

EMPLOYING NATION BRANDING AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: STRATEGIES FOR PAKISTAN

*Saima Ashraf Kayani and Muhammad Saif ur Rehman**

Abstract

In the 21st century, states use nation-branding techniques to safeguard their national interests. They employ public diplomacy strategies to maintain their international image. Through branding techniques and public diplomacy strategies, nations can build a positive image among the committee of nations. It is argued in this paper that the international image of Pakistan is required to be improved, and there is a need to shun the notion of negative characteristics associated with terrorism, religious extremism, Talibanization, and allegedly branding as a failed state. There is also a need to study the mindset for conducting various surveys about Pakistan's image and its sponsors. The main argument of this research work is that Pakistan has all the variables required for nation branding and building positive public perception. To improve its international image, Pakistan has to adopt innovative nation-branding techniques and public diplomacy strategies.

Keywords: Pakistan, Nation Branding, International Image, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power.

Technological innovations and advancements have fundamentally transformed the world, and so did the related concepts of international relations. The concept of power and foreign policy determinants has also been changing. Presently, reputation and image are considered essential determinants of a state's foreign policy. According to Maleeha Lodhi, "Increasingly a country's reputation and positive image count and play a pivotal role in earning respect and enhancing its diplomatic weight in international affairs."¹ States like the US, China, Germany, France, and many others are allocating sizeable resources to safeguard their international image and project themselves as soft power rather than hard power entities. States also resort to nation branding strategies and public diplomacy policies for image building.

Today, countries are compared in terms of their leadership, democratic processes, economic developments, political values, cultural attractions, tourism, and much more. States like Pakistan, therefore, need to strategize their public diplomacy and nation branding policies to achieve their foreign policy objectives and economic

¹Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani is Chairperson of the Department of International Relations, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi. Dr Muhammad Saif ur Rehman is a Senior Research Fellow (Head of International Relations Desk), Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad.

development. It would help Pakistan achieve its domestic and foreign policy objectives and raise its stature in the comity of nations. The same has been argued in this paper that there is a dire need to remove negative perceptions allegedly harming Pakistan's reputation and improve its international image through vibrant public diplomacy and strong nation branding techniques. The first section of this paper deals with contextualizing the concept of nation branding and its importance along with the understanding of public diplomacy, as many scholars believe that nation branding and public diplomacy go hand in hand. The second section deals with the international image of Pakistan; the third section is about the variables of nation branding for Pakistan; and finally, the way forward and concluding remarks are given.

Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: The Concept

Traditionally, the International Relations domain covers the themes like peace, war, diplomacy, alliances, human rights, etc. Recently, the domain of International Relations has seen expansion, and new themes like non-state actors, human security, image building, nation branding, and public diplomacy have been included in the subject realm. Every state has some international image and perceptions, and it is on the edifice of those images that other states make their policies towards that state. Previously, images played a role in building relations among states and helping them achieve their national and foreign policy objectives; however, in the era of globalization, states are under constant media surveillance, and those images have also been revolutionized in the 21st century. Roland Bleiker identified the following reasons for the growing importance of a country's image in global politics.²

a) Visual Communication Revolution

Modern means of communication, like the internet, have revolutionized the world. With the internet, any news or image can go global, and local news becomes international within a click.

b) Democratization of Visual Politics

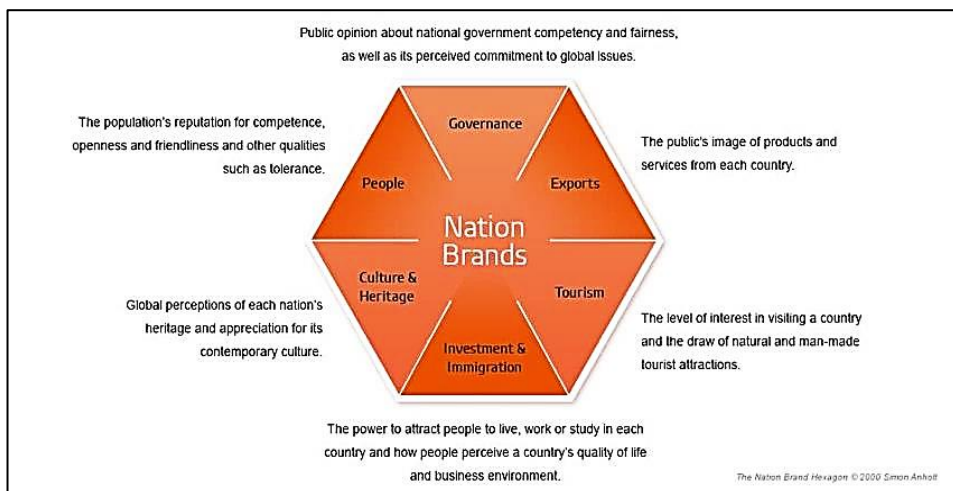
Today, every individual holding a smartphone in his or her hand can take a picture and share it with the entire world through social media platforms.³ Likewise, the role and importance of images and reputation in international politics have been increasing to achieve foreign policy objectives, win public opinion of targeted states, attain economic and commercial goals, accomplish political and diplomatic missions internationally, attract visitors and foreign direct investment, increase exports and tourism, develop friendly relations, and restrain conflicts.

To comprehend the term 'nation branding,' it is essential to be clear about the word 'brand.' According to the American Marketing Association (2017), the brand is a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers."⁴ Therefore, "brands are more than just

names and symbols. They represent consumers' perceptions and feelings about products and their performance – everything the product or service means to them. Thus, the real value of a strong brand is its power to capture consumer preference and loyalty.⁵ Jean-Noel Kanferer identifies the meanings of the word 'brand' as attributes, benefits, values, culture, and personality.⁶ For Simon Anholt, three things are associated with a brand, i.e., the designed identity of a product, the culture of an organization, and the corporation's reputation.⁷ He believes that how different countries present themselves to the rest of the world is nation branding, and a country's positive image can be considered an asset. Just like in the past, natural resources, a strong military and geography were considered assets for a country.⁸ Simon Anholt, the father of nation branding, coined the term 'nation branding' in 1996. Simon identifies three processes for branding a state: strategy, substance, and symbolic actions.⁹

Later, academic scholars explained the term 'nation branding'; today, this term is interchangeable with 'state branding' and 'country branding.' According to Fan, nation branding is "a process by which a nation's images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed to enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience."¹⁰ For Dinnie, nation branding is "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all its target audiences."¹¹ Aronczyk explains that nation branding should "attract the right kinds of investment, tourism, trade, and talent."¹² Simon Anholt developed Nation Brands Index (NBI) and City Brands Index (CBI) to measure people's views about places around the world. This measurement is developed as a hexagon, consisting of six components: exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people, and tourism.¹³ Therefore, "nation brand is the sum of people's perceptions of a country across six areas of national competence."¹⁴

Figure 1: Nation Brands Hexagon



(Source: nation-brands.gfk.com)

Some scholars consider nation branding synonymous with public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is associated with government efforts to improve its image among the foreign public to achieve its foreign policy objectives. It is also known as people's diplomacy. Public diplomacy's primary goal is to enhance the country's image among targeted foreign audiences. This image management benefits the state regarding economic development, foreign investment, tourism, support for foreign policies, greater cooperation and protect national interests. There are different methods and instruments practitioners of public diplomacy use, such as media, culture, celebrities, sports, education, art, etc. Academics also identify similarities between public diplomacy and nation branding. Both work to improve the image of a country. They target foreign audiences, attract investors, achieve foreign policy objectives and create mutual understanding and cooperation.

Nicholas J. Cull mentions that in the public diplomacy domain, non-state actors are prominent. Non-state actors and states use modern technology to communicate (live communication through the internet). New concepts of soft power, including people-to-people contacts, branding, international image, and prestige, have become the buzzwords. Now, rather than propaganda or psychological warfare, states choose public diplomacy to build relations overseas, which distorts the distinction between national and international news.¹⁵

The importance of a country's perception is clear from the example of the US. The US once secured fourth place in the Best Countries Ranking, which was reduced to 8th in 2018. US tourism, international students' enrolment, openness to business, political stability, gender equality, and trustworthiness were the areas that showed declining trends. It is because President Donald Trump (2017-2021) ordered a ban on traveling of citizens from Muslim countries, immigration was restricted, withdrew from Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and started a trade war with China.¹⁶ He also did not accept the 2020-Presidential election results, resulting in a global decline in the image and perception of the US. However, some states are successfully pursuing their nation branding programs.

Table 1: Active Nation Branding Programs

Country	Slogans of Nation Branding
Bolivia	The Authentic Still Exists
Costa Rica	Peaceful Destination
Dubai	The Jewel in the Desert
Egypt	Destination Egypt
Estonia	Positively Transforming
Iceland	Iceland Naturally
India	Incredible India
Malaysia	Truly Asia
Singapore	Uniquely Singapore
South Africa	Alive with Possibility
Sri Lanka	The Pearl of the Indian Ocean
Thailand	Amazing Thailand

(Source: <https://oaji.net/articles/2014/800-1398831146.pdf>)

In 2002, India started its international tourism campaign under the brand name 'Incredible India,' aiming to increase tourism in India. For this campaign, marketing firm services were also hired. Incredible India was received favourably throughout the world. In 2017, an Incredible 2.0 campaign was launched to promote India's cuisine, wildlife, yoga, and other aspects on social media. These campaigns resulted in a sizeable increase in foreign tourists from 2.38 million (in 2002) to 7.7 million (in 2014).¹⁷ According to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, India held 65th position in 2013; in 2017, it climbed to 40th position; in 2019, it jumped to 34th position, and presently India's tourism, domestic and foreign, is progressing.

International Image of Pakistan

Every country has a public image among international audiences in this age of modern technology. These images, positive or negative, determine the country's standing and place among the community of nations. Different indexes, polls and surveys measure any country's international image and standing. Some to mention are BBC Country Rating Poll, the Legatum Prosperity Index, Nation Brand Index, Country Brand Index, the Elcano Global Presence Index, Best Countries Ranking, and many others.

Currently, Pakistan is facing an image dilemma among different surveys, polls, and indexes, all reflecting the negative image of Pakistan. In 2016, a survey was conducted on the international image of Pakistan, which was not encouraging but instead portrayed Pakistan's negative image.¹⁸ Ying Fan and Akram Shahani, in the article "Country Image of Pakistan: A Preliminary Study," mentioned the BBC Country Rating Poll-2011 results, which showed an increase in the negative perception of Pakistan among different states.¹⁹ The Legatum Prosperity Index-2021 reviewed the performance of 167 countries on the indicators such as safety and security, personal freedom, governance, investment environment, enterprise conditions, market access and infrastructure, economic quality, living conditions, health, education and natural environment. According to the index, out of 167, Pakistan secured 138th position.²⁰ According to Corruption Perception Index-2021, out of 180 countries, Pakistan ranks at 140.²¹ Unfortunately, studies on Pakistan's image usually associate Pakistan with terrorism, corruption and political instability,²² and the international image of Pakistan is also reflected as unfavourable. To improve its standing among nation-states, Pakistan has to apply a blend of nation branding strategies and public diplomacy approaches.

Nation Branding Variables of Pakistan

The most important pillar of nation branding is national identity. National identity has many components like culture, shared values, politics, national history, and future aspirations. It provides a sense of belongingness and creates unity in any challenge, internal or external. The international audience perceives national identity in their own way, and national identity is communicated and reflected in the national

brand identity. Pakistan's national identity is Islamic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and exclusive to the Indus valley civilization. On the other hand, the international audience does not truly understand Pakistan's Islamic identity. After the 9/11 incident, the international audience perceived Islamic identity as fundamentalists and extremists; however, Pakistan needs to tell the world that its identity is associated with progressive Islam and pluralistic society.

Pakistan must utilize its archaeological treasures to show its 9000 years old heritage and civilization of Meharghar (Balochistan) and the Indus valley civilization. It is home to several religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Ancient Buddhist sites in Taxila and Mardan, the world's largest cemetery, Makli (a UNESCO world heritage site), and Mughal monuments in Lahore are unexplored treasures in Pakistan, which can be used as national pride for Pakistan. All these need proper maintenance and advertisement. Documentaries on important sites can also bring a better understanding of the hidden treasures of Pakistan.

Tourism has a significant role in branding the nation. The sites mentioned above, and many others can become tourist attractions if linked with cultural or religious activities. Pakistan can promote Religious Tourism as Pakistan has Katas Raj temples (sacred for Hindus), Guru Nanak Sahib and Kartarpur gurdwaras (sacred for Sikhs) and Takhat Bhai (sacred for Buddhism). Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) has identified 480 locations for inbound tourism alone, and all are of religious and historical significance.²³ As a tourist destination, Pakistan can attract followers of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Pakistan also has mesmerizing natural valleys (northern areas), attractive cultural sites, and vast coastal areas (Gwadar).

To promote tourism, the government of Pakistan announced its Brand Pakistan project in 2021. It is a 10-year project (2020-2030) to make Pakistan a friendly tourist destination. This project includes a 5-year action plan for constructing new hotels and launching an ePortal with all relevant information about tourism in Pakistan. According to the Forbes travel guide-2020, Pakistan became part of "The Not Hot List: 10 Best Under-the-Radar Trips for 2020." The reasons cited were hospitality, culture, food, natural sites, history, etc.²⁴ In 2020, Pakistan was also among the best holiday destinations worldwide.²⁵ Pakistan also has unique cultural festival activities like Sibi Mela, Shandur Polo Festival, Silk Route Festival, and Thal Jeep Rally.²⁶ Out of 14, the five highest Peaks in the world are located in Pakistan. The British Backpacker Society ranked Pakistan on the top of the list of 20 Adventure Travel Destinations by mentioning Pakistan as "one of the friendliest countries on earth, with mountain scenery that is beyond anyone's wildest imagination and has every preconception that you have ever held about this area of the world changed forever."²⁷ Pakistan is also a haven for eco-tourism, including Northern areas, wildlife, snow-covered mountains, glaciers and lakes, and beeches. In collaboration with UNDP, the Department of Tourism, Sports, Culture, Architecture

and Youth Affairs, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has successfully launched eco-Tourism and camping village projects.²⁸

Tourism in Pakistan is gradually improving, and the reason behind this is the improved security situation. The Royal Couple's visit (Prince William and Princess Kate Middleton) to Pakistan in October 2019 is evident. There are other encouraging developments in this regard, such as launching an e-Visa Portal (for 175 countries) and visa-on-arrival facility (for 50 countries), user-friendly websites with all required information, clean and safe accommodation like rest houses and hotels and tourists' resorts, the opening of Kartarpur corridor, increase in interfaith harmony and revival of cricket (sports) in Pakistan. Brand Pakistan includes various themes such as religious tourism, cultural festivals, UNESCO world heritage, the world's highest Peaks, natural attractions, and eco-tourism.

Related to tourism is the culture and heritage of Pakistan. Pakistan has more than 15 bigger ethnic groups with their own culture, traditions, values, and festivals. More than 73 languages are spoken in this country. Although Pakistan has diverse influences from Central Asia, West Asia, Afghanistan, India, and the British era, Islamic culture is predominant. Every region has its own traditional regional folklores, folk songs, and music.²⁹ Renowned singers like Nusrat Fateh Ali (Late), Rahat Fateh Ali, Abida Perveen, Sajjad Ali, Arif Lohar, Nazia Hussain (late), and Atif Aslam are world famous. Presently, the song 'Pasoori' by Ali Sethi "has been heralded for transcending boundaries... It has more than 111 million views on YouTube; it was the first Pakistani song to top Spotify's global viral charts and the first Pakistani song to enter its official global songs chart."³⁰ Besides singers, there are world-renowned Pakistani poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who won Lenin Peace Prize and was nominated for the Nobel prize in literature. Further, the Pakistani film 'Joyland' at Cannes Film Festival won the Jury Prize and Queer Palm award in May 2022.

Pakistan's all regions have a rich heritage of traditional culture, food, music, folk stories, festivals and lifestyle, such as Baltistan, Hazara Division, Kalash Valley, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. People of these regions celebrate their cultural activities and festivities. Taking an example of Punjab, people of this region celebrate Basant (kite flying festival to welcome spring), *Baisakhi* or *Vaisakhi* festival (signifies the beginning of the harvest season), and the National Horse and Cattle show. They also have distinct sports (*kabadi* and horse racing), cuisine (*Maki Roti*, *Sarson ka saag*, *Lasi*), musical instruments (dhol, flute, sitar), and dances (*bhangra*, *luddi*, *giddha*, *dandya*). Thus, each region has its unique culture and tradition related to festivals and celebrations.

Pakistan is also well known for its sports and athletes, like cricket (Javed Miandad, Wasim Akram and Babar Azam), Squash (Jahangir Khan and Jan Sher Khan), hockey (Sami Ullah as flying horse), and snooker (Muhammad Yousuf). Ahsan Ramzan becomes the youngest IBSF snooker world champion in March 2022.

Besides modern sports, Pakistanis are also famous for traditional games. In 1994, Pakistan was the world champion of snooker, cricket, hockey and squash.

Table 2: Culture and Heritage in Pakistan

Province	Historical Sights	Food	Dress	Sports	Festivals
Balochistan	Mehargarh	Sajji Dum pukht Roosh	Shalwar Kameez, Turban, head scarfs	Hashti	Sibi Festival Buzkashi Sibi Festival
KPK	Taktit Bhai	Seekh kabab Dum Puht	Khalqa Peshawari shalwar	Mukha (Archery)	Kalam Mela
Punjab	Taxila Lahore Fort Shalimar garden Rohtas Fort	Lasi Sagg Makki ki Roti	Shalwar Kameez Dhoti Pagri	Kabaddi (wrestling)	Baishaki Basant
Sindh	Mohangodaro Makli Hill Thatta	Daal Pakwan Kadhi chawal	Shalwar Kameez Sindhi Cap Ajrak	Malakhra (wrestling)	Aekta Jo Dihaarro
Others	Kalash Kashmir Gilgit Baltistan	Capoti gulak, jagai Rogan Josh, Kashmiri Rajma Chapshoro Dao Dao Soup	Goat hairs tunics Shalwar kameez Black colourful dress for women Phern	Yark Racing and Polo Kashmir Premier League Ski, Polo	Chilam Joshi Nouroz, Shandoor polo festival

(Source: Authors' Compilation)

Although Pakistan is a developing country with an agriculture-based and semi-industrialized economy, it is included among the N-11 countries, the emerging economies of the 21st century. Pakistan exports high-quality rice, mangoes, kinnow, cotton, surgical instruments, leather goods, furniture, footballs and seafood.³¹ Further, there are Pakistani brands with global footprints: Markhor (footwear), Shan Foods, RoohAfza, GulAhmad, J., Khaadi, Bar.B.Q. Tonight, Lal Qila, Habib Bank Limited, and National Bank Limited.³² Pakistan's major trading partners are the US, China, UK, Germany, Netherlands, UAE, Spain, Italy, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and France. Pakistan also exports its products to EU countries, North America, Latin America, Australia, the Caribbean and Africa.³³ Pakistani products are in high demand in mentioned countries.

From the above discussion, it seems Pakistan has enough variables to brand itself positively as a friendly tourist destination, a reliable exporter, a place for sports lovers, and a heritor of the Indus valley civilization. However, there are impediments to the positive image of Pakistan; one cannot even deny the propaganda against Pakistan by its arch-rival India. Therefore, Pakistan must realize that change in the international image of Pakistan does not happen just by wishful thinking, and it has to make short-term and long-term strategies with vigilance to counter the enemy's propaganda.

Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy Approaches for Pakistan

Pakistan must work consistently and creatively to achieve its global soft image and positive perception. It can apply public diplomacy approaches, such as listening, advocacy, exchange programs, international broadcasting and cultural diplomacy.³⁴

Firstly, Pakistan must listen to the international community and what they are talking about Pakistan and what kind of image Pakistan has among the community of nations. Through listening, Pakistan can collect information about the country's public perception, especially overseas. As mentioned earlier, the international public perception of Pakistan is questionable and needs to be revamped. The government must present the real Pakistan to the rest of the world. Listening can be done through print, electronic and social media, diplomatic channels, different surveys and opinion polls, targeted surveys, intelligence apparatus, and analysis of media coverage about Pakistan. It will give a complete picture of the perception of Pakistan internationally.

Secondly, Pakistan must develop a well-defined brand and public diplomacy policy. This policy should have a central idea and goal to define.³⁵ It is a kind of strategy for nation branding.³⁶ It is called advocacy; through advocacy, a state can communicate with international audiences for changed public opinion. It must be well structured and well communicated. It will develop trust among the international community, erase misperception and misunderstanding, and help the country advocate its idea.³⁷ Pakistan, through advocacy, can promote 'The Real Pakistan' and tell the international community that Pakistan is not a terrorist or extremist state but a country full of natural beauty, talented people, the cradle of civilization, and a responsible international community member. However, for advocacy, Pakistan has to develop a master plan, coordination among relevant organizations, a team of experts, and targeted audiences. For a nation-brand strategy, a proper organizational structure is much needed.³⁸

Thirdly, Pakistan needs robust cultural diplomacy. It is defined as "an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and or facilitating cultural transmission abroad."³⁹ Pakistan, as mentioned earlier, is blessed with cultural resources and can build its soft image with tourism like cultural tourism, eco-tourism, and religious tourism. Presently Pakistan has National Heritage and Cultural Division looking after cultural affairs and related activities.

Fourthly, exchange diplomacy that provides first-hand information to people overseas. Many countries spend vast amounts of money on exchange programs like the US, China, India, France, Germany, and the UK. These and many other countries offer scholarships to students and academia and different visitor programs for youth, students, teachers, professionals, scientists, artists and researchers. Pakistan has to develop exchange programs to show its marvellous culture, traditions and welcoming society. It will help eliminate misunderstandings about Pakistan and its people and provide first-hand information to students, teachers, scientists, artists, and professionals.

Fifth, by using technology, a nation can build its brand image. States use radio, tv, social media and the internet to communicate with an international audience. All state governments, presidents, prime ministers, and diplomats have their Facebook, Twitter, and other social media accounts to communicate with foreign

audiences and influence public opinion. Pakistan has to develop such a kind of digital diplomacy.

Keeping the above discussion in mind, Pakistan must consider the reasons for its negative image, which are often related to terrorism, corruption, and bad governance. Pakistan needs to start from scratch by working hard on the fault lines tarnishing the country's image and consistently working about its identity, which is Islamic and progressive. Pakistan has traditions, culture, industry, sports, cuisine, and other variables to help promote its soft image worldwide. It is a long-term process that requires consistency and serenity. Foreign direct investment should be the top priority, along with well-developed infrastructure, improved regulations, political stability, and a welcoming environment to win investors' confidence. All departments working for branding Pakistan must coordinate and understand their aims and objectives with clear directions. Achievements and progress be linked with performance indicators. Employees of such organizations should be offered scholarships and fellowships for professional training and grooming.

Communication strategy is required to develop prudently. All means of communication, such as radio, TV, news media and digital media, must be efficiently utilized by the government to improve the image of Pakistan. Presently, Pakistan has state-owned radio and TV channels and many private channels that are working to uphold the reputation of Pakistan. However, Pakistan television and radio programs' standard needs improvement. Media in Pakistan must counter the propaganda by India in the name of Indian Chronicles, known as the EU Disinfo Lab.⁴⁰ Pakistan must learn to communicate with international media full of negative stories about Pakistan. Overseas Pakistanis can be engaged to play their vital role in the image building of the country. Tourism also needs to be treated as an industry. Pakistan has enough tourist attractions that need infrastructure, basic facilities, professional registered tourist organizations, and tourist safety and security. Tourist attractions require proper marketing and advertising campaigns. The Government of Pakistan can seek the services of professional marketing companies in this connection.

Conclusion

Effective nation branding techniques and robust public diplomacy strategies can build a positive image of Pakistan while enhancing its soft power. Any sitting government in Islamabad must understand that other than relying on hard power, it is equally better to make full use of its culture, tourism, sports, art, cuisine, and festivals and link them with its foreign policy objectives. Tag lines, such as Amazing Pakistan, Fantastic Pakistan, Surprising Pakistan, and similar catching phrases (that depict true Pakistan), can be used to enhance the country's international image. Celebrating different festivals, sports events, and cultural shows regularly can help attract tourists and foreign direct investment. Pakistan needs to invest more in its media and film industry to enhance its viewership, which can easily change the prevailing negative perception into positive imagery.

Pakistan must realize its soft power potential as an alternative economic strength. It has all the variables required for nation branding and building positive public perception. Adopting innovative nation-branding techniques and public diplomacy strategies is much needed. It is important to remember that the international community has confidence in what is done rather than what is said.

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