

Diaspora and Cultural Diplomacy: Pakistan's Underused Soft Power Potential

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The concept of soft power is rapidly gaining attention in international relations. Under the domain of soft power, states heavily rely on their cultural assets to assert their global influence. Based on the theoretical construct of Joseph Nye's 'Soft Power,' this article explores the role of the Pakistani diaspora as a potent force of soft power. While there is a very strong presence of the Turkish, Indian, and Korean diasporas in promoting their culture, the potential of Pakistan's diaspora has remained underused in creating a strong cultural identity and especially in refuting negative perceptions and building a positive image of Pakistan abroad. To explore the potential of the Pakistani diaspora and the impediments they face in promoting cultural identity abroad, this article employs a mixed-method approach. With a sequential Quan-Qual research design, it combines a quantitative survey of 40 diaspora respondents across North America, Europe, and the Gulf with three qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews to get a deeper understanding of the issue. Through this approach, the article identifies four major themes: structural challenges, the diaspora's role as cultural ambassadors, the media narrative, and policy options for Pakistan. The findings of the article reveal both opportunities and constraints, and encourage diaspora-led initiatives to increase Pakistan's international visibility.

1. Introduction

The concept of power is a fundamental component of political discourse. Around the world, scholars have given it considerable attention as the debate on this concept provides a theoretical and operational explanation of the constantly changing global dynamics (Ledyayev, 2021, p. 72). So, in the case of power and politics, they always complement each other. The use of power is always subjective, as the use and interpretation of power differ for every state. With the evolution of numerous ideas, concepts, and socio-political changes, a transition was observed in the rigid explanation of the concept of power as well. At that time, the state realized that military power could no longer resolve the socio-political and economic issues, so it needed alternative sources of power. Hence, a shift was observed from one way of power to another, from hard to soft power (Bound et al. 2007: 13; Henne, 2022).

Keeping that premise in view, this research article has three important questions to investigate;

Q1: How has the concept of power evolved in history, and what are the factors behind the emergence of soft power as a strategic tool for states for persuasion?

Q2: What makes up Pakistan's soft power potential, and why has it been so underutilized?

Q3: How can Pakistan's diaspora serve as a strategic instrument of cultural diplomacy, and what are the impediments to their strategic use?

In today's globalized world, a state's image is as important as its military power (Nye, 2004; Askari, 2021). Recently, the concept of soft power has emerged so swiftly that it has gained the attention of political scientists, scholars, researchers, and foreign policy experts (Wilson, 2008; Hall, 2010; Gauttam et al., 2024). Coined by Joseph Nye in his seminal work, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power in the 1990s*, soft power has become one of the most important terms in international relations. In simple terms, it refers to a country's ability to shape perceptions about itself through its culture, values, image-building, and narratives, without relying on coercion. It is the ability to influence others to want what you want through attraction and co-optation (Nye, 2004; Belousov & Krivdina, 2025). Nye identified three main sources of soft power: culture (the more diverse and appealing, the more powerful it is), political values (the way these are practiced domestically and abroad), and foreign policy (Nye, 2008; Charles, 2023). Unlike other sources of power, such as military might and economic dominance, soft power has quickly secured a prominent position in international politics due to the changing dynamics of the global system.

While Nye's concept of soft power has been appreciated globally, it has faced critical voices from academia and political scholars. Several scholars have raised their concerns over the practical measurability of a state's soft power. Some referred to it as an 'unclear attraction' that didn't have a clear analytical category (Hall, 2010; Wołynec, 2021), and some identified it as a borrowed concept from Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Febriani & Hamdi, 2024). These critiques underscore the significance of treating soft power as a dynamic and contested concept in international politics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Diplomacy: A Strategic Tool

In any society, human relations, interactions, behaviour, and developmental patterns are frequently influenced by various political, economic, and cultural circumstances. That's why its definition remains elusive, evolving, and contested (Grincheva, 2023; Raeff et al., 2020, p. 295). The culture of a country involves literature, arts, customs, traditions, values, human behaviour, state history, cuisines, gestures, and social relationships and interactions. So, any government-to-government or people-to-people interaction falls under the domain of cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy has long been a part of political discourse; however, following the events of 9/11, it gained significant attention. During this period, cultural diplomacy was integrated into the framework of soft power and ultimately became a significant point of political discourse (Isar, 2015). Now, one of the most important dimensions of soft power is cultural diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy is a strategy through which states make their culture, art, crafts, heritage, values, music, and food more attractive to others. It is based on the exchange of ideas, values, and cultural identity. In the case of cultural diplomacy, numerous means can be utilized as tools, such as media, sports, religious, cultural, and educational institutions (Cull, 2008). The impact of cultural diplomacy is evident with the Hallyu wave (also known as the Korean wave). Korea has captured the global audience through its K-pop and K-dramas. K-wave is a unique blend of diaspora involvement and the emergence of an organic soft power tool. This wave was initially developed through diaspora networking and digital platforms. After witnessing its impact, it was embraced and systematically utilized by the South Korean government as a tool of cultural diplomacy (Jin, 2024).

With a diasporic population of more than 35 million in the world, India serves as the largest diasporic community in the contemporary world that strategically employs its cultural diplomacy. India. Under PM Modi's government, it systematically leveraged its diaspora potential with institutionalized frameworks and grassroots cultural initiatives. Under his government, India has changed its orientation towards owning diaspora and transformed it from passive remittance collection to active cultural diplomacy. India has shown massive visibility through Bollywood, Ayurveda, and its Yoga Diplomacy (Thussu, 2013). China is utilizing Confucius Institutes to attract a global audience to learn their language, medicine, and traditions. These examples demonstrate that nations now leverage cultural diplomacy, in addition to hard power, to expand their influence. Popular culture, media, cuisines, art, and traditions are now frequently incorporated into foreign policy under the domain of soft power (Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005). The trend of shifting from hard power to soft power in the developing countries is more rapid than anyone has ever expected (Rehman, 2014). Cultural diplomacy has become a vital tool for states to exert global influence beyond traditional power competition.

2.2 Pakistani Diaspora: A Strategic Asset

Pakistan, a country situated in South Asia, has gone through a series of unfortunate events. Its global image has often been tarnished by narratives of extremism, political

instability, weak institutions, and security threats (Haqqani, 2013). The situation further deteriorated with the 9/11 terrorist attack. After the attacks, Pakistan is often associated with religious radicalization and terrorism. This situation creates an environment in Pakistan that is not conducive to growth and sustainability. Ultimately, this resulted in the underutilization of Pakistan's soft power potential.

Pakistan's soft power, however, represents a valuable asset. The country is not only blessed with cultural and natural richness but is also a treasure trove of civilizational significance for archaeologists. It is home to the archaeological sites of the Indus Valley civilization, Gandharan Civilization, Harappa, and Mohenjo-Daro. Taxila has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Pakistan also boasts a rich ethnic diversity, vibrant arts and crafts, aromatic cuisine, a thriving literary scene, and a diverse range of sports. Yet, these resources remain an underexplored avenue. They have not been systematically harnessed as a potential source of soft power for Pakistan.

Among these potentials, an underused strategic instrument of soft power is Pakistan's diaspora, which remains largely underutilized. Diaspora can be defined as people dispersed across one or more countries outside their homeland, while still maintaining a transnational identity (Chander, 2001, p. 1020). It is a powerful community that directly contributes to the social, economic, political, and cultural landscape of its homeland through the transmission of knowledge, skills, trade, and commerce. The use of diaspora is gaining popularity as a tool for projecting a positive image of a country or community, for multiple strategic objectives. Nye argues that multilateral cooperation between governments, political actors, and diaspora communities is necessary for managing politics in an interdependent world. He asserted that a state, while formulating its foreign policy, should emphasize using soft power rather than military power to exert its influence (Nye, 2004). Nye named the diaspora as one of many soft power tools, besides culture, foreign policy, and the economy. (Nye, 2004) With an estimated nine million Pakistanis living abroad, the diaspora can work as a powerful agent of cultural identity. This community not only contributes to Pakistan's financial growth through remittances but also acts as a bridge between Pakistan and the wider world. Just in the year 2024, Pakistan received 32.2 billion as remittances from overseas Pakistanis (State Bank of Pakistan 2024). Pakistan has an active advisory council, "Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development, the Overseas Pakistani Advisory Council" (OPAC), which is working to encourage diasporic engagement abroad. However, in the case of Pakistan, these diasporic identities are strategically deployed to get nationalistic benefits related to political or economic targets (Qaisrani, 2022, p.2).

3. Methodology and Theoretical Construct:

The main purpose of this research is to highlight the untapped potential of the Pakistani diaspora in the realm of cultural diplomacy, which can be utilized to enhance Pakistan's narrative and image-building abroad. The theoretical construct of this research is based on Nye's concept of soft power and cultural diplomacy. These concepts are fully integrated in the research and are crucial to frame the analysis of this article. In this article, a mixed-method approach, with a sequential Quan-Qual research design, is employed. Initially, a questionnaire with four comprehensive questions was developed for an in-depth interview, but only three

respondents participated. To strengthen the study and to address this limitation, the researcher designed a structured survey consisting of closed-ended questions, which was completed by 40 respondents from the Gulf states, North America, and Europe. The three in-depth interviews provided a qualitative base for analysis and contextualized the survey results, while the quantitative data identified numbers and trends in the diaspora's perception. The three in-depth interviews conducted earlier provided a qualitative base that helped contextualize the survey results, adding depth to the interpretation of quantitative findings. This research helps to identify the importance of cultural diplomacy and diaspora involvement. This research also helps to identify the structural flaws that hinder the effective utilization of these resources. The combination of quantitative data and qualitative insights offers a balanced understanding of how Pakistan can better engage its diaspora to enhance soft power globally.

4. Analysis

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table No 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25	3	7.5%
26–35	19	47.5%
36–45	13	32.5%
46–55	2	5%
56+above	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

The demographic profile of this survey primarily consists of respondents aged 26-35, comprising 19 individuals, or 47.5% of the total sample. Respondents in the 36-45 age bracket comprised 13 respondents (32.5%). Respondents in the 18-25 age group include 3 respondents (7.5%), while those in the 46-55 age group consist of 2 respondents (5%). Lastly, there are 3 respondents aged 56 and above, making up 7.5% of the total sample size. This survey also shows that most of the respondents are young and middle-aged diaspora. This is really important for the findings of the survey, as they are compared to other age groups are more actively engaged in the professional and cultural engagements of a host country.

Table No 2: Gender Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	21	52.5%
Male	19	47.5%
Total	40	100%

There is a relatively equal gender distribution. Out of 40 respondents, 21 were female (52.5%) and 19 were male (47.5%). This near equal distribution in the survey ensures that the perception regarding cultural diplomacy is properly captured and reflects the voices of both.

Table No 3: Highest Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Master's Degree	22	55%
Bachelor's Degree	14	35%
High School or Below	2	5%
PhD Degree	2	5%
Total	40	100 %

The educational profile of this survey reflects a diverse yet qualified diaspora community. The majority of the respondents, 22 (55%), hold a Master's degree, and 14 respondents (35%) hold a Bachelor's degree. 2 respondents (5%) have completed high school or below, and 2 respondents (5%) hold a PhD degree. The education level of the diaspora reflects that they are a valuable asset and can hold a potential role in promoting Pakistan's cultural diplomacy and soft power strategies.

Table No 4: Country of Resident

Country	Frequency	Percentage
USA	14	35%
UAE	7	17.5%
UK	6	15%
Canada	5	12.5%
Germany	4	10%
France	1	2.5%
Luxembourg	1	2.5%
Australia	1	2.5%
Azerbaijan	1	2.5%
Total	40	100%

The survey clearly demonstrated the diverse global dispersion of the Pakistani diaspora around the world. The largest part of the population was from the USA (14 respondents, 35%), followed by the UAE (7 respondents, 17.5%), and the UK (6 respondents, 15%). Other respondents were located in Canada (5 respondents, 12.5%), Germany (4 respondents, 10%), France (1 respondent, 2.5%), Luxembourg (1 respondent, 2.5%), Australia (1 respondent, 2.5%), and Azerbaijan (1 respondent, 2.5%). The Pakistani diaspora is dispersed across North America, Europe, and the Gulf regions, shows a strong presence in these countries, and can serve as a perfect cultural ambassador abroad.

Table No 5: Working Profile of Respondents

Sector/Category	Frequency	Percentage
Business & Entrepreneurship	5	12.5%
Healthcare & Allied Fields	7	17.5%
Education & Research	5	12.5%
IT & Data	3	7.5%
Management & Consulting	3	7.5%
Engineering & Technical	2	5%
Law & Legal Professions	1	2.5%
Accounting & Finance	1	2.5%
Real Estate	1	2.5%
Students	1	2.5%
Homemakers	6	15%
Retired	1	2.5%
Unemployed/None	4	7.5 %
Total no. of respondents	40	100%

The working profile of the respondents reflected their diverse backgrounds and professional occupations. Notable participants are engaged in Business and Entrepreneurship, Healthcare & Allied Fields, research, and services, which make them a valuable asset in the host country and also a strong bridge with the home state.

4.2 Main Survey Questions

Table No 6: Q1: Do you think Pakistan has a positive image in your host country?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	25%
May be	12	30%
No	18	45%
Total	40	100%

Out of 40 respondents on asking this question, 18 (45%) answered No, 12 respondents (30%) answered Maybe, and a smaller number of 10 respondents (25%) replied Yes. This indicated that the majority of the respondents think that the image of Pakistan in their residing (host) country is bad or uncertain. Only a small fraction of this sample considers it a positive image.

Table No 7: Q2: Has the perception of Pakistan changed in recent years in your host country?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Improved	15	37.5%
Remained the Same	13	32.5%
Worse	9	22.5%
Not Sure	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

The survey asked: Has the perception of Pakistan changed in recent years in your host country? Out of 40 respondents, 9 (22.5%) mentioned it has become worse, 13 (32.5%) said it has remained the same, and 3 respondents (7.5%) said they are not sure. However, a significant proportion of respondents, 15 (37.5%), were of the view that Pakistan's image has improved. These findings of this question highlight the mixed response from the diaspora regarding Pakistan's evolving image. Nearly 1/3 of respondents feel it has remained unchanged, and some believe it has worsened. The largest part of the respondents acknowledged a positive shift, which indicates and highlights the potential of cultural diplomacy and soft power in improving Pakistan's image.

Table No 8: Q3: Do you think the image of Pakistan is influenced more by media than by reality?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	29	72.5%
No	7	17.5%
Not Sure	4	10%
Total	40	100%

An overwhelming majority of 29 respondents (72.5%) replied Yes, 7 respondents (17.5%) answered No, and 4 respondents (10%) replied Not Sure. The respondents' responses

showed that the majority of them believe the media is a powerful tool for image and narrative building, and Pakistan's image is clearly shaped more by media representations than by ground realities.

Table No 9: Q4: Do you think Diaspora can contribute significantly to improving Pakistan's image?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	32.5%
Agree	12	30%
Maybe	15	37.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Out of 40 respondents, 12 (30%) agreed, 13 (32.5%) strongly agreed, and 15 (37.5%) responded with Maybe. Interestingly, none of the respondents chose Disagree or Strongly Disagree. This result clearly shows that the diaspora recognizes its importance and potential as an ambassador of Pakistan. The absence of disagreement highlights a shared belief in the diaspora's capacity to enhance Pakistan's image abroad.

Table No 10: Q5: According to you, which cultural diplomacy efforts are more effective?

Cultural Diplomacy Effort	Frequency	Percentage
Food Festivals	25	62.5%
Music and Exhibitions	25	62.5%
Pakistani Film Screenings	10	25%
Academic Talks & Conferences	14	35%
Religious & Interfaith Events	13	32.5%
Sports Events	15	37.5%

Out of 40 respondents, the majority of them, almost 2/3, chose food festivals, music, and exhibitions as a strong component of cultural diplomacy. Academic discussion, student exchange, and international conferences are given importance too. Surprisingly, Pakistani film screenings and religious & interfaith events, as compared to others, received less response. But that doesn't mean these activities don't hold importance in cultural diplomacy. They are relevant and have a substantial role in the image-building of the state abroad.

Table No 11: Q6: What are the major challenges you face in promoting a positive image of Pakistan abroad?

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Negative Media Portrayal	24	60%
Stereotypes & Discrimination	18	45%
Limited Resources	16	40%
Lack of Support from Embassies	14	35%
Security Concerns	9	22.5%

One thing clearly reflected in this result is that the chances of successful implementation of cultural diplomacy strategies are more evident when it is capitalized on Pakistan's cultural assets properly.

Out of 40 respondents, when they were asked about the challenges in promoting a positive image of Pakistan, 14 (35%) highlighted the lack of proper support from embassies, an overwhelming 24 (60%) mentioned negative media portrayal, and 16 (40%) mentioned the limited resources for promoting a positive image abroad. Only a small number of respondents, 9 (22.5%), raised security concerns related to the positive image building of Pakistan. Interestingly, besides negative media portrayals, a large portion, 18 respondents (45%), identified stereotypes and discrimination associated with Pakistan. This could be due to disinformation and a lack of representation. It also highlights the urgent need for a strong voice, active diaspora engagement, and a stronger institutional backing to counter the negative narratives associated with Pakistan.

Table No 12: Q7: Do you think the Government of Pakistan should build stronger relationships with its diaspora to maintain long-term engagement and connection?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	16	40%
Agree	17	42.5%
Maybe	6	15%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

When asked this question, 16 respondents (40%) strongly agreed and 17 respondents (42.5%) agreed that the Government of Pakistan could play a strong role in maintaining long-term relationships. Six respondents (15%) answered Maybe, while only 1 respondent (2.5%) strongly disagreed. The responses to this question clearly indicate that the diaspora expects a stronger and more structured engagement from the Government of Pakistan. This involves systematic state involvement to ensure sustainable and long-term relations between the diaspora, their efforts, and the international community.

Table No 13: Q8: Should the government of Pakistan develop structured policies or models to strengthen its cultural and diplomatic relations with its diaspora?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12	30%
Agree	20	50%
Neutral	5	12.5%
Strongly Disagree	3	7.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

A majority of respondents, 20 (50%), agreed, and 12 (30%) strongly agreed with this point, indicating that structural and systematic involvement is crucial for strengthening relations between the diaspora and the government and also for institutionalizing diaspora

engagement abroad. Five respondents (12.5%) remained neutral, while surprisingly, 3 respondents (7.5%) strongly disagreed. This could be due to the distrust in government initiatives or the past failures in policy implementation. This reflects that not only is a structured infrastructure important, but the implementation and credibility of that arrangement are equally important.

Table No 14: Q9: Which of the following policy initiatives should the Government of Pakistan adopt to strengthen its relationship with the Pakistani diaspora?

Policy Initiative	Frequency	Percentage
Establish cultural centers / Pakistan Houses abroad	18	45%
Organize regular cultural events & festivals	26	65%
Provide government funding for diaspora-led initiatives	18	45%
Include diaspora voices in policy & diplomacy	21	52.5%
Launch media campaigns on diaspora success	18	45%
Create a dedicated diaspora ministry/department	18	45%
Academic, youth, & student exchange programs	25	62.5%
Simplify visa & travel procedures	23	57.5%
Provide legal aid & voting rights	21	52.5%

Since respondents were allowed to select multiple options, the results demonstrate a wide range of preferences from them. A majority, 26 respondents (65%), emphasized the importance of organizing regular cultural events and festivals with diaspora participation, especially when other countries are actively utilizing this. Similarly, academic, youth, and student exchange programs were ranked important by 25 respondents (62.5%). 23 respondents (57.5%) considered simplifying visa and travel procedures. Meanwhile, 21 respondents (52.5%) emphasized to include the diasporic voices in foreign policy decision-making and public diplomacy planning, along with ensuring legal aid and voting rights. Other initiatives, such as establishing cultural centers and Pakistan Houses abroad, were stressed by 18 respondents (45%). 18 respondents (45%) encouraged government funding for diaspora-led cultural initiatives. The same number of respondents encouraged launching media campaigns to highlight diaspora success stories (18 respondents, 45%), and creating a dedicated diaspora engagement ministry or department (18 respondents, 45%) was also widely supported. The results of the question reflect the strong demand from the diaspora to have institutionalized and practical mechanisms with structural reforms for a strong diaspora engagement.

4.3 Discussion and Analysis

The main purpose of this research is to understand the dynamics that surround Pakistan's image abroad. To investigate it further, the role of diaspora in shaping the state image, its narrative building as an ambassador of the state, is examined. Another important purpose of this research was to understand the structural impediments and institutional flaws that have been experienced by the diaspora abroad. All these factors are important to understand what are the obstacles that stop us from having an active cultural diplomacy and utilizing our soft power assets. In this research, triangulation was applied through the integration of existing literature, survey findings, and the in-depth interviews from the diaspora. By doing so, four interconnected themes emerged. They are (I) media and identity narratives, (II) diaspora as

cultural ambassadors, (III) structural and policy gaps in Pakistan's soft power strategy, and (IV) Lessons and policy opportunities for Pakistan.

4.3.1 Theme one: Media and Identity Narratives' impact on Pakistan's Image

The findings from the survey clearly demonstrated that in most cases, Pakistan's international image is contested. This reflected in the questions when the respondents were asked whether Pakistan has a positive image in their host countries. 45 % of the respondents clearly said no, and 30% said maybe. Only 25% of the respondents were sure of the positive image of Pakistan in their host country. This aligns well with the observations of both interviewees. For instance, DIA-1 stated that Pakistan's image in Canada is shaped by the security concerns and the negative projection of Pakistan in the media. Similarly, DIA-2 shared his observation that in the USA, Pakistan is projected as unsafe and unstable. The same trend has been highlighted by different scholars. Yousaf (2015) mentioned the negative framing of Pakistan in Western media. Their associated media press continuously use demonizing words for Islam and Pakistan in terms of terrorism and security threats. Most of the time, Western media focuses on violence, especially related to honor killing, extremism; it often quotes Islam as an "outside threat" and threat narratives; a socially intolerant society for minorities and women, which dominates other aspects like cultural or developmental stories of Pakistan (Yousaf, 2015, p.1566). Such perception and interpretation make it difficult for the diaspora to project the positive identity of Pakistan. The statistics showed that almost 72% of the respondents believed that the image of Pakistan is influenced more by the media than by reality. This response also indicates the need for systematic strategic communication arrangements to counter this narrative.

DIA-2 sheds light on the growing role of social media in establishing 'commonalities among people' and the important role of social media in reshaping the international perceptions of Pakistan beyond mainstream narratives. This aligns well with the shift in scholarly literature as well. While Nye's original concept of soft power focused on persuasion through cultural attraction, values, and customs, etc., later, critics are of the view that this attraction is strongly shaped by global media arrangements (Baumann & Cramer, 2010, p. 71). So, it is indeed very crucial for Pakistan to make proper arrangements for strengthening the diaspora engagement on digital platforms to claim its narrative space globally.

4.3.2 Theme Two: The Role of Diaspora as Cultural Ambassadors

The findings from interviews and surveys reflected that all the participants know the importance of the diaspora and their role as cultural ambassadors in the host country. When in a survey they were asked if the diaspora can contribute significantly to improving Pakistan's image, 60% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, none of them disagreeing on the important role of the diaspora. The same point was reinforced by the DIA-1, which identifies diaspora as a 'cultural ambassador' and can contribute significantly to the economics, social integration, and cultural diplomacy of their parent country. The same point was highlighted by DIA-2 that personal interactions, community engagements, and cultural events, such as student associations and festivals, can transform the perceptions associated with Pakistan.

The survey also highlighted the interesting findings related to the most effective forms of cultural diplomacy. Most of the respondents mentioned food festivals and music exhibitions (62.5% each) as the most effective form, followed by academic talks (35%) and sports events (37.5%). This shows that most of the diaspora considers the informal, and culturally rooted exchanges (festivals or celebrations) as a high-impact resource in shaping and reshaping the perceptions and narrative building associated with them. This argument was consistent with Nye's emphasis on cultural attraction as a basis of soft power (Nye, 2004). One important aspect mentioned by DIA-3, the Pakistani community is playing a positive role in society, as they are not involved in crimes or illegal activities in Canada like some other ethnicities. There are a good number of restaurants and Pakistani shops, primarily located in Pakistani-dominant areas, and a few community events or concerts have also been organized for private fundraising. However, unfortunately, these are all privately arranged and often poorly managed.

However, one critique that was prevalent through the interviews' insight and available literature on cultural diplomacy was that cultural attraction alone may not be sufficient. They required hard power, and most of the time, a state's soft power may not work properly in the absence of institutional infrastructure or a strong state's support (Marlin-Bennett, 2022; Kearn, 2011). The same issue was repeatedly highlighted by DIA-1, DIA-2, and the survey respondents, that although, Pakistani diaspora recognizes their importance and potential of soft power, without institutional support and concrete policy steps, it will remain underused.

4.3.3 Theme III: Challenges and Structural Gaps

The last point of the second theme leads towards the third theme, which specifically deals with the challenges and structural gaps. The survey respondents and interviewees identified challenges that are converged around two issues: global negative perceptions about Pakistan and internal lack of state support to counter misperceptions. The most frequently mentioned challenges in the survey were negative media portrayal (60%), stereotypes and discrimination (45%), and limited resources (40%). Moreover, 35% highlighted a lack of support from embassies or the parent country.

On the issue of stereotypes, DIA-3 mentioned that most of the diasporas faced prejudice based on colour. There is also a negative perception of us as Indians. A growing hatred against Indian immigrants has been observed, particularly after the post-COVID recession. There is also a lack of community bonding (Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Turkish), especially in the job market. This response reflected that the institutional engagement is often missing or ineffective. DIA-1 highlighted the internal coordination and lack of strategic engagement as major barriers to effective cultural diplomacy. Interestingly, DIA-2 stated that while the people in the U.S. were comparatively open to learn about Pakistan. Unfortunately, diaspora representation there lacks the same organizational strength that other powerful diasporas, such as Turkish and Indian, enjoy. This institutional ineffectiveness became an impediment to the diaspora from playing the role of cultural ambassador. DIA-3 stated Pakistani embassies abroad also need to provide a platform for their diaspora to collectively contribute to building a positive image of Pakistan. They should help the diaspora strengthen ties and engage both the government and local communities in different ways to project a better image of the country.

In Canada, for instance, there are India-Canada Study Centres and special scholarships for Indian students. The Indian Canadian community dominates academics, politics, business, public administration, and almost every sector, and the reason is the strong support they provide to each other as a community.

This critique was highlighted by various scholars. Nye's concept of soft power specifies that a state can leverage its cultural resources to exert its influence. But critics are of the view that without proper infrastructure, institutional support, and credible official actions, soft power is just mere rhetoric rather than actionable (Kearn, 2011; Baumann & Cramer, 2010). This gap is very much relatable in the case of Pakistan, where fragmented cultural initiatives and a lack of inter-provincial coordination dilute the potential impact of cultural diplomacy.

4.3.4 Theme IV: Lessons and Policy Opportunities for Pakistan

The final theme of this research focuses on the insights and policy options for Pakistan. In the interviews, both DIA-1 and DIA-2 mentioned that the Indian diaspora, especially in North America, has developed strong community networks and political representation. The same goes for the Turkish diaspora, which demonstrates a good integration into the political, economic, and cultural spheres of its host country. Pakistan diaspora, despite being large in number, often remained underrepresented in cultural promotion and political participation. The respondents from the survey highlighted the same pattern. A lesson that Pakistan learn from these engagements is the deep ties of diaspora with the government. As clearly mentioned in the survey, almost 82.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the government should maintain stronger diaspora ties. Nearly 80% of respondents supported structured policies or models for cultural and diplomatic engagement, especially between the diaspora and the government. Respondents have especially focused on concrete policy initiatives adopted by the government and identified various steps to be included to enhance cultural presence, such as regular cultural festivals (65%), youth and student exchange programs (62.5%), and simplifying visa/travel procedures (57.5%).

If we look around other countries, we can see the same pattern. South Korea, for example, clearly demonstrates that if one country properly channels its cultural assets, it can be an effective tool for exerting soft power. K-Wave, also known as the Hallyu wave, is among the most successful cultural diplomatic experiments, backed by the Korean government. The survey with the Pakistani diaspora resonated the same. For them, cultural diplomacy isn't an isolated arrangement; instead, it's a long-term strategy that requires proper planning from the government, funding, institutional arrangements, and a strong global narrative building to excel in their soft power and cultural diplomacy efforts.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this article is to explore the potential of the Pakistani diaspora in the image-building and narrative-building of Pakistan. Through the survey and interviews, it's clear that the Pakistani diaspora holds significant potential in the domain of soft power under cultural diplomacy. However, their contribution is underused due to the structural flaws, institutional barriers, policy gaps, and negative media presentation. Media framing continues

to present Pakistan's global identity in terms of security. Whereas, diaspora stress to show their ability as cultural ambassadors, but they have limited options with a weak institutional backing.

The comparative analysis from other communities like Turkish, Korean, and Indian interviews, and survey findings establishes a lesson for Pakistan that success in cultural diplomacy depends on three elements: the unity among the community, a state's structured policy, and strategic media engagement. In the case of Pakistan, although Pakistan's diaspora has the willingness to represent Pakistan's cultural assets globally. It remained underused due to the state's limited engagement and fragmented strategy.

5.1 Recommendations

1. Through the interviews and survey, a series of inputs given by the diaspora emphasized the establishment of a proper institutional framework that develops tailored policies related to diasporic needs. Even though there is a dedicated segment for this, due to internal fragmentation and vague policy adaptation, the issue remains constant. A streamlined diasporic policy framework with consistent policy options is necessary for leveraging cultural, social, and economic contributions from them.
2. Pakistan needs to strengthen its cultural presence abroad. For that purpose, embassies are a good resource as they can play a more proactive role. They can set up Pakistan Houses for consultation and discussion, cultural and educational centers, and arrange regular cultural festivals (film screenings, think tanks, food expos, interfaith events, educational exchanges, sports tournaments).
3. Pakistan also needs to focus on strengthening ties with the diaspora for skill transfer and brain gain. For that purpose, diaspora networks can be established throughout the world along with mentorship programs to train the youth. This could help in creating strong intergenerational connections, where the success of the diaspora could serve as a role model.

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