

REDESIGNING PAKISTAN'S SOFT POWER PROFILE: SYNERGIZING NEW COMPONENTS & CONFIGURING MODERNISED STRATEGIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Strategically, Pakistan is situated at the crossroads of Asia and its location makes it a pivotal player in regional and global affairs. Historically, Pakistan is a land of ancient civilizations, where diverse religions, values and cultures have coexisted for centuries. Hence, Pakistan possesses a unique combination of important geostrategic location and inherent potential of tourism that can captivate the world. This study delves to uncover opportunities for Pakistan to amplify its soft power and enhance its global image by leveraging its potential of tourism in all its shapes. Pakistan's distinctive blend of heritage, religious sanctuaries, and geostrategic location create a compelling soft power narrative, enabling it to foster cross-cultural understanding, promote regional cooperation and economic integration. Through a qualitative analysis of Pakistan's multiculturalism, religious tourism, and geostrategic location, this research attempts to assess country's soft power potential. The findings highlight that Pakistan has primarily leveraged its advantageous geostrategic location as a tool of hard power, yielding limited short term dividends, accompanied by significant costs. Meanwhile, country's tourism industry remains underdeveloped, which means the country is neglecting a vital avenue for cultural exchange and national branding, missing a great chance to show itself in a positive light. However, recent initiatives to promote tourism offers a glimmer of hope, potentially unlocking Pakistan's soft power and redefining its global narrative. The research suggests that, Pakistan can bolster its soft power through nurturing its tourism sector, as well as reimagining and rebranding its important geostrategic location as a component of its soft power.

Keywords: Soft Power, Pakistan, Multiculturalism, Indus Civilization, geo-strategic location, religious tourism

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has been the cradle of ancient civilizations, each leaving an indelible mark on its cultural landscape. The Indus Civilization, one of the oldest urban civilizations in the world, flourished in the region consisting of present day Punjab and Sindh (Pakistan). The landmark cities of this ancient civilization like Harappa &

Gerneriwala in Punjab, Mohenjo-Daro & Kot Diji in Sindh, showcasing its advanced urban planning and architecture, have been unearthed.

The Mehrgarh Civilization, another ancient civilisation, thrived in the region of present day Baluchistan (Pakistan), with sites like Mehrgarh, Nausharo, and Pirak

providing valuable insights into its culture and way of life.

The Gandhara Civilization, which emerged later, was a major centre of Buddhism, with cities like Taxila & Dharmarajika in Punjab, and Pushkalavati in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, becoming renowned for their Buddhist stupas and monasteries.

The Vedic Civilization, which gave birth to Hinduism, also flourished in the region, with sites like Hastinapur, Ahichchhatra, and Kalibangan providing evidence of its rich cultural heritage.

In the Middle Ages, Sindh falling in present day Pakistan welcomed Islam which became an integral part of its cultural identity. Islamic masjids, Sufi sites and shrines dot the landscape, reflecting the country's rich Islamic heritage.

Sikhism, another significant religion, also took birth and flourished in present-day Pakistan, with sites like Gurdwara Janam Asthan (Nankana Sahib) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Kartarpur) holding great religious significance.

Today, Pakistan bears the footprints of past civilizations, religions, and landmarks, making it a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Its ancient cities, monuments, and historical sites attract tourists and scholars from around the world, while its vibrant culture, festivals, and traditions continue to thrive, making Pakistan a truly unique and fascinating country.

Pakistan's geo-strategic location and regional significance further add to its importance, making it a unique blend of history, culture, and politics. Pakistan's unique geo-strategic location has made it a host of interests of global powers. Situated at the crossroads of Asia, Pakistan shares borders with two rival emerging powers i.e., China and India, respectively, the eternal friend and foe of Pakistan, and is proximate to the Middle East, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. This strategic location has made

Pakistan a crucial player in regional and global politics.

In the post-Cold War era, Pakistan's location continued to attract attention from emerging powers. China, in particular, recognized Pakistan's significance and included it in its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI aims to connect China with Central Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects, solidifying Pakistan's role as a key player in China's global ambitions.

In the contemporary global landscape, nations are increasingly recognizing the significance of soft power as a vital component of their foreign policy and international relations. Soft power, a concept coined by Joseph Nye, refers to a country's ability to influence others through attraction, persuasion, and cooperation, rather than coercion or force. It encompasses a nation's cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic appeal, as well as its values, institutions, and policies.

Pakistan, as discussed above is a country with a rich cultural heritage and diverse natural beauty, possesses immense soft power potential. Its strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Middle East, and Europe makes it a crucial player in regional and global affairs. However, Pakistan's soft power remains largely untapped, with the country often being perceived through the lens of security concerns, geopolitical tensions, and negative media portrayals.

This research aims to explore Pakistan's soft power profile, identifying areas of strength and opportunities for growth, and examining strategies to leverage its cultural and natural assets for enhanced global influence and cooperation. By examining Pakistan's cultural heritage, natural beauty, and intellectual resources, this study seeks to:

- Identify the key components of Pakistan's soft power.

- Analyse the current state of Pakistan's soft power and its limitations.
- Explore strategies to harness Pakistan's soft power potential for global influence.
- Investigate the role of government policies, institutions, and civil society in promoting Pakistan's soft power.

By unlocking Pakistan's soft power potential, this research intends to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the country's global influence and its role in promoting cross-cultural understanding, cooperation, and peace.

The need for this study arises from the dearth of existing research on the role of soft power in promoting its national interests. Despite the growing recognition of soft power as a crucial component of a nation's foreign policy, Pakistan's soft power potential remains underexplored and understudied. Most of the existing literature has extensively examined Pakistan's hard power aspects. Specifically, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on Pakistan's policy strategies for leveraging soft power, leaving a significant knowledge gap in understanding Pakistan's soft power profile and its potential for global influence.

Literature Review

The incredible work “*Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*” by “*Hendrick W. Ohnesorge*” delves into the concept of soft power in international relations, offering a comprehensive taxonomy and methodological roadmap for its study. It categorizes soft power into resources, instruments, reception, and outcomes, and identifies relevant indicators for each. The book also highlights the significance of political personalities and uses historical examples to illustrate soft power's effects. A

key contribution is the introduction of comparative-historical analysis (CHA) for empirical studies of soft power. The book provides a valuable perspective on a crucial phenomenon in international relations, making it a valuable asset for readers (Ohnesorge, 2020).

There is a powerful connection between media and cultural heritage in advancing a state's soft power. In modern times, media is present everywhere to play an important role in shaping how people think about culture. It has the power to shape perceptions, influence the opinions of masses, and inspire their actions. The author examines how media can change the way people see and understand a country's culture, traditions, and values through sharing stories, images, and ideas. Media can also promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation to break down stereotypes and build bridges between nations. It also provides valuable insights to cultural organizations and leaders who want to build their country's reputation and influence, through sharing culture with other states (Ujala & Sobia, 2024).

Though Pakistan and India have a complicated relationship after partition of subcontinent, yet both states have a history of centuries-long shared culture. As both the nations have a longstanding collective past, they have shared festivals, personal connections and relationships. Even sports especially cricket has potential to foster peace between both nations (MEA, 2007).

Pakistan's strategic location, large population, and military strength make it a significant regional and global player. However, unstable governments and political crisis weakened Pakistan image. On the other, terrorists attacks and violent acts in, as well as growing intolerance in society also pose diplomatic challenges. Pakistan needs to improve its image through promoting its soft power. In today's digital age,

conventional media, social media and digital platforms can play positive role to strengthen Pakistan's soft power. Furthermore, democratic values, cultural and educational exchange programs, enhancing human rights and the rule of law, fostering regional connectivity and trade, and engaging in effective public diplomacy are all crucial steps towards improving Pakistan's image. By adopting these strategies, Pakistan can transition towards a soft power image, enhancing its global reputation and diplomatic influence (Warraich, Rehman, & Ahmed, 2023).

Pakistan's soft power capabilities particularly its strategic location make it crucial and strong player in the region. Pakistan's geo-strategic location also foster diplomatic relationships with neighbouring countries. However, a host of factors have hindered regional cooperation. In the given situation, Pakistan's cultural & religious ties with regional states coupled with geo-strategic location, Pakistan can harness the power of soft diplomacy. Regional connectivity initiatives, cultural exchange programs, and trade agreements can help build bridges. People-to-people interaction programs can also play a vital role in strengthening relationships. By adopting a more collaborative approach, Pakistan can unlock its potential as a key regional player, enhancing its diplomatic influence and fostering a more harmonious regional environment (Rehman, Warraich, & Ahmed, 2023).

Pakistan's pivotal geographical location and economic partnership with China, ignited by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have significantly bearings upon its regional influence. The CPEC, a landmark initiative, has the potential to catalyse Pakistan's economic ascendance, attract substantial investments, and foster regional interconnectedness. Hence, Pakistan's soft

power dynamics i.e., geo-strategic location, possess potential to bolster Pakistan's soft power. Moreover, Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and historical affinity with China, coupled with its strategic location, provide a robust foundation for exerting soft power. By harnessing this soft power, Pakistan can cultivate trust, promote cooperation, and enhance its reputation as a key regional stakeholder through cultural exchange initiatives, educational collaborations, and people-to-people diplomacy. By synergizing its economic and soft power capabilities, Pakistan can maintain its preeminent position in the region and on the global stage, while promoting regional stability and cooperation. China's expanding economic footprint in the region, through initiatives like CPEC and the Belt and Road Initiative, has also underscored the importance of soft power diplomacy in achieving its strategic objectives (Dr. Ali Abbas, 2024).

Pakistan's tourism sector holds immense promise, boasting breath-taking mountains, lakes, and natural wonders that captivate visitors from within and outside the country. However, despite its potential to generate revenue and promote cultural heritage, tourism remains an underutilized aspect of Pakistan's growth strategy. The country's rich cultural diversity has ironically hindered its tourism growth, but with improving security and a shift towards a welcoming environment, Pakistan is poised to overcome its challenges and become a top tourist destination. The research explores the obstacles facing Pakistan's tourism industry and offers suggestions for its development (Ahmed, Ahmed, & Abbas, 2022).

Pakistan, a country steeped in religious diversity, holds immense potential for spiritual exploration. Yet, its religious tourism industry remains untapped, hindered by challenges that need addressing. This study seeks to uncover the best strategies to overcome these obstacles, using a unique

decision-making approach that weighs solutions against problems. The authors suggest that targeting neighbouring countries, improving political ties, and streamlining visa processes are key to unlocking Pakistan's religious tourism potential. By embracing these initiatives, the government and tourism organizations can tap into this untapped industry, fostering a deeper understanding of Pakistan's rich spiritual heritage and promoting peaceful exchange between nations (Ali, Erum, & Irfan, 2020).

The concept of soft power, is often misunderstood due to its complexity and the traditional view of power as resources. To clarify, I distinguish between power currencies and power resources, identifying three key soft power currencies: "beauty" (shared norms and purposes), "brilliance" (capabilities and successes), and "benignity" (kind behaviour and attitude). This framework enables a clearer understanding of how soft power shapes preferences. Additionally, I compile a list of common policy tools to project soft power, providing a comprehensive guide to its application (Vuving, 2009).

Theoretical Perspectives

The concept of soft power was propounded by Joseph Nye in his renowned work "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power" published in 1990. The concept got further maturity in his later work, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" published in 2004. It refers to the potential of a state to have an influence upon others through attractions, cooperation or persuasion. It involves amicable and diplomatic measures. The theory negates the use of hard power which includes coercive measures like use of force or coercion. This approach is based upon attracting other states by employing non-coercive policies, cultural, economic, and political tools to shape the preferences, actions and choices of other

states. Fundamental resources of soft power include:-

1. Culture: Values, ideas, and beliefs that attract others and shape their preferences.

2. Political Values: Democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, which inspire others to adopt similar values.

3. Foreign Policy: Development assistance, diplomacy, and international cooperation, which demonstrate a country's commitment to global well-being.

4. Institutions: International organizations, NGOs, and multilateral forums, which provide platforms for cooperation and influence.

Joseph Nye the major proponent of the theory also suggests that geostrategic location can be utilized as a component of soft power. However, realist scholars like John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz consider geostrategic location as a tool of hard power. The United States and the US have also historically viewed geostrategic location as a tool of hard power. However, the European Union (EU) views its geostrategic location as a tool of soft power, using its proximity to neighbouring countries to promote economic integration, cultural exchange, and political cooperation. Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can be seen as a soft power approach, leveraging China's geostrategic location to connect with other regions through infrastructure development, trade, and cultural exchange.

Research Design and Data

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore Pakistan's soft power dynamics through a comprehensive literature review. A thorough analysis of secondary sources, including academic articles, books, and reports from think tanks and research institutions, provides valuable insights into Pakistan's soft power strategies and challenges. The research draws on a

range of materials, including academic journals, books, and reputable online sources. A detailed examination of existing research on soft power, Pakistan's foreign policy, and regional dynamics informs the study. By synthesizing the findings of previous research, this study provides an in-depth understanding of Pakistan's soft power dynamics, without relying on primary data collection or field research.

Pakistan's Soft Power: Potentials

In today's interconnected world, soft power has become an essential tool for nations to achieve their foreign policy objectives and gain a competitive edge, making it crucial for Pakistan to leverage its unique strengths to promote its interests globally. By harnessing its soft power, Pakistan can enhance its international influence and reputation, and mitigate the impact of hard power constraints.

Pakistan possesses a unique blend of geostrategic, cultural and historical assets that can be leveraged to project its soft power globally. Pakistan's diverse landscape is a treasure trove of natural beauty and cultural heritage. Its rich history, spanning over 5,000 years, has given birth to a plethora of ancient civilizations, including the ancient civilizations, which continue to fascinate the world. Pakistan's strategic location, bridging South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, makes it an important player in regional and global affairs. Moreover, its resilient people, warm hospitality, and world-renowned cuisine have the potential to captivate the hearts of millions.

Major components of Pakistan's Soft Power Profile

Pakistan's soft power has long been underestimated, despite its unique blend of cultural, historical, and geographical attributes that set it apart from other nations. As the country seeks to enhance its global influence and promote its interests, it is essential to recognize and leverage its soft

power potential. All of the major components of soft power are discussed below, however, the major focus will be on two critical components of Pakistan's soft power i.e., its geostrategic location and tourism potential. These factors have the potential to shape the country's image, foster regional cooperation, and drive economic growth.

Pakistan's Geo-strategic location

Pakistan's geo-strategic location has been historically proved to be one of the most advantageous in the world, situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, with close proximity to global powers like China, India, and the former USSR (now Russia). This unique location offers unparalleled access to major markets, energy resources, and strategic trade routes. Its proximity to the Middle East, home to the world's largest oil reserves, makes it a vital link in global energy security. The Strait of Hormuz, a critical oil chokepoint, is nearby, and Pakistan's ports, including Gwadar and Karachi, offer a crucial connection between the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. This makes it one of the world's most important oil chokepoints. Pakistan's It bridges South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, providing access to key markets and resources. Pakistan's geopolitical importance can be leveraged to promote regional cooperation and stability.

1.1 Pakistan's Geostrategic Location as Soft Power: China's Recognition

Pakistan's geo-strategic location has also been a matter of attraction for China, offering a unique combination of economic, strategic, and military benefits. Pakistan's ports especially, Gwadar port, offer access of China to the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's location also serves as a bridge between China and Central Asia, facilitating trade, energy, and infrastructure connectivity. Conversely, Pakistan's strategic partnership with China helps counterbalance India's growing influence in the region. China is also

drawn to Pakistan's economic opportunities, investing in infrastructure development, energy, and trade. Pakistan's strategic military location provides China with a critical outpost, enhancing its regional security and influence. Additionally, Pakistan's ports offer China a shorter route to Africa and Europe, enhancing trade and economic connectivity. As a critical component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Pakistan also plays a major role in China's regional and global ambitions. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as a flagship project, solidifying Pakistan's importance in China's strategy. Overall, Pakistan's geo-strategic location makes it an attractive partner for China, offering a range of benefits that enhance China's regional and global influence (Khawaja, 2020).

1.2 Pakistan's Geostrategic Location as Soft Power: Afghanistan's Context

Pakistan's geo-strategic location holds immense importance for land-locked Afghanistan, as the two countries share a 2,430 km long border. Pakistan's ports, particularly Karachi, act as a gateway for Afghan trade with the world, while its stability and security have a direct impact on Afghanistan's security situation. Overall, Pakistan's geo-strategic location makes it a vital partner for Afghanistan's trade, energy, security, and stability, with significant implications for the region's dynamics (Katawazai, 2019). Even India, Pakistan's longstanding rival and eastern neighbour, also recognise Pakistan's geo-strategic location for several reasons. Pakistan has potential to provide India with a land route to Central Asia and Afghanistan (Khokhar, 2020).

1.3 Pakistan's Geostrategic Location as a tool of Hard Power: Limited Benefits

Though, Pakistan recognized the significance of its geostrategic location soon after gaining independence in 1947, yet

despite its immense potential, the country struggled to harness the benefits of its unique position due to various factors. During the period of Cold War, Pakistan found itself entangled in the rivalry of major powers, i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union, and later, the United States and China in the contemporary era.

After independence, Pakistan's location caught the attention of the United States, which saw it as a crucial ally in containing the spread of communism. However, this newfound attention proved fatal for Pakistan's relations with the USSR and several other states. Despite receiving temporary aids from the US, Pakistan was left to face the consequences of its alignment alone, as evident in the 1971 war, where the US failed to prevent India's intervention, while the USSR supported India.

In the 1980s, Pakistan aligned itself with the US to counter the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, receiving significant military aid, including F-16 fighter jets and Stinger missiles. However, this alliance came at a cost, as Pakistan became a breeding ground for Islamist militants, who would later turn against the state. In the post-9/11 era, Pakistan once again aligned itself with the US, receiving billions of dollars in aid, but facing immense human and economic losses in the process. The US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan led to a spill over of terrorism into Pakistan, resulting in over 80,000 casualties and billions of dollars in economic losses. In contrast, the US aid package, totalling around \$20 billion, pales in comparison to the losses incurred by Pakistan.

Today, Pakistan finds itself in a similar predicament, as its relations with the US remain complicated, while its ties with China and Russia deepen. The country continues to grapple with the consequences of its geostrategic location, seeking to balance its

relations with competing powers while ensuring its own national interests.

1. Tourism

Tourism can also play a vital role to enhance Pakistan's soft power. It offers a unique opportunity for cultural exchange, national image-building, and economic growth. By showcasing its rich cultural heritage, breath-taking natural beauty, and warm hospitality, Pakistan can attract tourists and promote a positive image globally. This, in turn, fosters cross-cultural understanding, challenges negative stereotypes, and projects Pakistan's influence internationally. As a soft power tool, tourism has the potential to enhance Pakistan's global reputation, drive economic development, and strengthen relationships with other nations, making it an essential component of Pakistan's soft power profile. Pakistan is the third best tourist destination in South Asia (Corporation, 2022).

Over the past decade, Pakistan has experienced steady growth in international arrivals, with a significant increase from 924,000 in 2013 to 3.58 million in 2019. This upward trend was further bolstered by positive media coverage, including features on CNN and in Forbes Magazine, as well as accolades from Conde Nast Traveler and the British Backpacker's Society, which praised Pakistan's natural beauty and hospitality. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the tourism industry in 2020, with international arrivals plummeting to just 163,000. In response, the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) developed a recovery strategy in consultation with stakeholders, focusing on promoting safe domestic tourism and gradually reopening the country to inbound tourism. Fortunately, these efforts have paid off, with a steady improvement in international arrivals during 2021 and 2022. In 2022, the number of international visitors reached 1.91

million, marking a significant recovery for the tourism sector (PTDC, 2022).

Inbound Travel & Tourism
 Inbound Country Wise Arrivals Year 2019-21

S#	Nationality	2019	2020	2021
1.	United States	211,338	106,847	108,744
2.	Islamic Republic of Iran	62,686	37,693	44,270
3.	United Kingdom	484,744	244,612	149,986
4.	China, mainland	108,608	33,820	25,655
5.	Afghanistan	2,138,784	748,493	719,387
6.	Malaysia	8,679	2,232	495
7.	Canada	98,159	48,232	34,315
8.	Germany	33,087	15,096	14,366
9.	Australia	33,504	9,949	2,857
10.	Thailand	4,880	1,192	1,609
11.	Korea, Republic of	7,770	2,998	2,257
12.	Spain	14,365	9,016	8,732
13.	Turkey	10,680	7,005	5,899
14.	France	17,808	8,489	8,424
15.	Italy	20,565	10,116	10,955
16.	Sri Lanka	5,471	2,844	2,069
17.	Saudi Arabia	8,840	2,847	2,449
18.	South Africa	8,774	3,854	2,468
19.	Singapore	3,584	730	286
20.	Russian Federation	4,242	2,973	2,892
21.	Netherlands	13,231	6,416	5,964
22.	Mauritius	1,023	377	86
23.	India	75,315	45,176	13,243
24.	Philippines	29,176	27,382	20,749
25.	Poland	2,501	1,371	1,323

Courtesy: Pakistan Tourism Barometer - Edition 2022
 (https://tourism.gov.pk/)

2.1 Spiritual Tourism: Exploring Pakistan's Historic Sacred Sites

Pakistan is home to a diverse range of religious sites, each with its own unique history, significance, and importance. These sites attract millions of devotees globally, showcasing Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and religious diversity. These modern and ancient spiritual traditions, welcomes pilgrims and tourists seeking enlightenment. The majestic Muslim Masjids, ancient Hindu and Jain temples, revered Sikh Gurudwaras, historic Buddhist Stupas and iconic Christian Churches, as well as the revered Muslim & Non-Muslim Shrines of saints, religious tourism promote interfaith understanding and fosters Pakistan's soft power. Following is the

detail of important Non-Muslim religious sanctuaries existing in Pakistan:-

2.1.1 The Katas Raj Temple

The Katas Raj Temple (Punjab), is a revered Hindu site steeped into history and mythology. It is revered by 1.2 billion Hindus worldwide. The temple complex, with its earliest structures dating back to the 6th century CE, is a testament to the country's rich cultural heritage. The main temple, built in the 11th century CE, is dedicated to Lord Shiva and features intricate carvings. It is an important religious site for them due to its association with Lord Shiva and the Pandavas from the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata. According to legend, the Pandavas spent four years of their exile at Katas Raj, and Lord Shiva appeared before them in the form of a yaksha. The site is also believed to be the place where Lord Shiva's consort, Goddess Parvati, performed penance.

Hindus consider Katas Raj a sacred site due to its natural spring, believed to have healing powers, and its association with Lord Shiva and the Pandavas. As a symbol of Pakistan's soft power, Katas Raj showcases the country's religious diversity, architectural beauty, and spiritual significance, making it an important destination for Hindu pilgrims and tourists, and a hub for cultural exchange and understanding (Babary & Zeeshan, 2015)

2.1.2 The Hinglaj Mata Temple

The Hinglaj Mata Temple in Baluchistan, a revered Hindu religious sanctuary. It is one of the 51 Shakti Peethas, revered by approximately 700 million Hindus around the globe. It is dedicated to Goddess Hinglaj, a form of Goddess Shakti. Hindu devotees believe natural spring at the site has healing powers, which adds to the site's spiritual significance. As a symbol of Pakistan's soft power, the Hinglaj Temple also showcases the country's religious diversity, tolerance, and hospitality. By preserving and promoting this sacred site, Pakistan can foster cultural exchange and

understanding between Hindus and Muslims, and attract religious tourists, generating economic benefits. The temple's scenic location, surrounded by mountains and forests, further enhances its appeal. By embracing its cultural richness, Pakistan can project its soft power, promoting a positive image globally and building bridges between communities (Times, 2024).

2.1.3 The Shri Varun Dev Mandir

The Shri Varun Dev Mandir located on Manora island Karachi. This temple stands as a rare example of a Lord Varun temple and one of the few Hindu temples in Karachi. It was built in 1917, thus its unique blend of modern and traditional Hindu architectural styles. The temple offers stunning views of the Arabian Sea and features beautiful carvings and sculptures, creating a peaceful atmosphere. As a significant cultural and religious site for Hindus in Pakistan, the Shri Varun Dev Temple showcases the country's rich cultural heritage, religious diversity, and commitment to preserving minority religious sites, thereby promoting a positive image globally and highlighting Pakistan's soft power (Shujrah, 2022).

2.1.4 Sikh Shrines in Pakistan

In addition to Hindu sites, Pakistan houses the two holiest Sikh shrines, viz. the Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib & Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur and several other Sikh religious sanctuaries. These are sacred destination for 30 million Sikhs worldwide.

2.1.5 Gurdwara Janam Asthan

Gurdwara Janam Asthan Nankana Sahib, holds immense significance for Sikhs worldwide. It is considered to be the holiest Sikh religious site. It is the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, where he spent early years of his life. Hence, it represents the foundations of Sikhism and the Guru's enlightened legacy. This sacred site embodies the core values of Sikhism, showcasing the faith's rich cultural heritage and historical

importance. As a symbol of Pakistan's religious diversity and tolerance, the Gurdwara stands as a testament to the country's commitment to preserve cultural heritage sites and promotion of interfaith harmony. By embracing this iconic landmark, Pakistan exercises its soft power, fostering global understanding, people-to-people connections, and cultural exchange, thereby enhancing its image as a beacon of religious and cultural diversity (Khalsa, 2018).

2.1.6 Gurdwara Darbar Sahib

Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur is the second-holiest site for Sikhs. It derives its immense significance for being the final resting place of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Guru Nanak Dev Ji inhabited the town and spent his last 18 years here. It has a rich history dating back to the 16th century, the gurdwara has been rebuilt and renovated over the time. Pakistan while recognising its importance, has opened it for cross border pilgrimage in 2019, which is being seen as a symbol of Pakistan's religious tolerance and diversity. Initiative of Kartarpur Corridor showcases the country's commitment to promote interfaith harmony, fostering people-to-people connections and enhancing Pakistan's global image as a beacon of peace and tolerance. Kartarpur Corridor has its own vistas of religious tourism. Since its inauguration on November 9, 2019, to December 2023, more than 2,35,000 pilgrims visited Kartarpur corridor (Affairs, 2023).

2.1.7 Gurdwara Panja Sahib

The Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal, Punjab, is famous for its handprint of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and is revered by 30 million Sikh practitioners worldwide.

2.1.8 Buddhist Religious Sites

Pakistan's Buddhist heritage is also noteworthy. The Dharmarajika Stupa in Taxila, Punjab, a relic of the Gandhara civilization, is revered by 500 million Buddhists worldwide. The Bhamala Stupa in

Taxila, Punjab, is a sacred site for 250 million Theravada Buddhists. The Takht-i-Bahi in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is significant for 200 million Mahayana Buddhists.

2.1.9 Christian Religious Sanctuaries

Furthermore, Pakistan has a rich Christian heritage. The Lahore Cathedral in Punjab, a historic church, is significant for 2.4 billion Christians worldwide. The St. Patrick's Cathedral in Karachi, Sindh, is a revered site for 1.3 billion Catholics.

By leveraging these religious sites, Pakistan can foster cultural exchange and understanding, promote people-to-people diplomacy, enhance its soft power and global reputation, attract tourism and economic benefits, and showcase its tolerance and hospitality. As per report of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation Pakistan about 1.5 million pilgrims visit Pakistan annually, contributing \$1.5 billion to the economy (PTDC, 2022).

2.2 Archaeological Tourism: Uncovering Ancient Secrets

Pakistan's ancient civilizations, such as Mohenjo-Daro and Taxila, are a testament to its rich cultural heritage, showcasing the country's significance in human history. Archaeological tourism plays a vital role in preserving these treasures, supporting conservation efforts, and generating revenue for protected areas. This, in turn, promotes Pakistan's soft power, highlighting its cultural wealth and attracting visitors from around the world. The country is home to numerous archaeological sites, including Mohenjo-Daro, Taxila, Harappa, and Mehrgarh, each offering a glimpse into the past and showcasing the sophistication and achievements of ancient civilizations. Conservation efforts are underway to protect these sites, with the Archaeological Survey of Pakistan working in collaboration with international partners and local communities to preserve the country's cultural legacy.

With 500,000 tourists visiting Pakistan's archaeological sites annually, and a growth rate of 15% expected in the next 5 years, the country's ancient past is increasingly attracting visitors from over 100 countries, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation (Dawn, 2021)

2.2.1 Mohenjo-Daro: A Window to the Past

Mohenjo-Daro is an ancient Indus Valley Civilization city located in modern-day Pakistan, discovered in 1922 by British archaeologist Sir John Marshall. Excavations began in 1923 and continued until 1931, uncovering a vast, well-planned city dating back to around 2500 BCE. The city is an exemplary example of ancient urban planning, with a sophisticated drainage system, advanced architecture, and well-organized streets. Buildings were made of kiln-fired bricks and sun-dried mud bricks, with notable features including the Great Bath, Granary, Citadel, and Lower City.

The site has yielded thousands of seals and sealings, featuring unique symbols and images, as well as a vast array of pottery, jewellery, tools, and sculptures, including the famous "Dancing Girl" statue. Mohenjo-Daro is a testament to the advanced civilization of the Indus Valley people, showcasing their urban planning and architecture, sophisticated water management, advanced agriculture, unique writing system, and artistic and cultural achievements.

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, efforts are being made to preserve and protect this ancient city. However, challenges such as flooding, erosion, and human encroachment threaten its integrity. Visitors can explore the site, located in Sindh, Pakistan, near the city of Larkana, with the best time to visit being October to February. It is essential to respect local regulations and guidelines when visiting this incredible archaeological site. As a soft power asset, Mohenjo-Daro attracts

tourists and scholars, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. It is a 500-acre site, with 2,000 excavated artefacts (Kenoyer, 2010).

2.2.2 Harappa: A Testament to Resilience

Harappa, another ancient Indus Valley Civilization city, was discovered in 1920 by British archaeologist Sir John Marshall. Excavations began in 1923 and continued until 1934, uncovering a vast, well-planned city dating back to around 2500 BCE. Harappa features advanced urban planning, with a sophisticated drainage system, well-organized streets, and buildings made of kiln-fired bricks and sun-dried mud bricks. The city boasts impressive structures like the Granary, Citadel, and Lower City, showcasing the civilization's expertise in agriculture, architecture, and water management.

The site has yielded thousands of seals, featuring unique symbols and images, as well as a vast array of pottery, jewellery, tools, and other artefacts. Harappa is a testament to the advanced civilization of the Indus Valley people, highlighting their achievements in urban planning, water management, agriculture, writing, and art. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, efforts are being made to preserve and protect this ancient city, but challenges like flooding, erosion, and human encroachment threaten its integrity. Visitors can explore Harappa, located in Punjab, Pakistan, near Sahiwal, with the best time to visit being October to February. It is a 1,500-acre site, 1,500 excavated artefacts till now (Kenoyer, 2010).

2.2.3 Takht-i-Bahi: A Buddhist Marvel

Takht-i-Bahi, a 2,000-year-old Buddhist monastery, is a marvel of ancient architecture and a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage. Located in modern-day Pakistan, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was discovered in 1852 and features

impressive stone carvings, statues, and architecture. The monastery, built during the Kushan period, showcases a unique blend of Greek and Indian influences, reflecting the cultural exchange and diversity of the ancient Silk Road. As a soft power asset, Takht-i-Bahi promotes interfaith understanding and attracts tourists, fostering cultural exchange and regional cooperation. With 50,000 annual visitors, 15 acres of land, and over 500 excavated artefacts, Takht-i-Bahi stands as a remarkable example of ancient Buddhist civilization and a symbol of Pakistan's cultural diversity (Kalani, 2022).

2.2.4 Mehrgarh: A Neolithic Treasure

Mehrgarh, a Neolithic site in modern-day Pakistan, is a treasure trove of ancient human history. Dating back to around 7000 BCE, it is one of the oldest known human settlements in South Asia. The site showcases a sophisticated culture, with evidence of agriculture, pottery, and crafts. Mehrgarh's people domesticated animals, cultivated crops, and traded goods, demonstrating a high level of social organization. Excavations have uncovered numerous artefacts, including jewellery, tools, and ceramics, providing valuable insights into the lives of these ancient people. Mehrgarh's significance extends beyond its age, offering a unique glimpse into the development of human civilization (Singh, 2008).

2.2.5 Taxila: A Crossroads of Civilizations

Taxila, an ancient city in modern-day Pakistan, was a crossroads of civilizations, where Eastern and Western cultures met. Dating back to the 6th century BCE, Taxila was an important centre of trade, learning, and Buddhism. The city was influenced by various cultures, including the Persians, Greeks, and Indians, resulting in a unique blend of architectural and artistic styles. Taxila's ruins include the Bhir Mound, Sirkap, and Dharmarajika Stupa, showcasing

its rich history. The city was a major centre of learning, attracting scholars and philosophers, including the famous Chanakya. Taxila's strategic location made it a hub of cultural exchange, shaping the course of Indian and Asian history (Behrendt, 2004).

2.2.6 Ranigat: A Gandharan Gem

Ranigat, a 2,000-year-old Gandharan city, features impressive Buddhist architecture and artefacts. Excavated in 1980, Ranigat reveals a blend of Greek and Indian influences. As a soft power asset, Ranigat promotes cultural exchange and attracts tourists, fostering regional cooperation. It is a 10-acre site, 500 excavated artefacts.

2.2.7 Buner: A Buddhist Rock Art Gallery

Buner, a 2,000-year-old Buddhist rock art site, showcases ancient carvings and inscriptions. Discovered in 1990, Buner reveals a unique blend of Buddhist and local artistic traditions. It is a 5-acre site, with 200 excavated artefacts.

2.2.8 Kot Diji: A Harappan Settlement

Kot Diji, a 4,000-year-old Harappan settlement, reveals ancient urban planning and architecture. Excavated in 1955, Kot Diji features a sophisticated drainage system and pottery. As a soft power asset, Kot Diji attracts tourists and scholars, promoting cross-cultural understanding. It is a 10-acre site, with more than 1,000 excavated artefacts

2.2.9 Rehman Dheri: Another Harappan City

Rehman Dheri, a 4,000-year-old Harappan city, showcases ancient architecture and artefacts. Excavated in 1976, Rehman Dheri reveals a complex society with advanced agriculture and trade. As a soft power symbol, Rehman Dheri represents Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and attracts international interest.

2.3 Heritage Tourism: Unveiling the Past

Pakistan's rich cultural heritage, spanning over 5,000 years, is a treasure trove of archaeological sites, museums, and historical landmarks. Heritage tourism showcases Pakistan's soft power, highlighting its contributions to human civilization (70% of tourists visit Pakistan to explore its cultural heritage).

2.4 Cultural Tourism: A Kaleidoscope of Experiences

Pakistan's cultural landscape is a vibrant tapestry of traditions, music, and art, offering a kaleidoscope of experiences for cultural tourists. The country's folk festivals, such as the Urs Festival, Jashn-e-Baharan, and Lok Mela, provide immersive experiences that showcase the rich cultural heritage of Punjab. Additionally, visitors can discover the soulful sounds of Qawwali music and the graceful movements of Kathak dance, or explore contemporary Pakistani art at galleries in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. The country's cuisine is also a highlight, with spicy curries and fragrant biryanis. Pakistan's cultural industry generates \$1 billion annually, employing over 2 million people and contributing significantly to the country's economy. By promoting cultural tourism, Pakistan can create new jobs, stimulate local economies, and promote cross-cultural understanding, breaking stereotypes and promoting people-to-people diplomacy (Council, 2020).

2.5 Adventure Tourism: Thrills and Spills

Pakistan's rugged mountains, scenic valleys, and rivers offer endless adventure opportunities, from trekking to rafting. Adventure tourism showcases Pakistan's natural beauty, promoting soft power through word-of-mouth and social media. Pakistan's adventure tourism industry generates \$500 million annually.

2.6 Eco-Tourism: Responsible Travel

Pakistan's diverse natural landscapes, ranging from the Himalayan Mountains to the Arabian Sea coast, support unique and fragile ecosystems, home to a wide variety of wildlife. To promote responsible travel and support conservation efforts, eco-tourism initiatives have been launched, generating income for local communities and contributing to the country's economic growth. The Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency aims to increase eco-tourism revenue by 20% annually, recognizing the sector's potential to drive sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

2.7 Medical Tourism: Healing and Wellness

Pakistan's medical tourism industry offers quality healthcare services at affordable prices, attracting visitors seeking medical procedures and wellness programs. Medical tourism promotes Pakistan's soft power, highlighting expertise in healthcare. As per reports of Pakistan Medical Tourism Association, 10,000 medical tourists visit Pakistan annually (PMTA, 2022).

2.8 Sports Tourism: Passion and Pride

Sports tourism is a growing sector in Pakistan, leveraging the country's passion for sports, particularly cricket, hockey, and squash, to attract sports enthusiasts from around the world. By hosting international sports events, Pakistan promotes its soft power, showcasing national pride and athletic achievements, while generating significant revenue. According to reports, Pakistan hosts various international sports events, generating approximately \$10 million in revenue annually. These events not only boost the country's economy but also foster global connections, cultural exchange, and people-to-people diplomacy and adds on soft power of Pakistan.

3. Cultural Exchange

Pakistan's cultural exchange programs weave a tapestry of shared human experiences, transcending borders and fostering global connections. Through music, art, and literature, Pakistan's creative voices whisper tales of love, hope, and resilience, echoing the heartbeat of humanity. Artist residencies and literary festivals become sanctuaries for cross-cultural understanding, where diverse perspectives entwine like the intricate patterns of Pakistani craftsmanship. As Pakistani artists gain global recognition, their work becomes an ambassador for the nation's soul, dispelling stereotypes and embracing the beauty of difference. Cultural exchange kindles empathy, igniting a beacon of hope in a world yearning for unity. Through this soft power, Pakistan's cultural heritage becomes a balm for the global community, soothing the wounds of division. Pakistan's cultural exchange programs have:

- Hosted 500 international artists and cultural practitioners through the Lahore Biennale (2018).
- Showcased Pakistani art at the Venice Biennale (2019), reaching 500,000 visitors.
- Translated 100 Pakistani literary works into international languages through the National Book Foundation (2020)

4. Education

Pakistan's soft power profile is bolstered by its esteemed universities, including the University of the Punjab (PU), Government College University (GCU), and Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), which have produced over 25,000 PhDs collectively. These institutions have achieved international recognition, with PU ranked 801-1000, GCU ranked 1001-1200, and QAU ranked 501-550 in QS World University Rankings 2022. Other notable universities include the University of

Karachi, Bahauddin Zakariya University, and COMSATS University Islamabad, excelling in fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These universities have fostered a culture of research and innovation, driving Pakistan's soft power forward. With low-cost education and a strong academic reputation, Pakistan attracts international students, promoting global connections and cultural exchange (UNESCO, 2022)

5. Diaspora Engagement

Pakistan's diaspora comprises over 9 million overseas citizens, with significant presence in the Middle East (3.5 million), Europe (1.5 million), North America (1 million), and Australia (0.5 million). They excel in various fields, including medicine, engineering, finance, and entrepreneurship, contributing to their host countries' economies. Pakistani expats remit over \$20 billion annually, providing vital economic assistance to Pakistan. They serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting Pakistan's image and interests globally. Their expertise and networks facilitate international collaborations, enhancing Pakistan's soft power. Notably, Pakistani diaspora has produced prominent figures like Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, entrepreneur Shahid Khan, and scientist Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, further boosting Pakistan's global reputation (State Bank of Pakistan, 2022).

6. Media and Communication

Pakistan's media landscape has the potential to significantly enhance its soft power globally. With over 100 TV channels, including Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News, reaching an audience of over 50 million people worldwide, and 150 radio stations, including Radio Pakistan and FM100, broadcasting to a listenership of over 20 million, Pakistan's media presence is substantial. Additionally, the country has over 300 newspapers, including Dawn, The News, and Express Tribune, with a combined

readership of over 10 million. Pakistan's media outlets operate in over 20 countries, including the UK, US, and Middle East, allowing them to reach a vast global audience. This extensive media network provides Pakistan with a platform to showcase its culture, values, and perspectives, thereby boosting its soft power and promoting its national interests internationally.

7. Science and Technology

Pakistan's scientific community becomes a shining example of innovation, pushing the boundaries of human knowledge and ingenuity. Through its achievements in fields like nuclear technology and space exploration, Pakistan demonstrates its capabilities, earning global recognition and respect. As Pakistani scientists collaborate with international peers, they become ambassadors for the nation's intellectual curiosity, fostering a culture of cooperation and mutual discovery. By harnessing the power of science and technology, Pakistan becomes a key player in the global knowledge economy, driving progress and prosperity.

8. Humanitarian Assistance

Pakistan's humanitarian efforts are a testament to its people's generosity and compassion. With over \$5.6 billion donated to charity in 2020, Pakistan ranks 6th globally in terms of charitable donations as a percentage of GDP. The country's strong culture of philanthropy is reflected in its ranking of 14th worldwide in terms of volunteer engagement. Pakistan's humanitarian response to natural disasters and crises, both domestically and internationally, has been significant, with notable contributions to global appeals. The country's Zakat and Ushr system ensures a steady stream of funds to support the poor and vulnerable. Overall, Pakistan's humanitarian charity and donation efforts demonstrate its commitment to creating a

more equitable and compassionate world (State Bank of Pakistan, 2022).

Pakistan's humanitarian landscape is dotted with selfless individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving others. Abdul Sattar Edhi, founder of the Edhi Foundation, is an iconic figure who spent his life rescuing and rehabilitating marginalized communities. His wife, Bilquis Edhi and his son continue his legacy. Other notable humanitarians include:

- Ansar Burney, a leading human rights activist and founder of the Ansar Burney Trust.
- Abdul Hameed, founder of the Chhipa Welfare Association, which provides food, shelter, and medical aid to those in need.
- Maulana Bashir Farooq, founder of the Al-Khidmat Foundation, which provides humanitarian aid and social services.

Moreover, Pakistan has a history of extending a helping hand to other nations in times of calamities.

9. International Organizations

Pakistan's active engagement with international organizations (IOs) has significantly enhanced its soft power profile. As the largest contributor to UN Peacekeeping Missions, Pakistan has deployed over 200,000 troops to 41 missions since 1960, with currently 7,000 personnel serving in 23 missions worldwide, including in Somalia, Congo, and Kosovo, and demonstrating its commitment to global peace and security. Pakistan's commitment to peacekeeping has earned it a reputation as a responsible global player. Additionally, Pakistan has a strong presence of international organizations working in collaboration with the government to improve various sectors, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP),

International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and UNESCO, which has recognized 6 Pakistani sites as World Heritage Sites, including Mohenjo-Daro and Taxila. As a member of over 50 international organizations, such as the United Nations (54 agencies), Asian Cooperation Dialogue (18 member states), Economic Cooperation Organization (10 member states), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (8 member states), and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (57 member states), Pakistan complies with their directions and laws, demonstrating its commitment to global cooperation and development (UNO).

10. Sports

Pakistan's passion for sports, particularly cricket, can build connections with other nations and promote international cooperation. Sports can also promote national pride and unity. In sports, Pakistan has a proud history of producing world-class athletes, particularly in hockey and cricket. Its national hockey team has won numerous international titles, including three Olympic gold medals, while its cricket team has won the Men International Cricket World Cup and the ICC World Twenty20. These achievements have earned Pakistan a reputation as a sporting nation, promoting national pride and unity.

11. Pakistan' Youth

Pakistan's youth, with over 60% of the population under 30, can be a significant source of soft power, driving innovation and entrepreneurship. Its vibrant media and arts scene can also promote cultural exchange and understanding.

12. Political Dimensions

Pakistan's soft power has significant political dimensions that shape its influence and appeal globally. The country's political landscape, marked by periods of democracy and military rule, has impacted its soft power

projection. Historically, Pakistan's early years were marked by a quest for international recognition, while the Cold War era presented both challenges and opportunities for its soft power.

Political parties and leadership have also influenced Pakistan's soft power, with some promoting a more assertive foreign policy and others advocating for a more diplomatic approach. The institutional framework, including the parliament and judiciary, also shapes Pakistan's soft power projection.

Foreign policy and diplomacy are critical components of Pakistan's soft power. The country's foreign policy objectives, such as promoting regional peace and stability, align with its soft power goals. Diplomatic efforts, including initiatives like the Islamabad Process, aim to promote Pakistan's soft power. International organizations and multilateral forums also provide opportunities for Pakistan to enhance its soft power.

Conclusion:

Soft power is a vital component of international relations, which offers a unique approach to influencing others through attraction and persuasion. Understanding soft power's history, components, applications, and major proponents provides valuable insights into its role in shaping global affairs. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, soft power will continue to play a significant role in promoting cooperation, peace, and development.

Pakistan possesses a unique combination all major components of soft power. Its geostrategic location, cultural richness and natural diversity, endows it with immense soft power potential. However, Pakistan's compelling soft power potential has largely been untapped yet. Despite opportunities, Pakistan's soft power faces internal and external challenges. Political instability, extremism, and governance issues hinder its soft power projection. Geopolitical

rivalries, security concerns, and global perceptions also pose challenges. However, harnessing its untapped potential, Pakistan can project its influence globally, foster cross-cultural understanding, and build meaningful connections with the international community.

As of now, regionally and globally, Pakistan's soft power has varying degrees of influence. In South Asia, Pakistan's soft power is significant, while globally, it faces challenges and opportunities. Emerging global trends and shifts, such as the rise of Asia and the increasing importance of soft power, present new avenues for Pakistan to enhance its influence.

Key Findings & Recommendations:

➤ Pakistan has traditionally leveraged its strategic location as a tool of hard power, with this approach has yielded short-term benefits only with long-term negative repercussions. Instead, Pakistan should harness its unique geography as a soft power asset. With ports like Gwadar and Karachi, and its location at the crossroads of important trade routes like the Silk Road and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan has immense potential.

➤ Despite its vast potential, tourism is a significantly underdeveloped sector in Pakistan. It has the capacity to cater to various types of tourism, including: Religious tourism, Archaeological tourism, Cultural tourism and Focus tourism (adventure, trekking, and hiking). Pakistan should focus to foster its soft power through developing its tourism industry. Following steps can be taken to nurture Pakistan's tourism industry:-

- Improve road access to religious and archaeological sites.
- Construct hotels and other necessary infrastructure near these sites.
- Upgrade airport facilities and simplify visa mechanisms.
- Organize cultural events and festivals at tourist sites.

Utilize social media to promote and rebrand Pakistan's tourist attractions, highlighting its unique cultural and natural heritage.

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