



Advance Social Science Archives Journal

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol.3 No.1, January-March, 2025. Page No. 1094-1099

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)



CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL FOR PAKISTAN'S SOFT IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

A country can enhance its global image by utilizing the tool of cultural diplomacy. It enables countries to proliferate their cultural values to the outside world. Pakistan is blessed with diverse culture which can be used for attracting the foreign world and creating a soft image. This paper sheds light on the idea of cultural diplomacy and its possible utilization in the foreign affairs of Pakistan. It can play a significant role in countering negative stereotypes about Pakistan. It can send the message of peace and love to the external audience. This paper explains the various strategies through which cultural diplomacy can be used such as educational exchanges, promoting tourism, highlighting local brands and organizing sports activities. Furthermore, the challenges facing cultural diplomacy are also being discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Global Image, Cultural Exchange, Foreign Policy, Media.

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy consists of a variety of tools including people-to-people contact, projecting cultural values and promoting soft image in order to enhance mutual respect and understanding among the countries. Pakistan, a South Asian country, has been using different tactics of cultural diplomacy to strengthen its relations with the regional and the global entities. The various strategies employed by Pakistan included artistic performances in the form of cultural dances and folk music, educational incentives to foreign students, promoting tourism (Rashid, 2020). The worth of media and digital communication has enhanced the value of cultural diplomacy in molding the psyche and opinions of the public.

The concept of cultural diplomacy is closely associated with soft power, a term explained by a Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye, as a country's capability to co-opt instead of coercing someone (Nye, 2004). Pakistan can make good use of cultural diplomacy for promoting peace, countering negative stereotypes and enhancing its influence in the external world (Waseem, 2018). This paper explains how Pakistan can utilize cultural diplomacy in its foreign policy and enhance its soft image at the global level.

Understanding Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has a similar connotation as soft power theory which gives importance to influencing others in a soft manner rather than using hard coercive tactics (Kreutz, 2011).

Cultural attraction is the main ingredient of Nye's concept of soft power. It is important to understand how the developed and the developing countries use their cultural appeal to change others' beliefs and perceptions in their favor. Cultural diplomacy works in a two-pronged manner i.e. proliferating a country's cultural appeal and establishing long-term relations with the outside world, hence positively contributing to peace and security across the globe (Liu, 2016).

It should be noted that cultural diplomacy and traditional diplomacy are quite different concepts as the former relies on strategies of cultural exchanges instead of using a certain hierarchical structure (Melissen, 2005). Apart from promoting cultural values, a country can strengthen its politico-economic relations with other countries and institutions as well. Pakistan can remove negative stigmas and misperceptions by actively engaging cultural diplomacy in its foreign policy.

Pakistan's Cultural Diplomacy

Pakistan has been utilizing various techniques of cultural diplomacy since its inception in 1947. In the beginning, it focused on establishing cultural exchanges with the regional countries and presented itself as a cultural hub in the region. Pakistan showcased its classical and folk music along with cultural dances as symbols of unique identity (Khan, 2012). Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) and Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) played a leading role in highlighting the local art, craft and Urdu literature.

In the recent years, Pakistan's cultural diplomacy multiplied its features by including cinema, fashion industry, education exchanges and sports events. Likewise, the horizon of cultural exchange programs was expanded by including music festivals, literary events and art exhibitions (Haider, 2017). All such programs made it easier for Pakistan to strengthen its relations with the foreign world especially in the West and the Middle East.

Objectives of Cultural Diplomacy

Key objectives of Pakistan's cultural diplomacy are following:

1. **Promotion of National Identity and Heritage:** The foremost purpose of cultural diplomacy is to project Pakistan's multifaceted cultural heritage and values. The Pakistani state has a unique distinction because of its multi-lingual communities, diverse ethnic groups along with their captivating traditions. By promoting its cultural values on the global arena, Pakistan plans to negate misconceptions and highlight itself as a pluralistic and peace-loving society (Nasr, 2014).
2. **Countering Misperceptions:** It is unfortunate that the Western media portrays Pakistan as a hub of extremism, terrorism and corruption. This negative portrayal has damaged the country's image at the global level. In such scenario, cultural diplomacy plays an active role in countering negative propaganda. The government of Pakistan has been striving to project its own narrative based on soft power initiatives and highlight its peaceful and progressive society (Khan & Alam, 2020). The Western media must realize the fact that Pakistan contributed a lot in countering War on Terror (WoT) in the region. It has been working with the regional countries to establish peace in the war-torn Afghanistan.

3. **International Cooperation:** The notion of cultural diplomacy works as a catalyst for a country to boost its bilateral and multilateral relations. A lot of examples can be given such as organizing joint cultural events, arranging literary programs in the foreign countries, hosting music shows for the embassies and conducting seminars/conferences for the foreign students. Pakistan also enhanced its cultural cum diplomatic ties with other countries by collaborating in different areas e.g. promoting tourism, enhancing trade and educational exchanges (Iqbal, 2016).
4. **Global Influence through Soft Power:** Any country can influence the international audience by employing the tactics of soft power. It has the power to mold others' opinions in your favor. Pakistan is also following the same path by highlighting its soft power in order to garner international support and co-opt the public opinion. It requires favorable environment as it has been facing several regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions (Tariq, 2019). Pakistan can enhance its international standing by contributing to culture of peace, tolerance and love.

Key Strategies of Pakistan's Cultural Diplomacy

Pakistan has utilized many strategies in the domain of cultural diplomacy which includes:

1. **Cultural Exchange Programs:** One of the basic strategies to enhance the soft power of a country is to engage in cultural exchange programs. These programs can achieve their goals by promoting people-to-people contacts. Mutual understanding and respect among the countries can be strengthened by exchanging artists, scholars, academicians, sports personnel, journalists and musicians. The roles of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA), the Pakistan Television (PTV) and Lok Virsa have been significant in sponsoring such exchange programs (Zafar, 2019). It is important to highlight the positive role being played by the Pakistani embassies abroad to project Pakistan's soft image.
2. **Film and Art Festivals:** A country can highlight its societal norms by releasing films in different languages. The Pakistani film and drama industries are famous for their script and dialogue throughout the world. It has showcased many historic films at the global level such as the Berlin International Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival. The Pakistani writers explained the themes of national identity, family system, social justice and cultural heritage for which they were being awarded at the international level (Rehman, 2015).
3. **Sports Diplomacy:** Sports events also play a vital role in highlighting a country's soft image. Pakistan makes good use of sports diplomacy by organizing different events at the regional and the international level. The country has been famous for its hockey and cricket teams. Pakistan remained the world champion in both sports. It has enhanced its bilateral relations with the South Asian countries through cricket diplomacy. Diplomatic ties are being promoted by hosting international cricket tournaments (Ahmed & Khan, 2021). Recently, the International Cricket Council (ICC) Champions Trophy and the Pakistan Super League (PSL) have attracted a lot of foreign cricketers to play in Pakistan. It also contributed to enhance digital audience. Apart

from that, Pakistan also participates in the Olympic games which contributes to its soft power ranking.

4. **Educational Collaborations:** Educational diplomacy is another important strategy for Pakistan. By offering scholarships, promoting higher education exchanges, and facilitating collaborations with foreign universities, Pakistan has strengthened its relationships with countries across the world. Pakistani educational institutions are also becoming increasingly attractive to international students (Hussain, 2018). The country has been offering various fully funded scholarships to the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as well as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Apart from that, it has been attracting the Afghan students every year by offering scholarships.

Challenges to Pakistan's Cultural Diplomacy

Pakistan's cultural diplomacy faces numerous challenges:

1. **Negative Media Portrayal:** The Western and Indian media often portray Pakistan in a negative light, focusing on issues such as terrorism, extremism, political instability, corruption and economic challenges. This has undermined efforts to improve the country's image abroad and poses a significant barrier to the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy (Bashir, 2017). It is imperative for Pakistan to use its media resources proactively in order to counter all such negative propaganda and disperse a counter-narrative highlighting a positive Pakistan.
2. **Geopolitical and Security Concerns:** The volatile security situation in Pakistan, particularly in its border regions, makes it difficult to host large international cultural events or attract foreign tourists. Geopolitical tensions in South Asia also affect Pakistan's ability to engage in cultural diplomacy with neighboring countries (Sattar, 2020). Pakistan must have to improve its security situation to attract foreigners.
3. **Limited Resources and Funding:** While cultural diplomacy is seen as a valuable tool, Pakistan often faces budget constraints that limit its ability to fund large-scale cultural initiatives. This restricts the scope and impact of cultural diplomacy programs (Shah, 2019). A strong economy will enable Pakistan to sponsor international seminars and conferences for highlighting its soft image. It will also enable Pakistan to host foreign students which will act as a catalyst for people-to-people contact and mutual understanding.
4. **Stereotyping and Prejudices:** Despite efforts to counter negative perceptions, various stereotypes about Pakistan continue to persist such as a conservative, religiously intolerant nation and corrupt country. Overcoming these entrenched biases requires sustained, long-term engagement through cultural diplomacy (Tariq, 2019). The role of diplomats, journalists and artists cannot be negated in countering negative propaganda about Pakistan. Likewise, the media outlets can play an active role in promoting Pakistan's positive values.

Impact of Cultural Diplomacy on Pakistan's Image

Employing cultural diplomacy has positively enhanced Pakistan's soft image at the global level. It is considered as a state striving for peace and tranquility in the region. It also helped in mitigating negative public opinion about Pakistan. The country has been able to portray its unique identity by highlighting itself as a pluralistic and moderate society (Haider, 2020). Pakistan is now recognized as an epicenter of culture after the successful events of the Lahore Literary Festival and the Karachi Biennale. Furthermore, Pakistan's relations have remarkably been improved with the countries of the West, the Middle East and the Central Asia after active engagement in soft power. The foreigners are attracted towards local classical music, art and cuisine (Rehman, 2015).

Conclusion

Pakistan can improve its soft image at the global level by utilizing tool of cultural diplomacy. Although, it has been facing many challenges both internally and externally, yet it has been successful in gaining favorable opinions across the world by employing effective cultural diplomacy. The government of Pakistan is now focusing on artistic collaborations, cultural exchanges and educational scholarships in order to improve its world standing. The ultimate mission is not accomplished yet. In order to achieve the desired outcomes, Pakistan must have to work on many areas such as overcoming geopolitical tensions, countering negative propagandas and effectively funding the cultural initiatives.

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