

ASSESSING PAKISTAN'S SOFT POWER: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS



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ABSTRACT

This research paper offers a comprehensive assessment of Pakistan's soft power by evaluating its standing across multiple dimensions of the soft power including diplomatic influence, foreign policy effectiveness, cultural appeal, and other pertinent factors explored within the paper. Additionally, the research underscores both the existing challenges and prospective opportunities influencing Pakistan's soft power. Detailed examinations within the paper shed light on obstacles like economic instability, terrorism, and political factors that impact Pakistan's soft power capabilities.

In addition to identifying the challenges, the paper also sheds light on the prospects and opportunities that could potentially bolster Pakistan's soft power. By discussing key prospects and opportunities such as the role of Pakistani culture, art, music, education, tourism, and the media and entertainment industry, this study offers actionable insights aimed at leveraging Pakistan's strengths to enhance its soft power.

Keywords: Pakistan, Soft Power, Hard Power, International Relations

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1. INTRODUCTION

Joseph Nye, the pioneer of the concept of soft power, aptly pointed that, “soft power is an important aspect of power yet the most ignored aspect of it.”¹ Joseph’s assertion is right owing to the fact that the concept of soft power has not garnered significant attention within the policy spheres of numerous countries. With the exception of a handful of nations, a significant number of countries, remain largely unaware of the importance of the soft power and have yet to formulate a comprehensive strategy for bolstering their soft power capabilities. Pakistan, unfortunately, is also in the list of such countries.

Despite its significance within a nation's broader power framework, Pakistan has ignored to harness to its soft power. As a result, the country's soft power remains below its potential, encountering various obstacles that hinder its progress. However, there is optimism regarding the potential of Pakistan's soft power, which, if effectively harnessed, could enhance the nation's soft power capabilities.

The fact that a large number of countries including Pakistan paying less emphasis on the soft power prompts an inquiry into the underlying factors contributing to the said lack of emphasis on soft power. Addressing this inquiry entails revisiting the fundamental concept of power within the context of International Relations. The concept of power in International Relations is a complex one and has historically carried a bias towards hard power, a type of power that mainly relies on coercive means such as

¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, First Edition (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

military intervention, economic sanctions, and coercive diplomacy to influence the behaviour of others. Nations that possess huge armies and robust economic bases are normally considered powerful countries in International Relations.² Consequently, what most countries do is that they spend huge amounts of resources and energies on this particular aspect of power while simultaneously ignoring another key aspect of power i.e soft power.

The term soft power was coined by the American Political Scientist Joseph Nye in the 1990s. Soft Power according to Nye is the country's ability to influence others to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and foreign policies.³ Soft power plays a pivotal role in shaping the international image and perception of a country and has gained heightened significance in the contemporary era of globalization. In this interconnected world, where countries are subject to constant scrutiny from a globally interconnected audience, the perception and image of nations hold substantial importance.⁴

This perception of a country holds importance because it impacts the trajectory of the development of a country. To put it bluntly, a positive perception can attract foreign investments, amplify diplomatic influence, and elevate a nation's global standing.

² Daniel Drezner, "Power and International Relations: A Temporal View," *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 29–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120969800>.

³ Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, First Edition (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

⁴ Shashi Tharoor, "India as a Soft Power," *India International Centre Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2008): 32–45.

Conversely, a negative perception can deter investments and diminish diplomatic clout.⁵ Hence, for positive perception and for the overall development of a country, a nation needs to harness its soft power.

Against this backdrop, this paper is an attempt to assess where Pakistan currently stands in terms of its soft power and to additionally explore the challenges it faces and the potential prospects for enhancing its soft power capabilities in the future.

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF PAKISTAN'S SOFT POWER

There are multiple ways of assessing a country's soft power. One such method involves considering the prevailing mental images associated with a particular country. For instance, when one contemplates about United States, the mental image often centres around cutting-edge technology and the highest number of Nobel laureates in the world. Similarly, when one thinks of China, the image appears in one's mind include "Made in China," being relentless, and being an emerging superpower; for Japan, it entails some of the biggest electronics conglomerates in the world, and cutting-edge innovations; and for India it includes emerging software hub and a huge market economy.

In the same line, if we are to assess Pakistan's soft power, we can recourse to the image that appeared in one's mind while thinking about the country. So, when thoughts turn to Pakistan, the prevalent mental image tends to be dominated by terrorism, intolerance, fundamentalism, gender disparity, political instability, and chronic economic stagnation. A telling example is a 2016 survey conducted among members of

⁵ "Soft Power: Why It Matters to Governments, People, and Brands | Brand Finance," February 25, 2020, <https://brandfinance.com/insights/soft-power-why-it-matters>.

the Foreign Service Programme class at the University of Oxford, predominantly comprising diplomats from various nations. When posed with the question, "What three things come to mind when you hear about Pakistan?" A large number of respondents highlighted themes such as terrorism, security concerns, Islam, nuclear capabilities, and the Taliban, lending support to the general view of Pakistan as a militarized state plagued by terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism.⁶

The net impact of this negative image is that Pakistanis are normally looked upon negatively in other countries. Notably, at airports, individuals carrying Pakistani passports, which rank as the fourth worst passport globally, often encounter heightened scrutiny and harsh treatment. Beyond travel difficulties, these negative perceptions are also affecting employment opportunities, social interactions, and educational experiences for Pakistanis abroad.

There is another useful approach to assess a country's soft power. The approach includes examining the country's rankings across various indicators associated with different facets of soft power. By adopting this methodology, we can also make an assessment of Pakistan's soft power. To get a better insight we will compare the rankings of Pakistan with those of other countries in the region. So, in the recent 2023 Global Soft Power Index, conducted by the brand evaluation consultancy 'Brand Finance,' Pakistan has descended to the 84th position out of 121 countries, a decline

⁶ Nadir Cheema, "Pakistan's Global Image: Perception and Causes," *The Royal Society for Asian Affairs*, November 16, 2016, <https://rsaa.org.uk/blog/pakistans-global-image-perception-causes/>.

from its 63rd placement in 2021. It is significantly lagging behind its regional rival, India, which holds the 28th spot in the concerned Index.⁷

Similarly, in the 2023 annual Lowy Institute Asia Power Index, Pakistan's standing in several aspects of soft power is detailed, providing a comprehensive assessment of Pakistan's Soft Power. The annual index gauges resources and influence, evaluating the relative power of 26 Asian countries across eight thematic measures and 133 indicators. In the following paragraphs we will shed light on these various indicators to show where Pakistan stands in it.

2.1 Diplomatic Influence

Diplomatic influence is a country's ability to influence the decisions, actions, or attitudes of other nations or international actors through diplomatic means. This influence is often exercised through various channels such as formal negotiations, bilateral and multilateral discussions, treaties, cultural exchanges, economic partnerships, etc.⁸ In terms of diplomatic influence, Pakistan holds the 18th position in the 2023 Lowy Institute Power Index. However, in contrast to it, India secures the 4th position in the same index, underscoring its growing diplomatic influence on the global stage.⁹

⁷ "Brand Finance Soft Power Index 2023," SCRIBD, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.scribd.com/document/672775143/Brand-Finance-Soft-Power-Index-2023>.

⁸ "Diplomatic Influence - Lowy Institute Asia Power Index," Lowy Institute, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/explore/diplomatic-influence/>.

⁹ Jack Sato, Herve Lemahieu, and Susannah Patton, "Asia Power Index 2023 Key Findings Report" (Lowy Institute, 2023).

2.2 Cultural Appeal

In the context of soft power, the cultural appeal of a country refers to the attractiveness and influence exerted by the country's cultural assets, such as its traditions, values, arts, music, literature, cuisine, entertainment, and overall lifestyle on the global stage. When it comes to the cultural appeal, Pakistan ranked 20th in the Lowy Institute Power Index whereas on the other hand India stood at 4th position.¹⁰

2.3 People-to-People Ties

People-to-people ties hold significant importance, in the context of soft power. It is a key source of dispelling misconceptions about a country and helps in establishing mutual understanding, trust, and collaboration between the states. According to the 2023 Lowy Institute Power Index, Pakistan ranks 23rd in terms of its people-to-people connection. However, on the other hand, India demonstrates strong people-to-people ties, securing the 3rd position.¹¹

2.4 Effectiveness of the Foreign Policy

An effective foreign policy plays a pivotal role in amplifying the soft power of a country by strategically leveraging its diplomatic, economic, cultural, and ideological assets to cultivate a positive image and influence of the country. In terms of foreign policy effectiveness, Pakistan stands at the 20th position whereas India stands at the 6th position in the 2023 Lowy Institute Power Index.¹²

¹⁰ Sato, Lemahieu, and Patton.

¹¹ Sato, Lemahieu, and Patton.

¹² Sato, Lemahieu, and Patton.

2.5 Economic Capability

There will be no exaggeration in arguing that of all the factors, economic strength and capability is one of the key factors that significantly influences a country's soft power. It is no coincidence that the countries wielding enormous soft power are also big economies. In the context of economic capability, Pakistan occupies the 18th position on the 2023 Lowy Institute Power Index, while India surpasses Pakistan, securing the 4th position on the same index.¹³

2.6 Influence of Diaspora

The influence of a diaspora plays a significant role in shaping its home country's image on the global stage within the framework of soft power. Diaspora populations, dispersed across various nations, serve as cultural ambassadors, economic bridges, and influential networks that project their homeland's values, traditions, and interests across the world. In the 2023 Lowy Institute Power Index, Pakistan ranked 15th in terms of its diaspora influence. India on the other hand excels at 2nd position in the said index shedding light on the disparity in their respective diaspora influence.¹⁴

The extensive discussion on various elements of soft power and Pakistan's standing in it aims to highlight the current situation of Pakistan's Soft Power. By analysing these rankings, especially in comparison with India, it can be inferred that Pakistan's Soft Power is far from ideal. While the country has demonstrated its prowess in the Hard Power capabilities as illustrated by its 9th position out of 145 countries in the 2024

¹³ Sato, Lemahieu, and Patton.

¹⁴ Sato, Lemahieu, and Patton.

Global Firepower Ranking,¹⁵ there exists a pressing need to bolster its soft power capabilities. It needs to increase its efforts by addressing the challenges that impede the country's Soft Power. Next, we will discuss some of these challenges.

3. CHALLENGES TO PAKISTAN'S SOFT POWER

Pakistan's soft power faces several significant challenges, notably economic instability, political instability, and terrorism. By employing the theoretical framework of Social Constructivism, a prominent paradigm in International Relations, one can shed light on how these challenges undermine the country's soft power. Social Constructivism argues that reality, which can be about anything ranging from a group of people to countries, is socially constructed through shared perceptions, norms, and interpretations.¹⁶ In this context, economic instability, political instability, and terrorism contribute to the formation of shared negative perceptions about Pakistan within the international community which in turn is creating a negative reality about the country in international community. These challenges reinforce negative stereotypes such as governance dysfunction, poverty, and insecurity, consequently tarnishing Pakistan's image and undermining its soft power.

Following this introduction, subsequent paragraphs will delve into each of these challenges to elucidate how they undermine the country's soft power.

¹⁵ "2024 Military Strength Ranking," Global Firepower, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>.

¹⁶ Richard Jackson, Georg Sørensen, and Jørgen Møller, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, 7th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

3.1 Economic Instability

Joseph Nye, the pioneer of the concept of Soft Power, was right when he said: “Economy is Soft Power”.¹⁷ A stable economy is incumbent on the country’s Soft Power in many ways. For instance, a stable economy allows a nation to wield soft power through trade partnerships, development assistance, and loans and aid to other countries. China and the United States are the primary examples in this regard. Both countries are using their economic muscles to increase their soft power as evidenced by initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for infrastructure development and the United States' humanitarian efforts through agencies like USAID. Both countries utilize these programs to present themselves as global leaders in development and champions of humanity worldwide.

While economic stability functions as a crucial pillar for a country's soft power, conversely, economic instability can undermine its soft power potential.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Pakistan finds itself in the latter category.

Pakistan’s precarious economic situation has damaged its soft power globally. Its economy is heavily dependent on foreign assistance. The nation’s dependency on financial assistance is evident from its recent 23rd bailout from the International

¹⁷ Maxime Gomichon, “Joseph Nye on Soft Power,” *E-International Relations* (blog), March 8, 2013, <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/08/joseph-nye-on-soft-power/>.

¹⁸ Daniele Carminati, “The Economics of Soft Power: Reliance on Economic Resources and Instrumentality in Economic Gains,” *Economic and Political Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 19–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20954816.2020.1865620>.

Monetary Fund (IMF) since 1958¹⁹, highlighting persistent economic challenges faced by the country.

Moreover, according to reports, approximately 700,000 workers have faced unemployment in recent times due to the shutdown of roughly 1,600 textile factories within Pakistan. These closures primarily result from the increasing costs of electricity and gas, affecting one-third of the nation's textile manufacturing units. Significantly, these textile industries constitute a pivotal sector of Pakistan's economy, accounting for 60% of its total export revenues.²⁰

Not only the textile industries but a bunch of Pakistan's biggest companies have also halted their operations due to shortages of raw materials and foreign exchange, or a combination of both factors. For instance, the local branch of Suzuki Motor Corp. announced an extension of its manufacturing plant shutdown, citing a shortage of parts.²¹ These developments further exacerbate the challenges faced by Pakistan's economy as it strives to avoid a potential default.

Lastly, burdened by debt repayments and a rising import bill, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves are sharply declining. For instance, in December 2023, the country's

¹⁹ Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan Receives 23 IMF Bailouts in 75 Years," *DAWN.COM*, sec. business, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1803805>.

²⁰ Aamir Shafaat Khan, "7 Million People Laid off in Textile Industry, Associations Claim," *DAWN.COM*, January 10, 2023, sec. business, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1730864>.

²¹ "Inventory Crunch Forces Pak Suzuki to Extend Plant Shutdown," *The News International*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1041585-inventory-crunch-forces-pak-suzuki-to-extend-plant-shutdown>.

foreign exchange reserves experienced a significant drop of \$237 million, primarily attributed to debt repayments.²²

These disturbing economic indicators do not resonate well with the global audience and present a significant challenge to Pakistan's soft power, particularly in an increasingly globalised world where a country's economic strength significantly influences its global image. Take, for instance, India and the UAE. Both nations have recently experienced a boost in their diplomatic clout and international reputation due to their expanding economies. Interestingly, this occurs even though both countries have displayed increased authoritarian tendencies, politically, in recent years, particularly notable in the case of India.

3.2 Political Instability

Having explored the implications of Pakistan's fragile economic landscape on its soft power, our focus now shifts to another critical and intertwined determinant: Political Instability. In tandem with economic stability, a nation's soft power also depends significantly on its perceived political stability characterized by effective governance, rule of law, strong institutions, and a predictable political environment. When a country grapples with political instability, frequent leadership changes, or governance crises, it undermines its attractiveness as a partner to countries around the world by creating perceptions of unpredictability, potential internal strife, and a lack of cohesive national vision. Hence, it also undermines its soft power.

²² "Forex Reserves Record \$237m Decline," *The Express Tribune*, December 2023, sec. News, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2449299/forex-reserves-record-237m-decline>.

Unfortunately, Pakistan has a long history of such political instability. Since its establishment in 1947, Pakistan grappled with political instability. The central government's authority eroded over time due to rampant corruption and internal conflicts. In 1958, the military launched its inaugural coup, ushering in thirteen years of centralized military. Although the military ceded power back to civilian authorities in 1971, subsequent years saw two additional patches of military rule from 1977 to 1988 and 1999 to 2007. Even during ostensibly civilian administrations, the military consistently operated as the primary power arbiter, manipulating alliances and government formations. The protracted political instability in Pakistan can be gauged from the fact that out of the twenty-nine individuals who have served as prime minister since Pakistan's inception, none have managed to complete a full tenure of five years.²³

The matter of concern is that the said political instability has only worsened in recent years. Though the elections are due to be held on February 8th, there is uncertainty as to whether the elections will be held or not, especially after the passage of a non-binding resolution by the members of Pakistan's senate calling for a delay in general elections.²⁴ Additionally, heightened concerns arise as top lawyer bodies in the country have rejected holding polls under the current leadership of the Election Commission.²⁵

The cumulative impact of this growing political instability is that it is significantly undermining Pakistan's Soft Power by eroding international confidence in Pakistan's

²³ "Instability in Pakistan," Council on Foreign Relations, December 12, 2023, <https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/islamist-militancy-pakistan>.

²⁴ Abid Hussain, "Pakistan's Senate Approves Resolution to Delay February 8 General Elections," Al Jazeera, January 5, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/5/pakistan-senate-approves-resolution-to-delay-february-8-elections-reports>.

²⁵ "Uncertainty Mounts in Pakistan as Lawyers Reject Polls under Election Commission Chief," Arab News, December 19, 2023, <https://arab.news/pkjjx4>.

governance structures. It is hindering foreign investments in Pakistan as investors' confidence is waning, with concerns mounting over the government's ability to execute its planned initiatives effectively. Subsequently, it is also negatively impacting the economic growth of the country, and diminishing its credibility as a reliable ally and partner in regional and international affairs.

3.3 Terrorism

Terrorism serves as another crucial challenge to Pakistan's Soft Power. Over the last two decades, it has significantly tarnished the image of Pakistan so much so that the country is now almost associated with terrorism. This association of Pakistan with terrorism is mainly to do with the scourge of terrorism that has engulfed the country at least since 2001 after becoming an ally of the United States in its so-called 'war on terror.' After witnessing a brief respite between the year 2016 and 2020, terrorism in the country is once again on the surge posing a major challenge to the country's Soft Power. The year 2023 alone witnessed 664 terrorist attacks across the country, marking a substantial 67% increase compared to the preceding year, 2022.²⁶

Pakistan has borne a staggering human and economic toll. Between 2004 and 2016 alone, the nation suffered approximately 80,000 casualties, including 50,000 civilians, 7,000 security personnel, and 27,000 militants, due to various terrorist incidents.

²⁶ Abid Hussain, "What Explains the Dramatic Rise in Armed Attacks in Pakistan?," Al Jazeera, December 21, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/21/what-explains-the-dramatic-rise-in-armed-attacks-in-pakistan>.

Furthermore, on the economic front, Pakistan's losses attributed to terrorism amounted to a staggering \$126.79 billion from 2001 to 2018.²⁷

However, the greatest casualty of terrorism remains the country's soft power. Terrorism has dealt a blow to Pakistan's Soft Power. Frequent terrorist incidents have perpetuated perceptions of instability, and insecurity regarding the country among the international community and potential investors. Such incidents not only highlight security concerns but also raise questions about Pakistan's ability to effectively combat extremism and safeguard its citizens. As a result, terrorism serves as a crucial challenge, undermining Pakistan's soft power and diminishing its influence on the global stage thus necessitating urgent attention and action.

4. PROSPECTS FOR PAKISTAN'S SOFT POWER

Despite the challenges that have been discussed at length earlier, there also exist promising prospects for Pakistan's Soft Power. Pakistan is a nation blessed with a rich culture, history, and strategic geopolitical significance. By leveraging all these elements, through proper policy planning, the country can certainly enhance its Soft Power capabilities.

4.1 Literature, Art, and Music

One of Pakistan's most potent soft power assets lies in the country's vibrant cultural heritage. The country's literature, arts, and music have resonated globally, offering a window into its rich traditions. In the realm of literature, Pakistan can leverage the works

²⁷ "Impact of War in Afghanistan and Ensuing Terrorism on Pakistan's Economy" (Finance Division Govt of Pakistan, n.d.), https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_18/Annex_IV_Impact%20of%20War.pdf.

of towering figures, such as the works of national poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal, which are being taught in foreign universities, to enhance its soft power. As a visionary philosopher, poet, and key intellectual figure, Iqbal's writings, which are quite famous in the Islamic world, reflect the essence of Islamic thought, unity, and spiritual awakening. The government can strategically promote these works of Iqbal through international events, conferences, and educational programs, and by translating his poetry to showcase Pakistan's cultural and intellectual depth. By doing so, Pakistan can create a positive image, fostering a deeper understanding of its rich heritage.

Similarly, Pakistani music, ranging from Qawwali to contemporary pop, has captivated audiences worldwide. Pakistan can harness the immense cultural legacy left by legendary musicians such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Mehdi Hassan among others to elevate its soft power. These iconic figures have made significant contributions to classical and qawwali music, leaving a significant mark on the world of music. The government can highlight their timeless works through international music festivals, collaborations, and digital platforms.

Pakistan's contemporary music exemplified by platforms like Coke Studio, is also garnering international attention, making headlines worldwide. Launched in 2008, Coke Studio is one of the most popular television shows in the world. Through its unique mix of traditional and contemporary music, it encapsulates the nation's rich musical heritage while showcasing its vibrant cultural diversity to international audiences. In the past few years, it has emerged as a compelling cultural phenomenon for Pakistan with the potential to significantly amplify Pakistan's soft power on the global stage due to its tremendous popularity. Notably, the platform has produced several global hit songs.

While the platform operates independently, there is untapped potential for collaboration with the government of Pakistan which can leverage the influence and reach of the platform to further enhance the nation's soft power.

4.2 Geostrategic Location

Pakistan's significant geostrategic location serves as another key asset that can bolster the country's soft power. Situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan enjoys strategic importance, making it a crucial player in regional geopolitics and world affairs. The strategic positioning offers Pakistan opportunities to facilitate trade, regional connectivity, and diplomatic engagements and thus to emerge as a country that is all up for development and prosperity. Though the country is already engaged in several regional connectivity endeavours such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, to name a few, there is even greater potential. By further leveraging its geostrategic position to promote regional integration and cooperation, Pakistan can significantly bolster its soft power.

4.3 Pakistan's Higher Education

Given the precarious situation of the country's higher education, it might sound a bit unconventional, however, Pakistan's Higher Education can also serve as an important soft power avenue that remains underutilised by Pakistan. Student exchange programmes are cost-effective and sustainable methods of developing a state's soft power. Programs like Fulbright and Chevening attract students from around the world

and play a significant role in boosting the soft power of the United States and United Kingdom respectively.²⁸

While Pakistan's military academies already train cadets from South Asia and the Middle East, there's much more room to grow in the broader education sector. Although only one Pakistani university rank within the top 500 and ten within the top 1200 globally²⁹, this still places Pakistan ahead of regional counterparts like Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Sri Lanka. Pakistan could leverage these rankings to attract students from these strategically important nations, showcasing its rich culture and values while fostering them as future ambassadors for Pakistan in their home country.

In this regard, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan can jointly establish leadership and Student Exchange programmes targeting youth from emerging economies. While Pakistan can face competition from India, because its educational institutes rank comparatively better than those of Pakistan, it holds a distinct advantage rooted in its unique cultural identity. For instance, as a Muslim-majority nation where Urdu is written in the Arabic script, Pakistan offers a familiar academic and social environment that may be more accessible and relatable for students from various South, Central, and West Asian countries. This cultural alignment can enhance Pakistan's appeal as a welcoming destination for international students.

²⁸ Priya Gauttam et al., "Education as a Soft Power Resource: A Systematic Review," *Heliyon* 10, no. 1 (January 15, 2024): e23736, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e23736>.

²⁹ "Only One Pakistani University Ranks among World's Top 500," Arab News, October 13, 2022, <https://arab.news/b5wxz>.

4.4 Pakistan's Media and Entertainment Industry

Of all the tools at the disposal of the country, the Media and Entertainment Industry serves as an important soft power toolkit. Media outlets such as Al Jazeera, CNN, BBC, and TRT have a global presence, drawing audiences to their respective countries' political and cultural values.³⁰ Similarly, when it comes to entertainment, industries like Hollywood and Bollywood are playing a central role in enhancing the worldwide appeal of the United States and India respectively.

Despite having a well-developed media sector, Pakistan's media outlets struggle to capture global audiences, limiting the country's ability to convey its perspectives internationally. The electronic and print media largely focus on topics tailored for the domestic audience. The same is the case with the country's entertainment industry, which rarely generated content worthy of export.

However, Pakistan has the potential to enhance its soft power through its media industry. The state-owned Pakistan Television (PTV) could serve as a valuable tool in this regard. Despite facing challenges, PTV can be brought to the level of TRT and Al Jazeera given the government takes certain necessary measures. First, the government should invest in better technology and upgrade the broadcasting infrastructure of the PTV for improved quality. It can collaborate with experienced media professionals, both locally and globally which can bring fresh perspectives on increasing the reach of the channel. The channel also needs to revisit its editorial policy and diversify its programs

³⁰ Thomas Borghols, "The Credibility of Transnational, English-Language News Media in the Middle East: From the Al Jazeera Effect, to the PressTV and the TRT World Effect?" (Master of Arts, Universiteit Leiden, 2019), <https://staff-studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2667723/view>.

to attract a wider audience. Furthermore, it needs to embrace digital platforms and online streaming that can keep the audiences engaged through interactive content.

As far as the entertainment industry is concerned, the government can allocate funding for projects that spotlight Pakistan's diverse cultural heritage. By translating these programmes into foreign languages and distributing them on global platforms like Netflix, Pakistan can effectively showcase its cultural narratives to international audiences. In this regard, Pakistan can learn from Türkiye which has effectively utilised its famous TV serials “Diriliş: Ertuğrul” and “Kuruluş Osman” to promote its culture and history around the world.

4.5 Tourism

Tourism serves as another potent avenue for bolstering Pakistan's soft power. Pakistan has diverse landscapes to offer for tourism. Consider the northern areas of the country for that matter. In the north, we have picturesque destinations such as the Deosai National Park, capable of leaving people in awe.

Located at the confluence of the Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges in northern Gilgit-Baltistan, Deosai National Park stands as a captivating destination renowned for its rich flora and fauna. Spanning on 3000 sq kilometres, it carries the title of the roof of the planet Earth.³¹

Despite its potential allure to global tourists, the destination has yet to reach its full potential in terms of attracting tourists due to several challenges. First, currently, the road to the park from Skardu is in dire condition, hindering accessibility. The Pakistani

³¹ Haroon Arshad, “Deosai - Roof of the World,” *The Nation*, September 11, 2017, sec. Blogs, <https://nation.com.pk/11-Sep-2017/deosai-roof-of-the-world>.

government must prioritize infrastructure development, ensuring well-maintained roads and visitor facilities.

Furthermore, the government needs to actively champion sustainable tourism practices and implement robust conservation measures to safeguard the natural assets of the park. This urgency comes to light, as recent news featuring images depicting numerous empty bottles and plastic wrappers littering the landscape of the national park emerged on social media.

Additionally, the government needs to invest in interpretive centers and guided tours which are pivotal to educate visitors about the unique ecosystem and cultural significance of the park. Additionally, the government should embrace digital marketing and social media campaigns to enhance global awareness apropos of the park and its rich diversity to attract a diverse audience.

Furthermore, the northern regions of Pakistan hold significant potential for attracting tourists through mountaineering. The global market for mountain and snow tourism is expected to reach US\$8 billion by 2033. To tap into this international market, Pakistani decision-makers should strategically promote the country's distinctive mountain sites, boasting 5 out of the 14 peaks worldwide with elevations of 8,000 meters or above. Additionally, Pakistan features over 100 peaks surpassing 7,000 meters in height.

To fully exploit the opportunities in mountaineering, the government should collaborate with both local and international mountaineering agencies. This collaboration should focus on establishing reasonable destination charges, enhancing

facilitation, organizing guided expeditions, providing essential gear for rent or purchase, and implementing a robust rescue mechanism, among other measures.

In the southern part, Pakistan has immense potential for maritime tourism. Pakistan boasts a stunning coastline stretching across 1,046 kilometres. Along this beautiful coastal line, there are 12 captivating islands within the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan. To fully exploit this potential, the government needs to establish well-equipped rest areas every 50 kilometres along the coastline, featuring amenities like tuck shops, motels, beachside huts, camping sites, and sunbathing spaces. The government can also leverage Pakistan's rich marine biodiversity by creating designated fishing points along the coastline, providing facilities for both recreational and sport fishing to promote tourism practices. Lastly, the government should actively seek foreign investors for the development of tourism along the coastal line.

Last but not least, Pakistan is home to a wealth of historical sites, including the archaeological wonders of Taxila and Mohenjo-Daro, along with six UNESCO World Heritage sites. To optimize the full potential of this historical tourism, the government needs to implement rigorous conservation measures to safeguard archaeological sites and ensure their longevity. This includes investments in restoration, protective infrastructure, and ongoing monitoring. It needs to improve the infrastructure around these historical sites, providing amenities such as information centres, guided tours, and well-maintained pathways. Moreover, the government can also introduce educational programs at historical sites to inform visitors about their significance. This could include exhibitions and workshops, enhancing the educational value of these attractions.

Recognizing the significance of tourism in enhancing the country's soft power, the government has undertaken initiatives and investments. A noteworthy step is the inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor, facilitating Sikh pilgrims from India to visit the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan. The government has also launched a dedicated tourism channel, "Discover Pakistan," to promote tourism domestically and internationally. Despite these efforts, there is considerable room for improvement.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the assessment of Pakistan's Soft Power reveals that it is riddled with a number of challenges that significantly hamper its potential. The economic instability, coupled with political volatility and persistent issues of terrorism, have collectively cast shadows on Pakistan's soft power by eroding trust among potential allies and investors and also by undermining efforts to foster meaningful international partnerships. However, amidst these challenges lie latent opportunities that, if properly tapped, can rejuvenate Pakistan's soft power. The nation's rich culture encompassing art, music, literature, and its diverse heritage, can serve as a potential reservoir for the country's soft power. Additionally, sectors like tourism, media, and higher education present promising prospects for enhancing country's soft power.

Moreover, in an era of globalisation and interconnectedness, where public opinion does matter, Pakistan's policymakers must recognize that in such a system, soft power acts as a force multiplier, complementing the hard power. As such, it becomes imperative for Pakistan to embark on comprehensive reforms, addressing internal challenges while capitalising on available opportunities for increasing its soft power.

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