competent individuals from own country to overseas in pursuit of better opportunities for employment and growth, along with loss of human capital which is the incompetence effective utilization of talent. Both mentioned have emerged as a serious hindrance in projecting Pakistan's Soft Power globally. The ever-increasing emigrant's ratio especially among the educated youth, convey

to world as a state failure in providing enough domestic opportunities, thereby deteriorating Pakistan's credibility and attractiveness internationally.

Lack of Consistency in Policy Continuity

Since independence, successive regimes have abandoned the initiatives of their former governments on loop, even those proposed for socio-economic development and public welfare. One recent policy change to highlight in this regard is the Ehsaas Scholarship, which was the initiative of PTI, was discarded by the currently sitting government. Although the present government facilitate the youth by distributing free Laptops under the PMYLS, but a laptop alone has is less useful if a student cannot secure admission in an institute due to financial constraints. There are hundreds of other examples i.e. One Unit Scheme, various Five-year development plans, that have been repeatedly halted or sabotaged by every government change. As a result, the international community identifies Pakistan as unable to sustain effective policies which erode the country's ability in soft power projection.

Politicization of Sports

Now days, sports are not only the source of entertainment, but they are at the core of national identity, the image of soft power and a bond of internal unity. Political meddling in sports can affect its value and charm as instead of a ambassador of goodwill, sportsmanship and respect it becomes a medium for spreading hate among nations. Recently in a popular cricket event Asia Cup 2025, Pakistan and Indian Cricket Players confronted each other with some objectionable gestures, followed by Pak-India War, which wrecked the ultimate values and morals of sportsmanship. Also, the internal politics and unfair advantages in selection of athletes in different sports have also contributed in conveying a perception of inefficiency, favoritism and instability to international forums.

Politicization of Public Institutions

Unfortunately, Politicization of public institutions is a factor that has never been brought under discussion, regardless of its devastating impact on the Pakistan's soft Power Projection to the outer world. Every public institute in Pakistan whether it's educational, cultural, health or administrative, decisions are influenced by Political involvement. Pakistan ranked 135 out of 180 countries, in recent Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index reports, reflecting bias and political favoritism highlighted as the leading factors in administrative corruption revealing flaws in systemic governance. With such reports and surveys Pakistan always struggled to present an attractive image to world.

Gaps in Education and Knowledge Diplomacy

Education provides the bedrock for reducing poverty and strengthens social development. Poor Educational System is one of the reasons why underdeveloped countries never grow and like every other under developing country the education system in Pakistan has a declining trend. The key drivers for these ever-declining trends include outdated curriculum, acute shortage of skilled teachers, scarcity of state of the arts labs and libraries. Lack of interest in knowledge exchange, research collaboration and academic diplomacy hindered Pakistan's visibility in global intellectual and cultural arenas.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of soft power in modern diplomacy with Pakistan as a case study. It shows that influence in today's world is not built only on military or economic strength, but also on attraction, appeal, and positive interaction. Pakistan possesses significant soft power resources in the form of culture, heritage, diaspora, entertainment

media, education, tourism, sports, and peacekeeping contributions. Initiatives such as educational scholarships, digital diplomacy, religious Diplomacy, environmental campaigns, and humanitarian efforts demonstrate that Pakistan has actively tried to build a more positive global image.

However, the study also finds that soft power cannot succeed without consistency and strong domestic foundations. Political instability, policy discontinuity, brain drain, weak institutions, internal interference, gaps in education reduce the effectiveness of Pakistan's soft power projection. Soft power works slowly and depends heavily on trust, reputation, and continuity; therefore, short-term or inconsistent efforts bring limited results.

Overall, Pakistan's soft power potential is high but underutilized. If supported by stable policies, responsible media, stronger institutions, better governance, and investment in education and cultural diplomacy, soft power can become a major pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. In a world where narratives and perceptions shape international relations, Pakistan's long-term diplomatic success will depend on how effectively it converts its cultural richness and human capital into sustained global influence.

Recommendations

- Make sure that Pakistan's soft power should be consistent over time so that projects and initiatives can have long-term impact.
- Politics should never influence the morals and values of sports and sportsmanship so it can be fully utilized to promote peace, harmony and love among people.
- Autonomous and Independent institutions should drive soft power initiatives so that their work can be fair and effective.
- Government should propose a comprehensive plan to ensure the growth and job security of skilled professionals ensuring that they work for their own country and contribute to make Pakistan stable while excelling in latest paradigm of science and technologies.
- Instead of grinding own axes, political parties should step forward and make policies for the welfare and betterment of a common man.
- Education is the only tool by means of which countries either progress or left behind in this ever-growing world of knowledge and technology, Pakistani Government should take constructive steps and encourage students to participate in seminars, student exchange program across the world to keep up with the global educational trends.
- To promote and preserve Pakistan's cultural heritage, customs and traditions, Government must encourage the launch of cultural programs, dramas, and seminars that accurately reflect Pakistanis and their Muslim background while addressing historical events.
- As Media is the fourth estate it tends to act responsible and portray Pakistan in a fair and positive manner by highlighting achievements and positive developments rather than partial or negative coverage.

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