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## **Pakistan’s quest for soft power status: A case study from 2018 to 2022**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In international politics the impression of the state is significant in order to achieve a convincing position. Soft power helps a state to establish its image globally. This article analyses how Pakistan is striving for Soft power status. The time period under study is from 2018 -2022. It also highlights the Role of state and individuals in pursuing the status of Soft Power. To answer the questions, the researcher has explained the efforts of different government institutions and various individuals and the outcomes of their activities, especially during a time when the nation is frequently labeled a "failed state." Through a careful academic analysis, a case for the potential of soft power to transform Pakistan's international reputation has been presented.*

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### **Introduction**

Soft power has achieved increasing popularity in today’s world. It is considered a road map to success. Soft power is intertwined with the rise of globalization, technological advancement and the implementation of instruments like culture and local products. Different narratives have been built to explain the domain of soft power. Different states employ different image projections to portray themselves as soft power.

In the late 1980s, Joseph Nye coined the term ‘soft-power’ for the very first time. To him, there are three pillars of soft power; *political values, culture, and foreign policy* (Jr., 2004). With these three dimension lenses, he presented the idea of gaining attraction in international politics. This means if you want to be accepted and embraced readily by the international community of states, the key is to gain soft power. This is the main reason why achieving more soft power is a significant goal for states in today’s international arena.

The Information Age has changed the stereotypical idea of state power, making it less tangible by employing tools to attain soft power image, instead of application of conventional hard power assets for the accomplishment of state objectives. It has been established that armed forces and financial strength are now not the only parameters of measuring a state's international reputation and standing, rather setting up a positive image in the international arena is more important in today's world.

Soft image of any state plays an effective role in enhancing its value and esteem. It alters public opinion on a wider range and encourages policy makers of other states to draft policies in favor of your state. This is precisely why developing states strive to become a soft power instead of being otherwise.

In reality, Soft power is all about your international image, which is formed by the standard of democracy, human rights record, tourism profile, educational development and entertainment industry. Nye argued that the genuinely powerful states have both hard and soft power.

Academic and cultural bodies leave a vital impact on the developmental process of soft power of a nation. Traditions, artistry and media are commonly recognized as sources of soft power. Having said that, it is not only the non-traditional elements that define a country's soft power image, in fact it is the supporting point on which the principles of soft power stand. These are enriched society, its well-formed institutions and the stable policies that attain state objectives.

### **History of Pakistan struggling as a Soft power**

According to Joseph Nye, winning hearts is equally vital as winning wars. To win hearts, Pakistan is trying to establish a progressive image since the attempts of Jinnah to make it a secular and modern state to the times of *Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf* (PTI's) quest for change. Due to the popping up of tags of being a terrorist state and sometimes a failed state, it is really challenging for governments to enhance the soft power image of Pakistan. Almost 40 years ago from today, in the 1980s, Pakistan was under the rule of the military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq. He was the one who implemented strict policies of Islamization and prohibited Western social influences in the country. He exerted control over women and suppressed liberal ideologies, making his era synonymous with asphyxiation and suffocation in the country.

In the 1990s, during the democratic governments of the Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League, Pakistan's soft power image experienced improvement. The television dramas, films, and music industry played a significant role in promoting Pakistan as a socially vibrant country. Globally admired dramas were produced, and the 1990s witnessed the evolution of pop music in the state. Music sensations like Hassan Jahangir, Vital Signs, Alamgir, and Junoon introduced new genres such as pop, soft and hard rock, *bhangra* rap, and fusion to the subcontinent's music scene. This music gained admiration even across the border. By the end of the 1990s, Pakistan had transformed into a progressive state.

In 1999, the last year of the same decade, General Pervez Musharraf assumed control of the state through a military coup. In his first few years, there was a rapid boom in the television industry. He granted licenses to launch new TV channels, organized nationwide student conventions, invested in the education sector, established governing bodies like the Higher Education Commission, empowered

women by granting them more legal, financial, and political rights, and internationally fostered the image of Pakistan as an enlightened and moderate society.

However, the direct involvement of Pakistan in the War on Terror had a profound impact on Pakistan's internal situation, affecting security, economy, politics, and societal dynamics. The effects of this period continue to shape the country's challenges and policy decisions. The rising sentiments of anti-Americanism, radicalization, and frequent terrorist attacks, coupled with the realization about the illegitimate military dictatorship and judicial activism, have collectively damaged the image of Pakistan. It began to be seen as a failed state and an aggressive nation. Over the last 15 years, the international perception of Pakistan has been on the decline.

Pakistan desires to endorse its soft image through media, music, theater, tourism, literature, art and painting and information technology. Pakistan has unlimited options which can be used to balance the shadowy image of the country. However, in previous decades, there was no state focus on soft power, which was given a priority in 2018, as it is essential for portraying Pakistan positively on a global level.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the contributions of Pakistan's State Institutions and Social Media Influencers to empower the country in the realm of soft power exclusively during the democratic government of Imran Khan. The time-period under study is 5 years that is from 2018 till 2022. The emphasis on Imran Khan is due to his electoral victory achieved through compelling slogans promising societal change and transformation. Additionally, a research gap has been identified regarding his tenure as the Prime Minister.

### **Exploring Pakistan's Soft Power Potential: Tools and Instruments:**

Pakistan unfolds as a captivating tapestry, weaving together natural beauty, ancient civilization, religious pilgrimages, culinary delights, aromatic herbs, rich culture, music, and modern sports. In this paper, we will see how during the period under study the potentials of Pakistan for being a soft power state were utilized.

#### **I. Tourism as an instrument to enhance Soft power**

Pakistan is a land of natural beauty and a home to ancient civilizations. It offers a diverse array of options for tourists to choose from. It has mighty mountain ranges, melting glaciers, lush green meadows, wild waterfalls, twisting rivers, vast Indus plains merging into great deserts, and dense forests in its north. Additionally, Pakistan is a land of some significant UNESCO world heritage sites for instance Archaeological Ruins of ancient Indus Civilization Mohenjo-Daro and elegant remains of Mughal Fort and Shalimar Gardens in Punjab (Prime Minister's Office, Board of Investment Tourism Profile, 2020).

In regard to tourism and tourist destinations, in 2018, Pakistan has received acknowledgement of being the World's Top Adventure Travel Destination by the British Backpacker Society. This society is a British organization that connects adventure lovers globally. This society encourages adventurous travel in the mountain ranges across the globe and aims to bring the countries with unexploited tourism potential into limelight (Fuxe, 2018). With a travel experience from variety of states they described Pakistan as "one of the friendliest countries on earth, with

mountain scenery that is beyond anyone's wildest imagination" (Foxe, 2018). This association also provides consultation services to the policy-makers in the states that are budding tourism markets.

In recent years, Pakistan's budding tourism sector has attracted several you tubers, social media influencers and international investors, by providing easy visa facilities, who have undoubtedly contributed in presenting the positive image of Pakistan.

## **II. Trouble-free Visa policy and Soft Image of Pakistan**

In the later months of 2018, the Prime Minister of Pakistan developed a task force to draft new policies and strategies in order to grow the tourism trends in Pakistan (Pakistan Tourism News, 2020). This ultimately led to the formation of the National Tourism Coordination Board (Nagri, 2019). This board took significant measures to promote tourism. Thus, in January 2019, the government of Pakistan announced a soft and flexible Visa Policy. This policy allowed granting visa-on-arrival facilities to as many as 50 countries. According to this policy, now citizens from more than 170 countries can avail E-visas (Editorial, 2019) . The International Community valued the relaxation of visa policy considering it a wise move for gaining soft power status.

## **III. Religious Tourism – Kartarpur Corridor and Soft Image of Pakistan**

Pakistan also provides an exclusive prospect for religious tourism, because it has a number of Sufi shrines, Hindu temples, some prominent Sikh Gurdwaras and mystical Buddhist monasteries. Pakistan is a sacred and valued place for the followers of Guru Nanak, the global Sikh community. Their holy places such as Gurdwara Panja Saheb in Hassan Abdal and Nankana Saheb are the two major pilgrimage sites. Pakistan is as significant for Sikhs as Saudi Arabia is for Muslims and Nepal is for Buddhist. Keeping in mind the growing number of Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan every year, the government took a huge step by constructing and opening of the Kartarpur Corridor in 2019. This corridor is a 4.7 km long visa free transit route that connects Gurdwara Darbar Sahib situated in Pakistan with the Indian border (NDTV News, 2021). The decision of the Corridor was widely welcomed by people of both countries. The news became a headline in the next days' newspaper and TV.

The opening ceremony was broadcasted on national and international media; this was a massive showcase of soft power embodiment. Sikh community around the world cherished this brave diplomatic achievement. A seasoned Cricketer, an esteemed television host and a Minister in Indian Punjab, Navjot Singh Sidhu, applauded the step of opening a corridor for Sikh pilgrims as one that will bridge gaps, burn hostilities and will be a soothing balm for both states. Sidhu was invited on the opening ceremony of the Corridor. While delivering his speech on the occasion he directly addressed Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan "You have won hearts" (Siddiqui, 2019). These words are a noteworthy addition in the soft power status of Pakistan as it has already been established that soft power is all about winning hearts.

Earlier both countries have taken many initiatives on people-to-people contact, like *Samjhota Express*, the *Wahgah Bus Service* but this time, it is extraordinary that the

Pakistani Army and the civil government were found on the same page (Sevea, 2018). In the beginning, the Kartarpur corridor was under the control of Frontier Works Organization (FWO) and the ministry of Defense, however, now it comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (Kartarpur Corridor - About Us). The change of power also gives the matter a softer aspect.

According to news story published in Hindustan Times on March 8, 2020, in six months around 60,000 pilgrims visited Kartarpur. This data was assembled from a check post set up at Dera Baba Nanak, Gurdaspur (Singh S. , 2020).

The decision was celebrated both at state and individual levels. Many Sikh pilgrims and Indian tourists who visited Kartarpur corridor recorded vlogs and tiktoks and uploaded the content on social media. The videos crossed millions of views on YouTube and Facebook. For example, two videos uploaded by Curly Tales and Happy Groovy Lucky have crossed 5 million and 10 million views to date, in which they are visiting Gurdwara Kartarpur.

The opening of the corridor, entering into Pakistan without visa is still very fascinating for the Indian masses. The stigma of being a hostile neighborhood became blurred with the soft power label. Watching these vlogs and reels even today, Indian masses continue to plan visits to Pakistan. The role of social media influencers from other sides of the border in promoting the softer, the friendlier image of Pakistan is undeniable.

Social media influencers from Pakistan are also very active in promoting tourism in Pakistan by uploading their personal travel-videos on intra country road trips.

#### **IV. Religious Tourism –Buddhist Monks and Soft Image of Pakistan**

Pakistan inherited assets of ancient civilizations in the form of historical sights of religious importance. Nearly 3000 years ago, The Gandhara Civilization was dominant in areas that are now considered a part of Pakistan. Ancient archaeological sites, stupas and old artifacts have been discovered in the region. These remains prove that Buddhism was the main religion of the ancient city of Taxila.

Taxila is ranked as a UNESCO world heritage site in Pakistan. According to the official website of Tourism Development corporation of Punjab, “Gandhara (means “Land of the Lakes”) was a region comprising of cities such as Peshawar, Mardan, Malakand, Swat, Dir, Bajaur and Taxila in Pakistan and up to Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Strategically situated on a branch of the Silk Road that connected China to the West, Taxila civilization reached its climax between the 1st and 5th centuries. Taxila is a vast serial site that includes a Mesolithic cave and the archaeological remains of four early settlement sites including Sarikela, Bhir, Sirkap, and Sirsukh reflecting the evolution of urban settlement. The Bhir mound was founded in the 6th century BC by the Achaemenians. Its stone walls and meandering streets symbolize the earliest patterns of urbanization. Its various sites have significant historical bases for instance Bhir is associated with Alexander's entry into Taxila in 326 BC. Sirkap was a fortified city that was founded during the mid-2nd century BC, featuring several stupas, and temples laid out on grid pattern. The city of Sirsukh with asymmetrical rectangle of walls with rounded bastions exposes the early impact of Central Asian architectural (Buddhist Monasteries).

The Gandhara civilization monasteries' archeological sites attract Buddhist monks and scholars from all over the world; including Indonesia, China, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Korea. Despite the fact that Pakistan's image is of a conflict-oriented state, still almost every year Buddhist monks visit Pakistan considering the Gandhara region as their holy place of pilgrimage.

In particular, Korean Buddhists map out their religious center to the region that is currently Pakistan; this is the area that was traveled by Korean monk Hyecho around 1,300 years ago (Altaf, 2018). In 2019, A Buddhist priest from Korea Dr. Neung Hur, also, spent a time of three months in Pakistan to follow the footsteps of Hyecho. He visited all Buddhist archeological sites around Pakistan. Later, in his interview he explained the importance of Buddhist sites in Pakistan, "Many people don't know that Pakistan as a land of Gandhara is like Mecca – the holy place of Islam – for the Buddhist community. Swat is also the birthplace of Padmasambhava who is universally celebrated as the Second Buddha, reincarnated in the 8th century AD. There are several leading ancient philosophers from Peshawar, Swat and Taxila, who have played an important role in the spread of Buddhism to Korea, Japan, and China" (Hur, 2020).

Dr. Neung Hur is an extraordinary Monk who holds two Phds in the fields of Philosophy and Psychology. For more than 20 years, he attended and served monasteries in Tibet, Mongolia, and Russia. In Pakistan, Dr. Hur also conducted a Buddhist Prayer Ceremony for peace and serenity in Kashmir at the archeological site of Bhamala Stupa in Khanpur. Simultaneously being an artist, the Buddhist Monk created several paintings, interestingly based on the themes of Islamic calligraphy. His artwork was displayed under the title "The Buddhist Monk and Islamic Scriptures: A Work of Art Inspired from local and Islamic cultural and aesthetic traditions" (APP, Monk displays calligraphy, 2019).

His presence in Pakistan, the prayer ceremony led by him, and the exhibition of his paintings; all are testimony of the fact that Pakistan is a land of inter-faith harmony. He, voluntarily, helped to enhance the soft power image of Pakistan by labeling it a dreamland for Buddhist pilgrims. He appreciated the national dress of Pakistan.

Visiting Pakistan for their religious purposes is a routine matter for Buddhist Monks. This has established a friendly environment for Pakistan. In April 2021, a group of 14 senior Sri Lankan Buddhist monks undertook a 7 days long holy pilgrimage to different Buddhist ancient religious sites in Pakistan. The delegation started their expedition by visiting Lahore Museum that treasures a number of the premium relics, most importantly, the 'Fasting Bhuddha' and 'Sikri Stupa' that date back to 2 BC. The trip was organized by the High Commission of Pakistan in Colombo, Sri Lanka with a motive to encourage religious tourism in the state by displaying the rich historical remains and warmth of the Pakistani nation (APP, The Express Tribune, 2021).

Recently, in July 2022, at Dharmarajika stupa in Taxila the Arayawangso monk of Thailand, along with a group of monks and students began a three-month 'rain retreat' or vassa (Qureshi, 2022).

The delegation of five monks, one novice and 15 disciples will stay in Pakistan for three months from July till October. Earlier, in 2019, the Arayawangso monk visited Taxila and was deeply impressed by the rich Buddhist heritage of Pakistan. He, then,

announced to make it a yearly tradition to return for retreat in Pakistan. Though, that could not materialize because of the global pandemic. Now, in 2022, after the lifting of the travel restrictions he came back to the land which is acknowledged as 'center of wisdom and peace' according to Buddhist customs.

It is for the very first time in a century that a monk of high stature is observing Rain Retreat in Pakistan. This would help in introducing these Buddhist historically important places to the world and promote Pakistan's soft image internationally (Qureshi, 2022).

## **V. Travel Loggers and Soft Image of Pakistan**

North of Pakistan was almost undiscovered until a man from Lahore, who called himself a vagabond, travelled in this region. He was not just an adventurous soul and a trekker but an eminent national writer as well. He wrote about the beautiful valleys in present day Gilgit -Baltistan, Khyber - Pakhtunkhwa and Kashmir. He traveled by road on local transport upto the Khunjerab Pass. His travel diaries published in the form of travelogues and novels are widely read. The credit of promoting tourism in the north of Pakistan is often associated with Mustanser Hussein Tarar (Parvaiz, 2021). Following the trends set by Tarar, today, thousands of people travel to explore the splendor of the northern areas in Pakistan in their comfortable cars. However, there are some daring young men as well who travel on motorbikes to experience the roughness and serenity of the scenic routes leading to Karakorum and Hindu Kush.

Few of them are enthusiastic enough to upload the videos of their travel diaries on social media. One such man is Abrar Hussein. He is a Pakistani boy who travelled from Germany to Pakistan by road on his motorbike during the first Covid wave in early 2020. He entered Pakistan through the Iran border. Later he travelled across Pakistan and recorded videos of his road trips on motorbike. On YouTube, his Channel subscribers have gone upto 874k, and that makes a huge audience (WildLens by Abrar, 2022). People from all around the world watch his vlogs and admire his efforts. For instance, one of his vlogs titled as "Riding along the River on India Pakistan LOC - Pakistan Motorcycle Tour" has 1,145,213 views alone (WildLens by Abrar, 2021). In his vlogs, he brings out the untouched beauty and cultural values of Pakistan into limelight. He is undoubtedly promoting a softer and a friendlier image of Pakistan. Consequently, through his video travel diaries, Abrar Hussein as an individual has put in consistent efforts to portray Pakistan as a soft power.

While discussing the individuals helping to enhance the soft power status of Pakistan, people associated with television are worth mentioning, who are constantly promoting the soft image of Pakistan on national television through their travel based programs; Wajahat Malik, Taranjeet Singh and Ammad Mir are names of few.

Wajahat Malik is yet another name who has been promoting tourism in Pakistan from the early 2000's; he is a professional adventure and travel filmmaker. His passion to uphold tourism in Pakistan started from times when there was very little craze of social media. Recently he has produced a TV show titled 'Rickshaw Diary' in collaboration with Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) and Pakistan Television. He wanted to travel from Islamabad to Khunjerab Pass, a

gateway located on the Pakistan China Border, in some interesting vehicle. With the hashtag of Responsible Tourism, he has driven a Rickshaw, a three-wheeler locally made vehicle, all the way from Islamabad to the Karakorums. In the same Rickshaw, he came back following the route of BabusarTop, the highest point in Kaghan Valley; passing through Naran, he crossed Muzaffarabad and ultimately reached Neelam Valley (Malik, 2019).

Promoting responsible tourism in a traditional vehicle, the idea was picked by another television host Taranjeet Singh. Singh is a Pakistani Sikh explorer, who travelled in his unique four-wheeler named 'Proper Patola' loaded with brightly colored truck art motifs, designed by the artisans from LokVirsa Islamabad (Singh T. , 2018). A purely nationalist show, being hosted by a Sikh in Pakistan is the highlight of the program. This shows the love of minorities for Pakistan and helps to undermine the propaganda that minorities are generally unfulfilled in Pakistan. His show has effectively dispelled the misconceptions surrounding Pakistan's conservative image. Taranjeet Singh is helping in enhancing the soft power status of Pakistan. Indeed, with conscious efforts of these talented and hardworking individuals, Pakistan has found a reintroduction on a global level.

## **VI. Pakistani Food and Soft Power Status**

It is informally said that food is the national way of entertainment and celebration in Pakistan. People from all social classes and ethnic or cultural backgrounds love food. The food of Pakistan is also a key player when it comes to the embodiment of the soft image of Pakistan. The national and international food bloggers show the world the tastier version of Pakistan. The content creators never fall short of topics because of the variety of food available in Pakistan with different cultural contexts.

The society of Pakistan is a potpourri of diverse cultures that has been mixed up yet their individuality is still intact. The geographical realities of different regions in Pakistan also have an impact on cuisines of each province, for instance, in Khyber Pakhtonkha, the food has Afghan flavors. In Baluchistan, the food is inspired by Iranian cuisines, in Gilgit-Baltistan, the food has central Asian savor. Likewise, in Karachi, since most people are migrants from New Delhi, one may find Indian taste in the food in Karachi. In Punjab, village food is exactly like the food of Indian Punjab. However, Lahore is globally famous for its street food. This being the reason that the first-ever food street was established in Lahore in early 2000s.

Every year, hundreds and thousands of tourists visit Food Street in Lahore. On the internet, one may find hundreds of videos made by video-loggers showcasing the richness of Lahori food. One of these social media influencers or vloggers is Mark Wiens, a man from Bangkok who travels for food. He has more than 9 million subscribers on his YouTube channel (Wiens, 2022). On Nov 11, 2018 he uploaded a video "Street Food in Pakistan - ULTIMATE 16-HOUR PAKISTANI FOOD Tour in Lahore, Pakistan!" On his YouTube channel, he got 16,508,714 views with almost 31 thousand comments. The number of views and comments are quite enough to understand the power of social media. Indeed, it is helping in exporting a positive image of Pakistan. In one of the comments, a subscriber with username Lace Moon writes, "*Its heartbreaking how American media makes us believe that's these beautiful souls should be feared! Thank you for sharing the truth of their warm hearts and generous, kind nature! Beautiful work! Sending all my love to every person you met and beyond! I'm so moved*" (Weins, 2018).



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Wiens not only focuses on food flavors but also discusses the local cultures, traffic situations, buildings, people, and so much more about Pakistani culture. He appreciates the warmth, generosity, and hospitality of the public. He interviews street vendors and people. In another worth mentioning video "What is it like to travel in PAKISTAN?" With 5,197,018 views, he retold his experience of his 16 days across Pakistan and mentioned with confidence that not even a single time he felt threatened or endangered. In fact, it was the total opposite, with random people in streets welcoming him, wanting to shake hands with him and greeting him. Interestingly, there was not a single day in his whole visit when he did not come across a food business owner who refused to take money ( Mark Wiens, 2018) . The comment section is a testimony that the impact of his video is far reaching. A viewer, 'Positively happy mom' from Nepal writes, *"My experience with Pakistani people when I was a kid was that they are so polite and so welcoming. Their food is amazing and they are so cultured. In recent times, it is sad to see Pakistan in such negative light especially from the West. 30 years ago, I visited Karachi, and will soon visit you again. Love from Nepal"* (Wiens, 2022). With the help of social media, it has become easier to spread positive vibes. People from outside the region are eager to express their love from Pakistan. *"The Pakistanis are not rich in their pockets! But definitely rich in their hearts, minds and generosity! You can do nothing but love and respect them! Much love to our Pakistani brothers and sisters from Morocco!"* writes a subscriber of Mark Wiens' YouTube channel from Morocco. This is a great step towards the attainment of the Soft power that Joseph Nye suggested in the 1980s. This is how food in a country plays a pivotal role in projecting Pakistan as a soft power.

Interestingly, the promotion of Pakistan as a soft power has also been contributed by some people who are from outside Pakistan. Another important social media star in this regard is Emirati content creator Khalid al Ameri from Dubai, UAE. Khalid has 1.65M subscribers on Youtube alone. He has a huge fan following on Facebook and on Instagram as well. Khalid claims to share stories that bring the world closer. He has visited Pakistan twice. During his first visit, he got the opportunity to meet the President of Pakistan Mr. Arif Alvi (Ameri, Youtube: Khalid Al Ameri, 2020). Moreover, unlike other social media content creators and Food loggers, he went to the country's most prestigious alma mater, Quaid -i- Azam University. He tried the food at the campus from decades-old *Dhabbaa* ( A [roadside](#) café or food [stall](#)) established inside the university. In his YouTube video description, he writes, *"I have fallen in love with Pakistan and its incredible people. One of the greatest lessons I have learned from this trip is not always believe what the media tells you about a country or a community, visit for yourself, and see for yourself. You will be surprised with the kindness, beauty, and hospitality you will experience in Pakistan"* (Ameri, Youtube: Khalid Al Ameri, 2020). The second time he visited Pakistan was during the third wave of Covid, in March 2021, exclusively to try food in Pakistan. This time, his trip was extensive. He relished the food and shared recipes from big metropolitan cities like Islamabad to ancient cities like Peshawar. More than one million people around the globe watched his videos. In comment sections, the eagerness of his subscribers to visit Pakistan in future shows the success of the intentions of Khalid Al Ameri of depicting Pakistan as a tourist state, and not a terrorist country.

The food bloggers from Pakistan are also very active in showing the world the flavors of Pakistan. Most known names among them are Ali Rehman and Adeel Chaudhry from Lahore. Ali Rehman is also a food photographer with a count of 105000 followers on Instagram. Adeel Chaudhry owns a restaurant in Lahore and has a great fan following that reaches up to 139000 on Facebook. Both these individuals endorse local food stalls, small food businesses, roadside dhabbas, and traditional food stands. In their videos, they share the ingredients, the recipes, and show live cooking of the meals. Also in description, the prices and locations of the particular food business is mentioned to make it accessible for people to approach the food vendor on their own.

## **VII. Music hits and Soft Power Image**

Music is a universal language, based on emotions. Music is a power in itself. It can dissolve international borders, bypass cultural barriers, and encourage international cooperation. This is precisely the reason why it is termed as a strong diplomatic tool for attaining soft power status. Melodies from Pakistan have always been appreciated around the globe. Every region has its own distinct culture, music and folklores. Coke Studio and Nescafe Basement, serve as a display of the diverse musical talent present in the region. During the time-period under study, a super hit song from Coke Studio Pakistan (Season 14) 'Pasoori' is a music production worth mentioning. From car stereos in Islamabad to the clubs of New Delhi and parties in Kathmandu, the song is heard everywhere. The music composer and singers have created magic in the song. On YouTube, the song has already won over 290M views.

The Guardian UK writes that the influence of the song is extended far beyond South Asia. Since its release, it has become an international sensation. *Pasoori* is a fusion of traditional and contemporary musical elements. It stands out as one of Pakistan's most celebrated musical exports in recent years. Admired for breaking barriers, especially between India and Pakistan, the song continues the longstanding tradition of culture bridging the divide where politics has consistently fallen short (Baloch, 2022).

It also needs to be mentioned here that two other Pakistani music sensations like Atif Aslam and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan are already singing for one of the biggest movie industries, Bollywood, for over the past two decades. Their soulful voices, romantic ballads, and pop songs are ruling over Indian music charts. By selling our music to international companies, Pakistani music artists are promoting the melodious image of Pakistan globally. This is an undeniable contribution which has multiplied the softer image of Pakistan.

## **VIII. Sports and soft power of Pakistan**

Sports are another effective instrument to establish as a soft power. Soft power has the potential to reach and influence in a gentle way. Peace and prosperity both can be realized through four attributes of sport diplomacy that are image-building, trust-building, integration and anti-racism (Gates, 2013). The Pakistan Super League commonly known as PSL has all the attributes mentioned above. The HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) has evidently proved as an event of exceptional power. In the past few years, PSL has displayed the ability to bring communities together. After launching PSL as an annual sports event, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have generated revenue, earned acclaims, appreciations and fresh talent has come up

internationally. The league has greatly contributed in upholding the soft image of the state at international arenas (Daily Times, 2022).

HBL PSL is graded as one of the top cricket tournaments of the world today. Regardless of being a novice to T20 matches, PSL has earned global recognition. Its recent edition, PSL 7, was the most popular one, which earned more revenue and viewers than ever before. For PSL 7 International Television Channels across the world bought the broadcast rights to show live matches in their respective countries. This allowed cricket happening in Pakistan to reach spectators across other continents. The PSL brought the cricket of international standards back to the stadiums in Pakistan (Tahir, 2022).

Pakistan owns a rich folk culture and this cricket league was the right time to display them both internationally. Showcase of Pakistan's iconic truck art, during the opening ceremony of HBL PSL 7 drew global attention. A commentary booth was decorated as a truck. Australian cricket presenter Erin Holland and New Zealand commentator Danny Morrison were also noticed riding a vibrantly painted truck-art-style rickshaw in the stadium lawns, appealing both live spectators and television viewers alike (Tahir, 2022).

PSL 7 was more entertaining than the previous editions of the league. This year the popular mobile application TikTok was also an official media partner. The anthem of PSL 7 was launched on TikTok at first place. People were asked to share their videos while dancing on the anthem of PSL 7 with the hashtags #LevelHai #AgayDekh and #KhelegaPakistan. "the hashtag #LevelHai has gained more than 700 million views, #AgayDekh has around 200 million, and #KhelegaPakistan has 2.3 billion views. These numbers reflect viewership in Pakistan and other countries around the world (Tahir, 2022).

Another initiative taken by the Pakistan Cricket Board during the live screening of PSL matches was the Awards presented to some brilliant but unknown Pakistani individuals who shined in their field of life including education, technology, games, medicine, music, philanthropy and social entrepreneurship. "A total of 32 "*Hamaray Heroes*" awards were handed out during the HBL PSL 2020 in Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi" (PCB, 2021). Introducing these heroes to the world was a wise step indeed. Such flaunting of the achievements made by them helped to burst the myth of a radical Pakistan. PSL portrays a soft image of the state, moreover sends a positive note to the world that Pakistan is nonviolent and it is a safe country to host leading cricket events.

### **Conclusion**

In today's age of globalization, states of the world are interconnected through media and technology. Liberalism has spread awareness in the people and people have become peace loving. A peaceful state is now called the most powerful state in the era of idealism. The merger of Liberalism, active media and peace gives birth to soft power. All states are working to show themselves better than the others. They are striving hard to acquire a good perception in the world and portray their soft image in front of the international community of states.

Pakistan, as a state, is still grappling with the formation of its image. The perception of the country as a soft power depends on both its economic situation and the mindset of the ruling party. As discussed earlier, during the Zia regime, Pakistan

emerged as a frontline war ally of the U.S. against the USSR, projecting an international image of a hard power. In the early enlightened and moderated years of General Musharraf, it transformed into a burgeoning soft power. Thus, we can conclude that Pakistan has followed a zigzag pattern in its endeavors to establish an international image.

While evaluating the effectiveness of Pakistan's soft power initiatives and whether they have yielded the desired results. One may assume that Pakistan exists on the delicate balance between embodying characteristics of both a soft power and a hard power state. On one occasion, it faces accusations of supporting extremist groups, while on another; it deploys troops for UN peacekeeping missions.

For Pakistan, who has long suffered from international image problems, which is mainly due to current on ground realities of unstable government and partly due to deliberate distortions, it is need of time to undertake soft power efforts to correct these misperceptions, and more importantly, showcase its many positive attributes and rich heritage of arts, civilization, tourism, and culture.

The media should make concrete efforts to stay away from projecting negative and sensational news. Also, the people who live abroad are like ambassadors in foreign countries who can play a pivotal role in changing the perception about Pakistan. Above all, the prompt and fair execution of elections, coupled with a peaceful transfer of power to a genuinely democratic government, is pivotal for positioning Pakistan as a widely recognized soft power.

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