

Capitalizing on Pakistan's Public Diplomacy:

Potential in Pursuit of Soft Power

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Abstract

This paper examines Pakistan's challenges in leveraging its soft power potential through effective public diplomacy (PD). It explores the root causes of Pakistan's negative image perception, primarily from domestic economic, political, and social conditions. The study highlights the need for strategic policy investments to promote a tolerant, liberal, and multicultural ethos essential for strengthening Pakistan's soft power toolkit. The research identifies several key obstacles, including the limited space for liberal arts in a conservative society, a lack of understanding of PD within policy circles and society, a prevailing mindset that views PD as tangential to core diplomatic functions, and insufficient expertise in executing PD activities among Foreign Ministry officers. The paper argues for a long-term, institutionalized approach to image-building, acknowledging that there are no quick fixes for long-held negative perceptions. It emphasizes the necessity of developing a comprehensive understanding of PD's importance and potential impact. Through critical evaluation of existing policies and practices, this study aims to chart a course forward for Pakistan to effectively utilize its soft power resources and improve its global image through strategic public diplomacy efforts.

Keywords: *Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Strategic Communication division, Artificial Intelligence, National Security Advisor.*

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1. Introduction

A major foreign policy goal for Pakistan is promotion of its image as a dynamic, progressive, moderate, and democratic Islamic country. This is undertaken through Public Diplomacy (PD) efforts defined in various ways as 'self-presentation through impression management' (Mor, 2007), 'development and maintenance of a country's soft power of persuasion and attraction' Batora (2005) and 'diplomacy directed at the public, not at governments of foreign countries, to shape opinion in those countries in a way that furthers policy objectives' (Lowy, 2009).

A country's reputation and positive image play a pivotal role in earning respect and enhancing its diplomatic weight in international affairs. This is the idea of 'soft power'-the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion because seduction is always more effective. (Nye, 2004).

Advantages of successful image curation are immense. They include raising a country's international standing, creating favorable perceptions in international domain, helping to achieve foreign policy goals by being heard and accepted, promoting economic interests, and opening doors and creating opportunities.

The way a country is perceived abroad is its external image-sum of all the impressions that are evoked when we think of a country. The image constitutes the country brand which can be understood as a deliberate effort to create favorable perceptions. A strong, positive national brand creates favorable global perceptions, encourages inward investment and export growth, and helps achieve strategic foreign policy goals; the idea of positive image positioning vis-à-vis Pakistan forms the basis of this paper.

1.1. Statement of Problem

In the modern information age, it is becoming elemental for governments to leverage digital technologies as an instrument to create a favorable image (Christodoulides, 2005). This renders it essential for Pakistani diplomats to step out of their status-quo-oriented comfort zones and embrace modern diplomatic practices through the exercise of public diplomacy and strategic communications. These tools can help Pakistan's diplomats dispel misperceptions regarding the country's perceived negative image attributable to both mischaracterizations and deliberate distortions by our foes, as well as on-ground realities (Lodhi, 2021). However, despite repeated efforts to undertake effective PD by owning and projecting its many positive attributes and rich heritage of history, arts, and civilization to curate a positive country brand, Pakistan remains unable to tap into its soft power potential in a bid to win hearts and minds. There is a dire need to invest in narrative-shaping exercises that dispel the abiding adverse image of Pakistan. This study is significant because it aims to analyze the issue from the lens of public



diplomacy practitioners. The scope of the paper will focus on the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in practising Public Diplomacy.

1.2. Research Question

Foregoing in view, why has Pakistan not been able to capitalize on its PD potential, what are the challenges it faces in undertaking effective PD and how can it effectively project its soft image?

2. Review of the Literature

There have been several studies on the importance of projecting Pakistan's soft image in pursuance of its PD aims and reasons why the efforts have not been successful. Shabbir (2012) identified multifarious causes of Pakistan's 'chronic negative image problem' ranging from negative mentions in Western press and books, negative assessments made in official/semi-official publications, sensational and exaggerated mentions in Western feature films and documentaries, negative self-image propagated by local media and Pakistani diaspora and negative reports by international civil society organizations. Jabbar (2005) has deemed such perceptions extremely dangerous because they erode and/or diminish the contours of a nation's identity. Melissen (2005) attributes Pakistan's negative perception to a lack of due attention to the importance of soft power and image building and lists various means to win the 'profile' war by preventing image distortion and investing in education, exercising open and trustworthy foreign policy, mobilizing diaspora networks, and investing in a culture of democracy and the rule of law. Abbas (2021) argues that Pakistan's distorted image has serious implications for the country's economy and core national interests. Najam (1999) argues that the international media appears anti-Pakistan not because of a Zionist conspiracy or its inherent bias but because we have never given it much reason to be pro-Pakistani.

However, Abbas (2021) counters that all is not lost, and Pakistan's image crisis can be overcome by adopting a clearly defined strategy by engaging media, undertaking meaningful diplomacy, tourism promotion, and inculcation of a strong democratic culture.

No study, however, has analyzed the critical role of MOFA in positive image curation particularly by exercising Public and Cultural Diplomacy (CD). Therefore, this research paper aims to critically evaluate the role of MOFA in owning, projecting, and disseminating Pakistan's narrative in pursuance of soft power and influence.

3. Method

The study uses mixed research methods, including qualitative and quantitative research tools as well as primary and secondary data. Primary data was

collected from structured interviews and questionnaires with the public at large, mid-career diplomats and Ambassadors of Pakistan. The data is tabulated and evaluated quantitatively to arrive at distinct conclusions. Various books, papers and published reports have been used as secondary data sets. A descriptive narrative is used to explain various theoretical models.

4. Section I: Introducing Public Diplomacy and Identifying its Various Facets

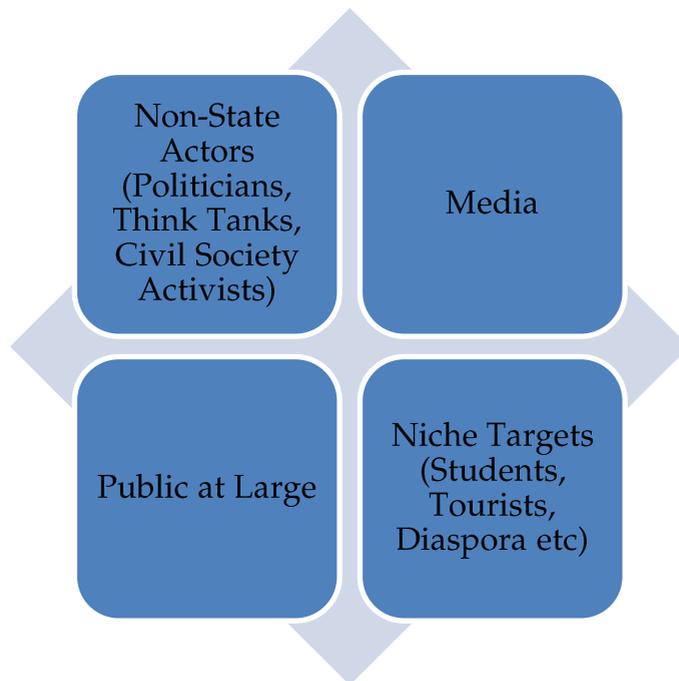
Sun Tzu, the famous Chinese strategist, said the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting (Sun Tzu and the Art of Soft Power, 2011). Nye (1991) introduced the idea of 'soft power' as an indirect way of exercising influence.

PD, when practiced effectively to advance national interests, can capitalize on the country's soft power. While the components of PD are not new, what is new today is the realization that these form a holistic entity requiring integrated actions to present the country at its best, influencing the perception of the foreign public while advancing its external interests.

When practised as a diplomatic craft, PD aims to improve and project a country's true image by addressing actors from the public at large, including:

Figure 1.

PD and it's Facts



The most effective toolkit includes supplementary ideas such as country branding, positive image positioning and reputation. Elements that make up a country brand include:

- Culture and Reputation
- Recent experiences, including the image conveyed by tourists, businessmen, foreign students, and, of course, the media
- The position the country takes on international issues (e.g., climate change)
- Powerful commercial brands that can act as building blocks for a country's image (e.g., Samsung for South Korea or Tata for India).

However, even though soft power has measurable value, many countries still use it reactively, responding tactically, not strategically, to urgent political challenges. They fail to develop long-term soft power plans linked to a national brand strategy.

5. Section II: Pakistan's 'Image Problem'

Countries are judged by what they do, not by what they say, and hence, the idea that a country can merely advertise itself for a better reputation has proved to be delusive (Anholt, 2013). Country reputation is a strategic concept grounded in long-term impressions that are constructed from images and actions of a country (Passow et al., 2005) and; thus, branding only contributes to the country's reputation to a certain extent but does not entirely define it (Wang, 2006).

Professor William Benoit's "Image Repair Theory" implies that an image might be improved but not entirely restored. Herein lies the Pakistan conundrum: the global media, foreign think tanks and international academia are almost unanimous in portraying Pakistan as a 'problematic' nation.

To borrow Foucault's phrase, once the world's perceptions of Pakistan "have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made" (Kelly, 1994). The process begins by discovering how these perceptions came about and how they can be reversed.

Firstly, the international community's outlook on Pakistan has not been favourable. Brand Finance's Soft Power Index ranks countries in order of their soft power potential; the 2022 ranking saw Pakistan drop 20 paces to the 83rd position.

Pakistan projects a poor image of its quality of life by consistently ranking low on life satisfaction indices. The Human Development Index, that ranks 192 countries based on their standard of living, health, longevity, and education, ranked Pakistan at 161 in 2021-2022. This ranking shows a drop of 7 places since

2020, showing little to no improvement in gender equality and discrimination, poverty, literacy, and life expectancy from previous years (UNDP, 2022). These low rankings project Pakistan as a backward country with archaic policies that are not designed to improve the lives of its citizens.

Figure 2.
Brand Finance Soft Power Index, 2022



Source: Brand Finance Soft Power Index, 2022

According to the latest report on the Global Terrorism Index, Pakistan ranks 10 out of 163 countries, with 171 terror-related incidents in 2020 and 186 incidents in 2021 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022).

Pakistan was placed by FATF, an international task force that monitors and counters global money laundering and terror financing, on its grey list multiple times: first in 2008, and then again in 2012 and 2018 (Dawn, 2022), citing the country's less than stringent financial monitoring mechanisms in relation to terror financing. This inclusion on the grey list as a country through which terror financing occurs proved highly detrimental to Pakistan's international image.

Corruption also portrays a negative image of Pakistan in the international community. Pakistan's recent ranking in the Corruption Perception Index shows a high level of public sector corruption, with a score of 28 in 2021



(Transparency International, 2021). This discourages international investment in the country as investors are wary of indulging in backroom deals to operate their businesses.

Islamic parties within the political fabric of Pakistan insist on implementing a more hard-liner view of Islam, often pressurizing and getting concessions from the government by using their large voter base, contributing to Pakistan's poor external perception.

Repeated attacks on democracy, such as the 2008 assassination of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the inability of governments to complete their term, and low voter turnout, all undermine democracy. However, the pervasive direct and indirect military influence in politics is the most damaging.

A closer look at the past three-year ratings of Pakistan on the Global Soft Power Index substantiates the problems highlighted above:

Table 1.

Past three-year ratings of Pakistan on the Global Soft Power Index

Category	2022		2021		2020	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Familiarity	5.9	37	5.7	45	5.5	42
Influence	3.3	50	3.4	47	3.2	45
Reputation	4.9	117	4.8	102	4.9	57
Business & Trade	2.2	113	2.0	89	1.9	58
Governance	1.6	110	2.0	80	1.5	58
International Relations	2.0	108	2.0	64	2.3	38
Culture & Heritage	1.7	115	3.5	89	2.5	59
Media & Comm	1.8	112	1.7	85	1.8	55
Education & Science	1.7	108	1.7	85	1.7	57
People & Values	1.9	117	1.9	102	2.5	58

COVID 19 Response	4	105	3.1	62	-	-
Cumulative Scores	31/100	83/120	31.8	63/120	29.7/100	53/120

Source: Global Soft Power Index, 2022

Figure 3.
Pakistan's Global Soft Power Ranking (2020-2022)



There is a downward trend evident across all contributory sectors that Brand Finance evaluates to determine Soft Power Index rankings; Pakistan has dropped 30 paces in the past 3 years. These results exemplify Pakistan’s inability to highlight the actual culture, traditions, and values of Pakistan to the world at large.

6. Section III: Public Diplomacy Practiced by Pakistan

To rectify this imbalance, MOFA established a dedicated Public Diplomacy division in 2007 to project state policy, promote national interest, build a



positive image, and better understand its foreign policy decisions within Pakistan and abroad. Its mandate was enhanced in 2015 to include Public Policy and Research functions.

PP&PD division is tasked with the promotion and projection of the soft image of Pakistan through various PD events organized by Missions Abroad. To do that, it has at its disposal two specific budget heads namely PD Fund and Projection of Pakistani Culture Abroad.

Table 2.

Breakdown of departmental budget in PKR for FY 2022-23

Sr. No.	Head of Account	Budget Grant 2022-23	Spending Units	Cost Centers	
23	A02203-Surveys Remuneration to Research Scholars	502, 000	PP	HQ2203	
	A03903-Conferences & Seminars	11, 313, 000			
	A03905-Purchase of Books, Audio & Video Cassettes, Films for Dissemination	2, 150, 000			HQ2195-Projection of Pakistan Culture
	A03805-Traveling Allowance	2, 668, 000			
	A03970-Others	13, 557, 000			
24	A03907-Purchase of Publicity Material	1, 200, 000	PD	HQ2203	
	A03970-Others (Public Diplomacy Fund)	110, 000, 000			
Total		141, 390, 000			

However, the budget allocation is meagre. The sanctioned amount is invariably less than the amount requested by Missions, necessitating them to utilize their own resources to fund the remaining cost. This is a big disincentive to conduct sustained and effective PD outreach and has contributed to the fragmented effect of the PP&PD division on MOFA's PD efforts.

6.1. Launch of Strategic Communications Division

To plug this increasingly evident gap, in August 2020, Prime Minister Imran Khan approved a formal arrangement to operationalize the Strategic Communication Division (SCD) within MOFA, reporting directly to the Foreign Minister, with the the broad aim of coordinating and developing a comprehensive communications strategy to tackle Pakistan's image issues.

The core objectives of SCD include employing the latest communication tools to craft contextualized messaging, including speeches, blogs, social media content and micrometres; developing Strategic Communication Strategies for high-level events; establishing linkages with public and private organizations; undertaking PD narrative building and liaising with think tanks, Universities, and academics within Pakistan and abroad. Further SCD objectives are acting as a focal point for intergovernmental coordination for content highlighting Pakistan's creative industries; preparing guidelines for media engagement, ensuring adoption of modern communication tools.; developing SOPs and guidelines, arranging media engagement pieces of training for diplomats and organizing 'High-Impact' PD events.

Its job description also included a complete revamping of MOFA's digital footprint, and its effect is manifest in:

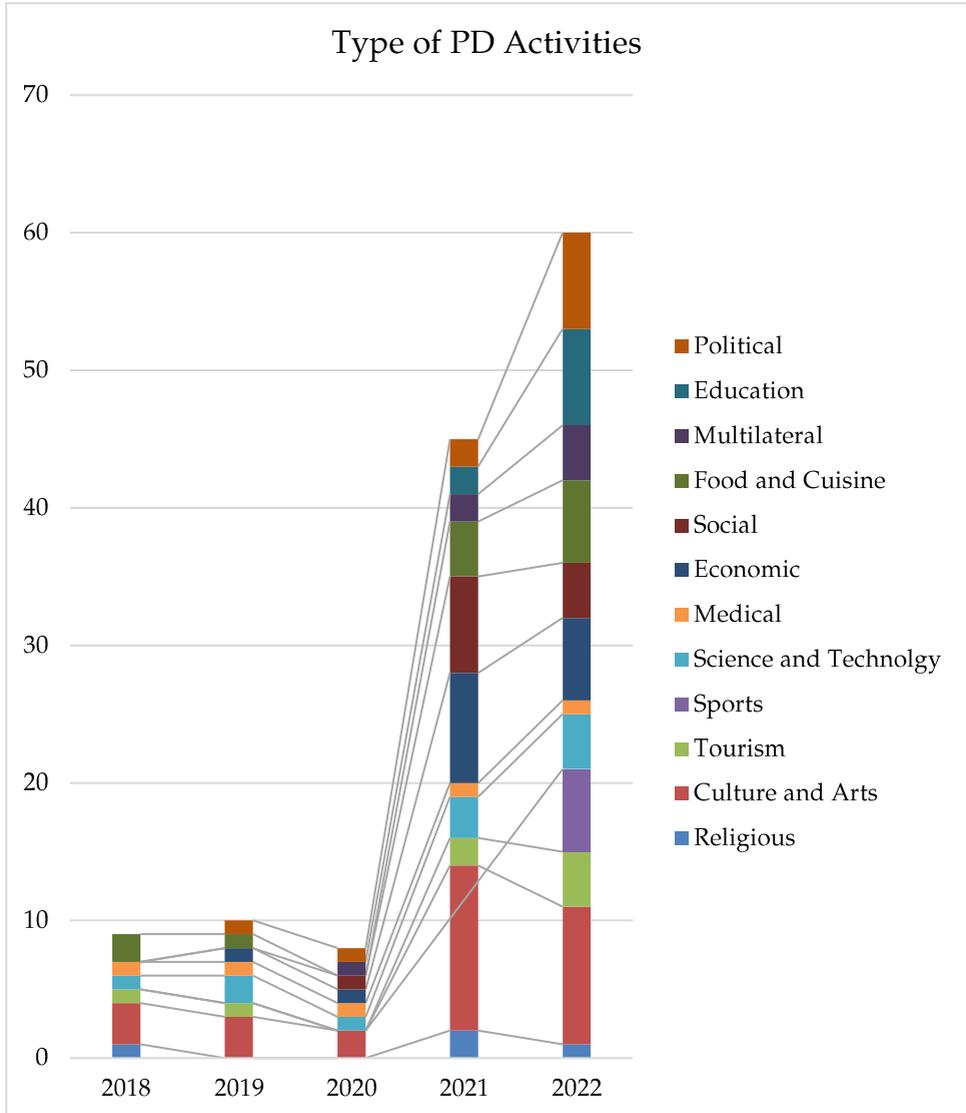
- i. Ensuring the digital presence of 118 Pakistan Missions Abroad on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in a standardized format with blue tick verifications and uniformity of message.
- ii. Launch of Science Diplomacy Pakistan (@SciDipPak)
- iii. Launch of Public Diplomacy Pakistan (@PkPublic Diplo)
- iv. Revamping of Spokespersons' media outreach
- v. Undertaking dedicated PD through @PkPublicDiplo
 - a. Weekly Video Drop on Pakistani Cities
 - b. Weekly Video on Pakistani Culture
 - c. Amplification of PD outreach by Missions Abroad
 - d. Highlighting Pakistan's achievements in sports, culture, art, music, literature etc.
 - e. Networking



f. Covering High Impact Public Diplomacy Events (Pre-During-Post Event Coverage)

It is apt to mention here that SCD has no budget. It relies on PP&PD to provide funds or resorts to the PPP model to raise funds through sponsorships.

Figure 4.
Type of PD Activities



Let us analyze PD activities undertaken by Pakistan in the last 5 years (2018-2022).

We notice a dip during the pandemic years (2019-2021), followed by a promising spike as we enter the post-covid era. This was also marked by the creation and launch of SCD, which brought its institutionalized perspective of conducting PD. Flagship frameworks included celebrating national days, observing Kashmir days, celebrating diplomatic milestones such as 70 years of diplomatic relations with China, Germany, Spain, Thailand, and Argentina; 75 years of diplomatic relations with the US, UK, Canada, and Türkiye; partnering for stronger cultural cohesion and projection with entities such as Coke Studio Pakistan and UNEP Pakistan, marking international UN days etc. This was achieved by making a calendar of activities and sharing it with the entire network of Missions Abroad to create strategic constructive collaboration.

It is promising to note the upward trend in the conduct of PD by Pakistan Missions Abroad. However, the quantum and spread of the events is very limited and is not expanding to all Missions. This is visually represented in the pie chart below and can be attributed to various factors, or a combination thereof, including:

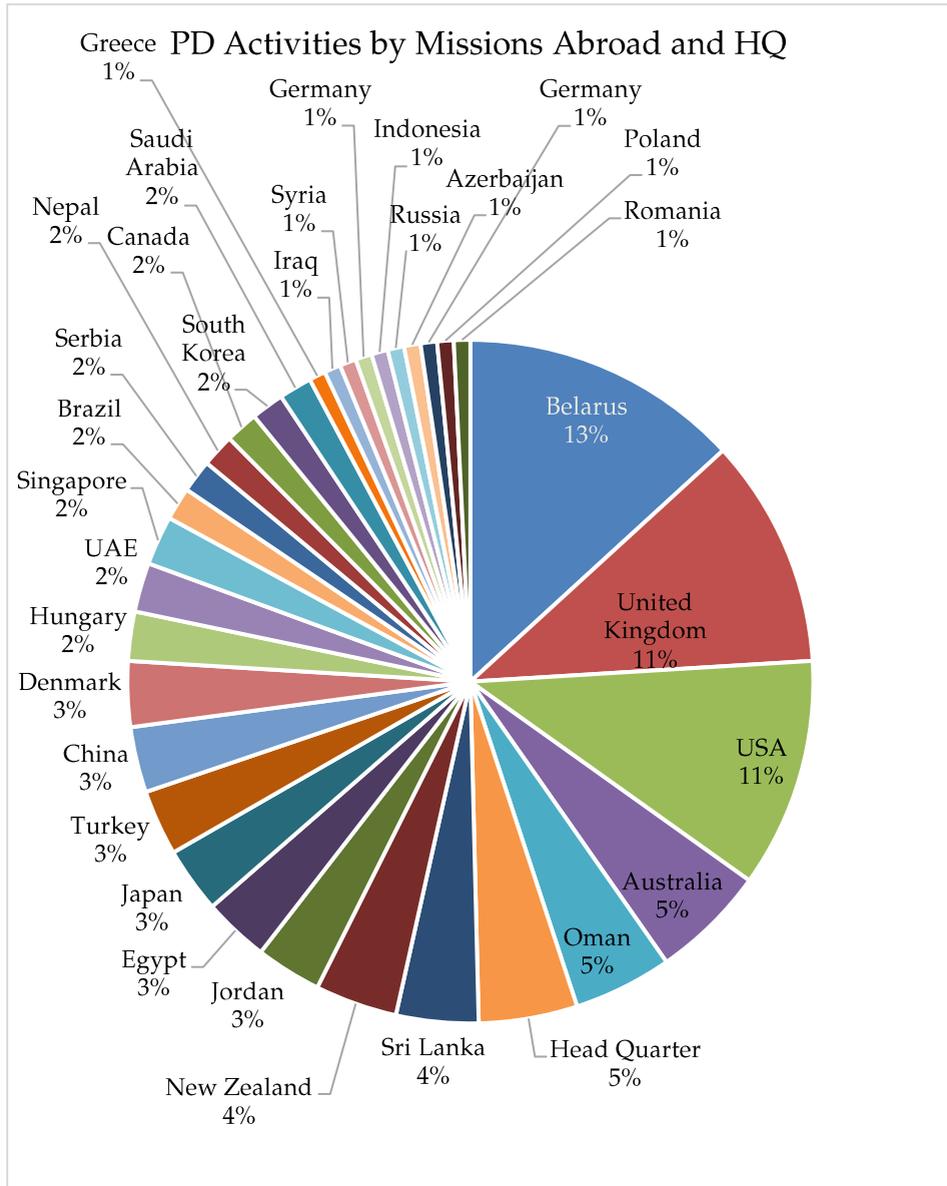
- i. Lack of financial & human resources
- ii. Lack of interest or understanding of PD
- iii. Difficult political relations with the host country
- iv. Limited local outreach

7. Section IV: Presentation of Data

To understand this better, detailed surveys were conducted based on structured questionnaires from three groups: the public (18–28-year-olds), mid-career public diplomacy practitioners at MOFA and Pakistan's Ambassadors and Heads of Missions.



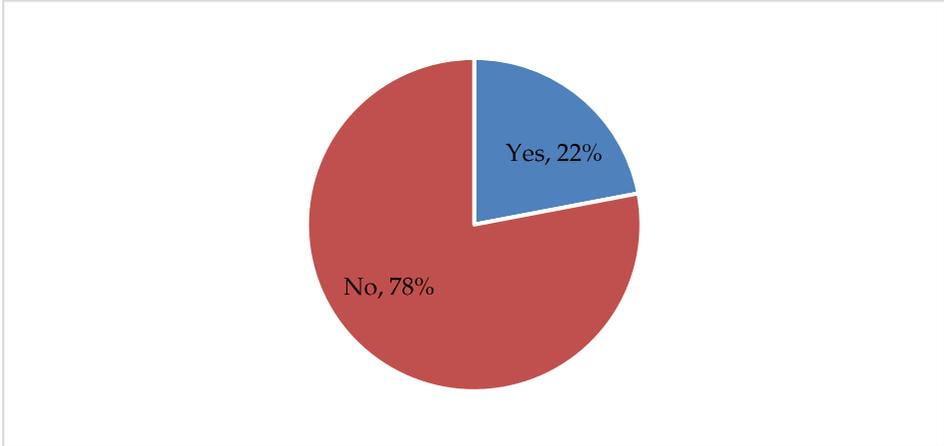
Figure 5.
PD Activities by Missions Abroad and HQ



7.1. Public At Large (50 Respondents)

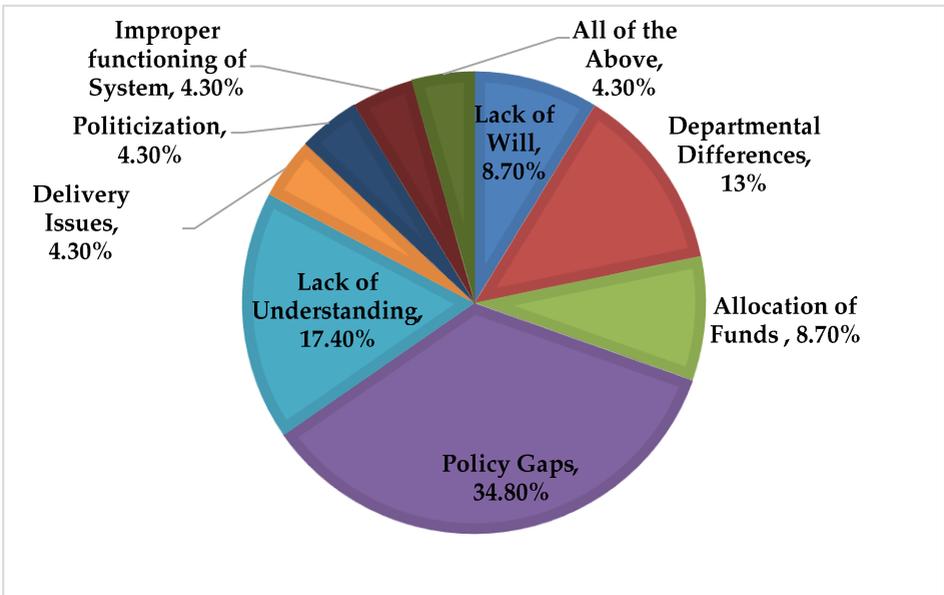
Do you think Pakistan has capitalized on its Public Diplomacy potential?

Figure 6.
Pakistan's PD Potential



39/50 respondents (78%) believe Pakistan has not capitalized on its PD potential.

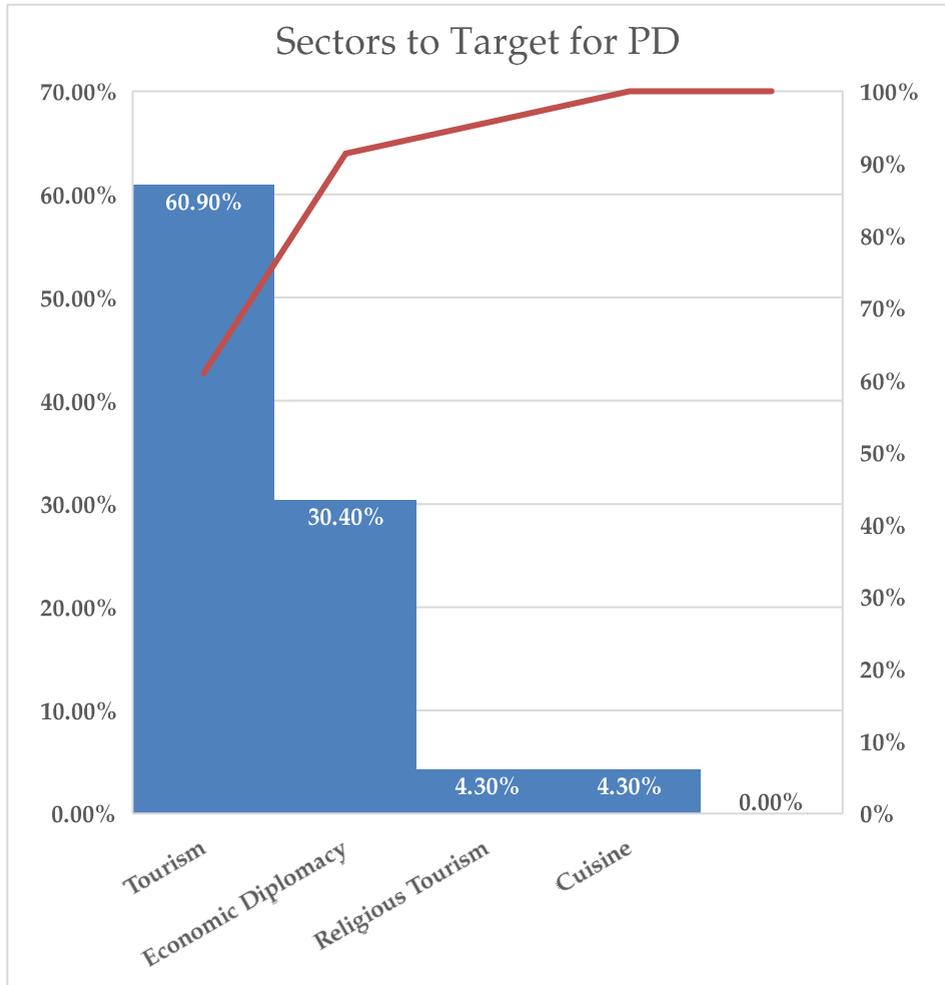
Figure 7.
What are the main problems encountered in conducting PD?



18 respondents believe that policy gaps are the main reason Pakistan has been unable to meet its PD expectations; nearly 9 respondents attribute it to a lack of departmental understanding on conducting effective PD; approximately 7 people blame inter-ministerial and inter-departmental differences, whereas 5 each believe that resource constraints and politicization of policies are the reasons why Pakistan is unable to chart a comprehensive course forward.

Figure 8.

What are the areas where Pakistan can undertake effective PD?



31 respondents believe Pakistan should focus only on tourism promotion as a PD opportunity; 15 state that Economic Diplomacy should remain the focus of all outreach activities.

8. II. Mid-Career Practitioners of PD at MOFA (Sample Size: 50 Respondents)

Is Pakistan practicing sustained Public Diplomacy abroad, leading to the creation of 'Brand Pakistan'?

Figure 9.
Effectiveness of PD Efforts

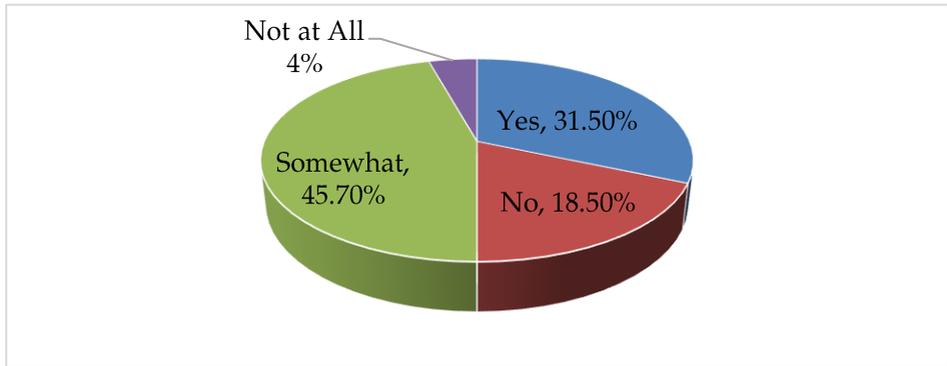


Table 3.
Title

Response	Value Assigned	Number Respondents	of Percentage
Yes	10	15.5	31%
Somewhat	6.6	23	46%
No	3.3	9.5	19%
Not at All	0	2	4%

Total Respondents: 50

Weighted Mean: 6.76

Standard Deviation: 1.17

The results show that MOFA’s PD efforts are acknowledged in an encouraging trend. However, there is considerable room for improvement as 46% of respondents have stated that PD efforts are only ‘somewhat’ contributing to the creation of Brand Pakistan. Nonetheless, 77% of the surveyed respondents had a positive view of the PD efforts of MoFA. This is strengthened by the



calculation of the weighted mean (with an even distribution of weights), which indicates that a significant portion of the surveyed population agrees with the partial effectiveness of PD activities. The standard deviation lies within 10% of the assigned values, reflecting that the mean is a representative indicator of the view of the population surveyed.

Figure 10.

Has Pakistan's Public Diplomacy initiatives resulted in a better understanding of its culture in foreign publics?

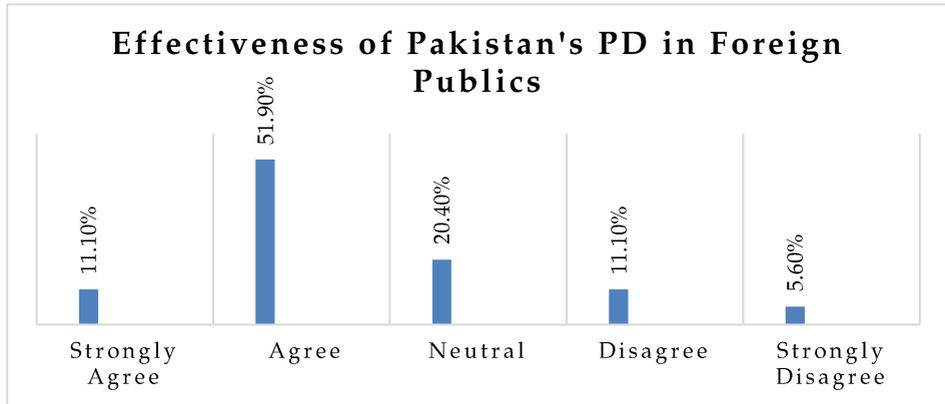


Table 4.

Title

Response	Value Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	5.5	11.1%
Agree	7.5	26	51.9%
Neutral	5	10.2	20.4%
Disagree	2.5	5.5	11.1%
Strongly Disagree	0	2.8	5.6%

Total Respondents: 50

Weighted Mean: 6.3

Standard Deviation: 1.19

63% of respondents agree that MOFA's PD activities have resulted in a better understanding of Pakistan's culture and values amongst the foreign public. Since we have assigned an equally distributed weighted value to all segments of the response, the mean value appears somewhat lower than expected from

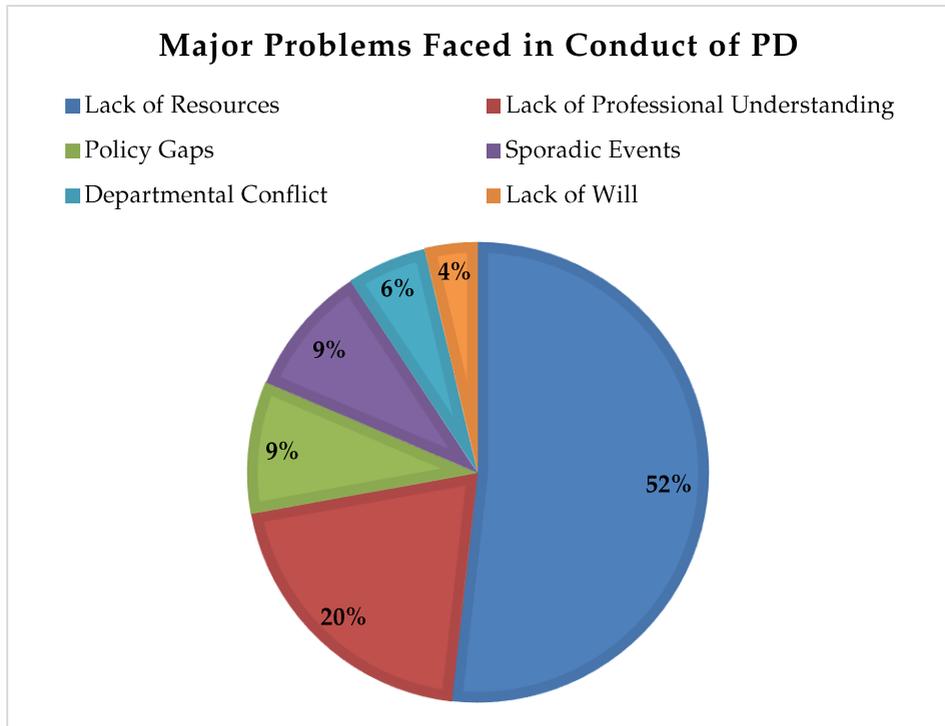
looking only at the raw percentages.

However, the weighted mean value of 6.3 (with evenly distributed weights) indicates a largely positive view of the responders to MOFA's efforts. The standard Deviation is also low, confirming that the mean represents the overall data well.

Nonetheless, the largely positive response may be treated with some caution as respondents are practitioners of PD, and the results may be skewed because of inherent confirmation bias.

Figure 11.

What is the major problems Pakistan faces in conducting Public Diplomacy?



16 respondents believe that resource constraints are the biggest hurdle in conducting effective PD; 10 respondents accept the lack of required skill set and understanding to conduct PD outreach as a limiting factor; each 5 respondents agree that policy gaps and holding of sporadic events also contribute to a marginal PD footprint.

Although responses varied vis-à-vis importance attached to each sector, it is evident from the graph above that the scope of conducting PD is vast and ranges from tourism promotion (35.2%) to all categories (25.6%).



Figure 12.

What are the main areas where Public Diplomacy initiatives can be undertaken?

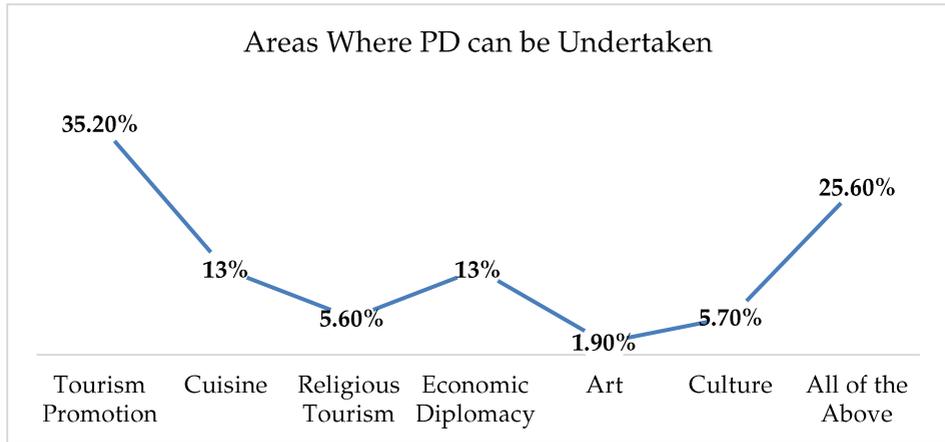
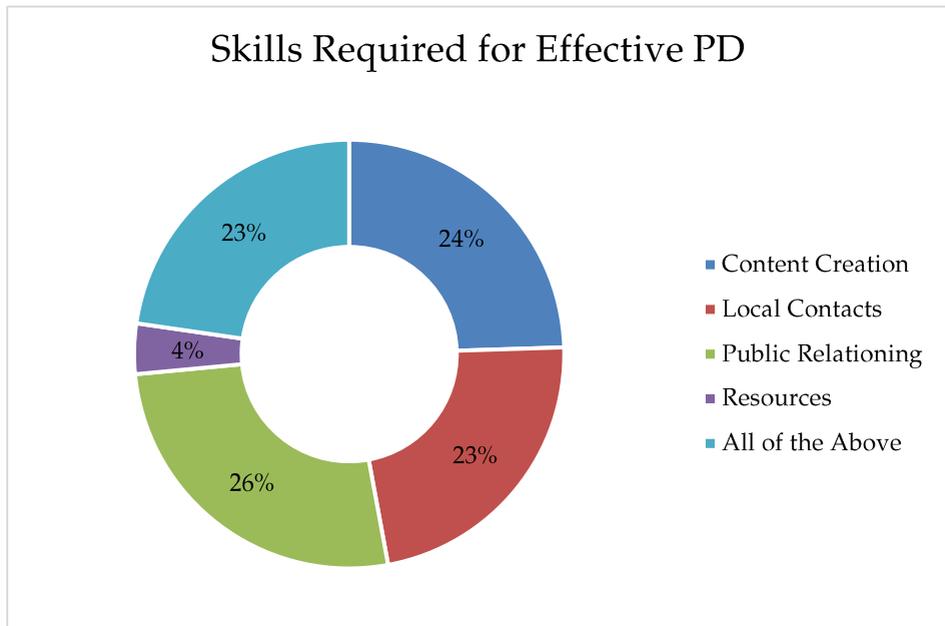


Figure 13.

What skills are required in Pakistan's diplomats to undertake effective Public Diplomacy?

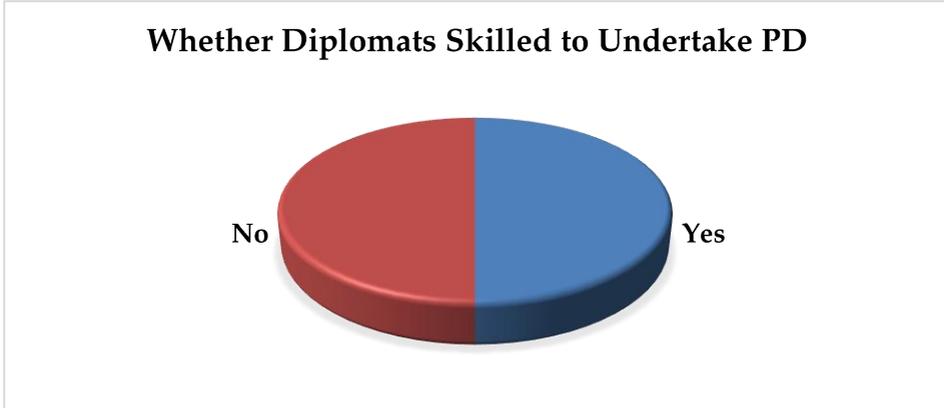


It is evident from the nearly uniform split that our diplomats themselves recognize that there is a dire need to be equipped with a new skill set comprising many attributes, including strong public relations, networking, content creation, resource generation (particularly through the PPP model),

and cultivating local contacts in host countries in order to undertake effective PD outreach.

Figure 14.

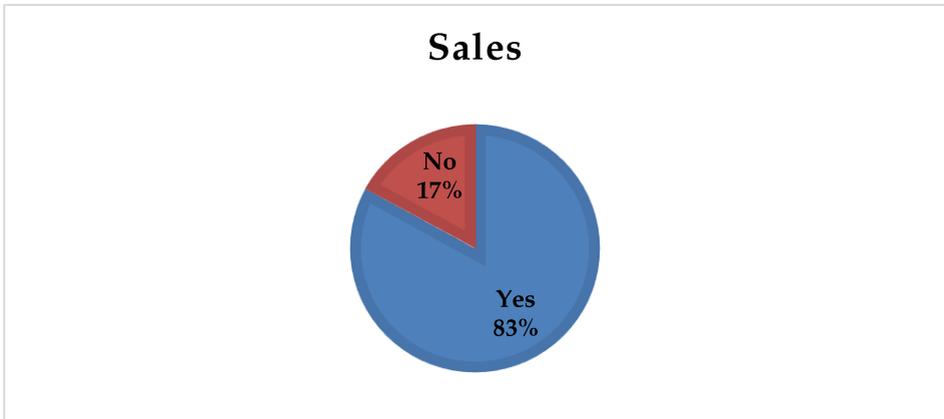
Do Pakistani Diplomats possess requisite skill set to undertake Public Diplomacy Abroad?



Respondents are inconclusive on whether Pakistan's diplomats possess the requisite skill set to undertake effective PD.

Figure 15.

Has creation of Strategic Communications Division positively affected Pakistan's conduct of Public Diplomacy?

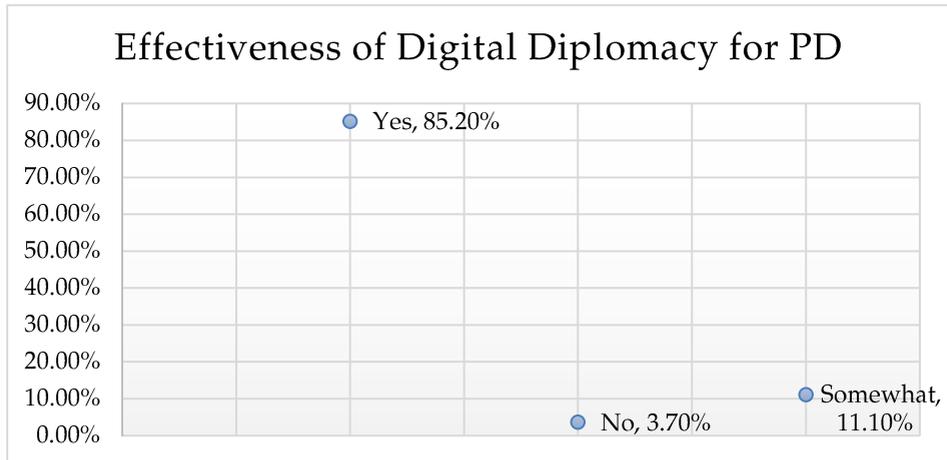


In a positive endorsement, 83% of PD practitioners understand and recognize the utility of SCD.



Figure 16.

Is Digital Diplomacy (DD) important to the effective conduct of Public/Cultural Diplomacy?



In another encouraging sign, an overwhelming majority of respondents believe in DD's importance in undertaking effective PD.

III. Pakistan's Ambassadors and Heads of Missions (HOMs) (Sample Size: 30)

Figure 17.

Is Pakistan practicing sustained Public Diplomacy abroad leading to creation of 'Brand Pakistan'?

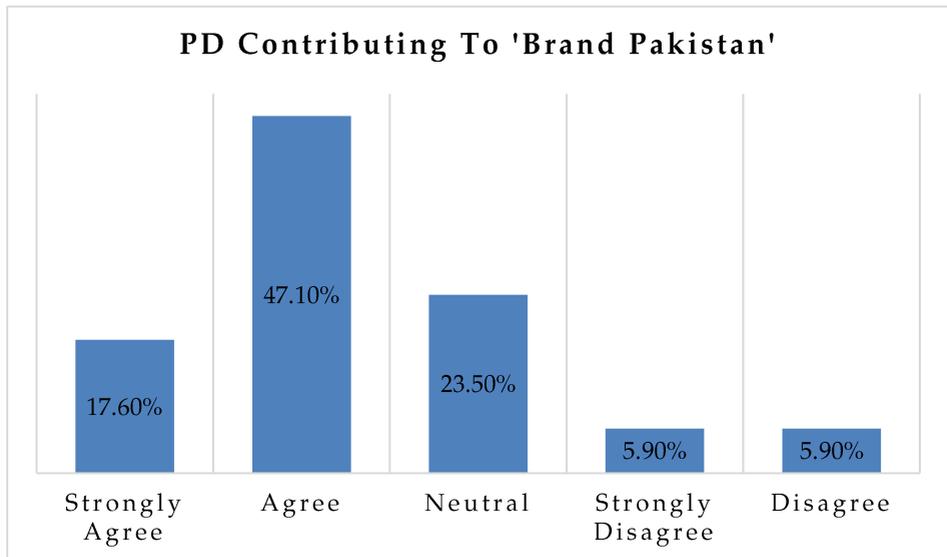


Table 5.

Title

Response	Value Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	5.3	17.6 %
Agree	7.5	14.1	47.1 %
Neutral	5	7.06	23.5 %
Disagree	2.5	1.77	5.9 %
Strongly Disagree	0	1.77	5.9 %

Total Respondents: 30

Weighted Mean: 6.62

Standard Deviation: 1.59

It is interesting to note that 64.7 % of Pakistan’s HOMS believe that MOFA’s PD activities are impactful enough to contribute towards ‘Brand Pakistan’. The figure contrasts starkly with the perception of the public, of which 78% had alluded that Pakistan had not capitalized on its PD potential. The weighted mean value of 6.62 (with evenly distributed weights) confirms this strong agreement, but the standard deviation of 1.59 is slightly higher than previous responses, showing a broader spread of the data, with a significant portion remaining neutral in their assessment.

Figure 18.

Has Pakistan’s Public Diplomacy initiatives resulted in better understanding of its culture in foreign publics?

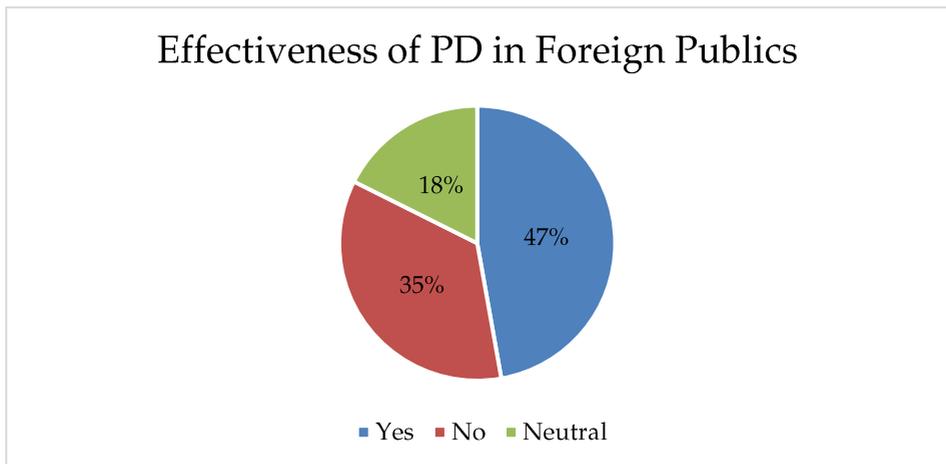


Table 6.

Title

Response	Value Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	9	14.1	47 %
Neutral	6	10.5	35 %
No	3	5.4	18 %

Total Respondents: 30

Weighted Mean: 6.61

Standard Deviation: 0.79

47% of respondents believe that Pakistan has effectively conducted PD in garnering a better understanding of our traditions and cultures amongst the foreign public. This view is reflected in the largely positive weighted mean value of 6.61. In this case, value assignment has been done carefully to fully reflect the 'No' responses, eliminating the extreme value assignment options. The Standard Deviation of only 0.79 shows that 68% of the responders fall within a short deviation (plus or minus) of this figure, reflecting the strong representative nature of the mean value.

Figure 19.

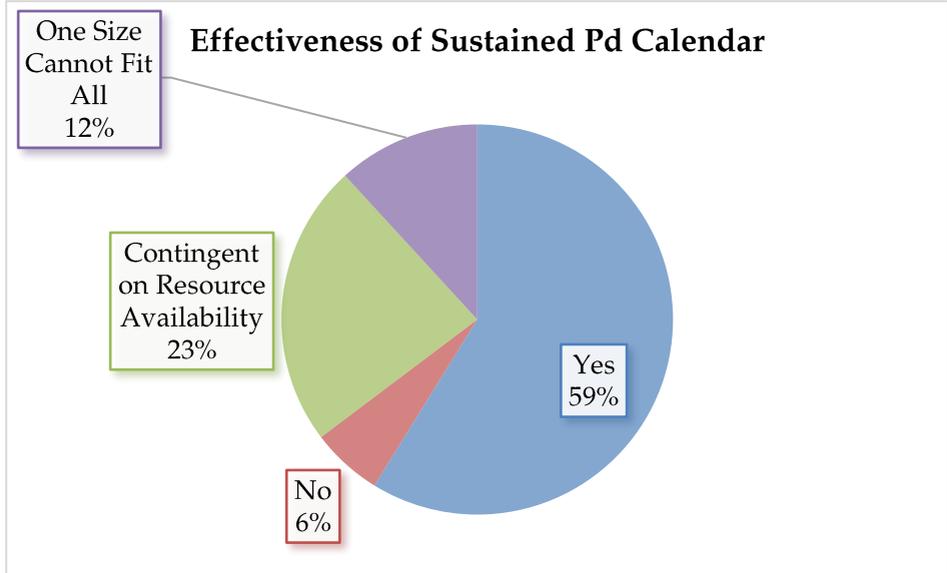
Are Pakistan's diplomats equipped with the necessary skill set for effective public diplomacy?



76% of respondents believe further training and upgradation of skill sets are required to undertake effective PD.

Figure 20.

Will a sustained, uniform, predictable calendar of Public Diplomacy events help undertake effective PD across Pakistan Missions Abroad?



MA majority of respondents believe that a planned and predictable yearly calendar may prove to be important to conduct meaningful and sustained PD.

Figure 21.

Is the Ministry utilizing Digital Media correctly to leverage its Public Diplomacy potential?

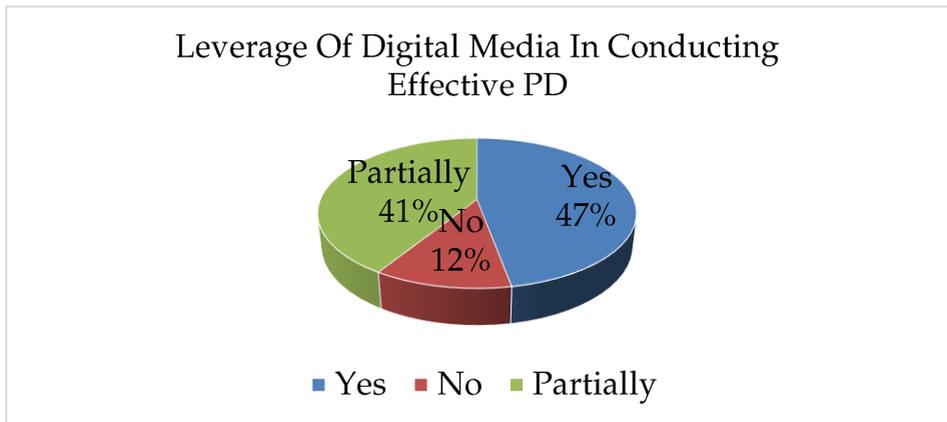


Table 7.

Title

Response	Value Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	9	14.1	47 %
Partially	6	12.3	41 %
No	3	3.6	12 %

Total Respondents: 30

Weighted Mean: 7.05

Standard Deviation: 0.84

Most respondents believe that MOFA is not optimally utilizing its DD network to leverage its PD outreach. However, that does not mean that MoFA is entirely wasting its efforts in this field. The weighted mean score of 7.05 reflects that most respondents believe that MOFA is at least partially utilizing its outreach well. The standard deviation of 0.84 also tallies with the collected data as 88% overall do believe either partial or optimal use of resources is being made.

9. Section V: Findings

The surveyed population is no representative sample of the wider PD landscape. However, it indicates interesting trends that can loosely be extrapolated to inform general trends.

78% of the surveyed sample of the general populace believes that MOFA is miserably underperforming in its pursuit of soft power. This statistic aligns with the global rankings of Pakistan's soft power categorization.

The general populace attributes this dismal performance to Policy Gaps (35%), lack of understanding among PD practitioners (18%), and inter-departmental differences between various government departments (13%), among others. They also overwhelmingly believe that MOFA should target tourism promotion as a PD strategy (60.9%), followed by Economic Diplomacy (30.4%), Religious Tourism (4.3%), and promotion of Pakistani cuisine (4.3%).

47% of mid-career PD practitioners surveyed at MOFA believe that while the Ministry is on the right path, it has only achieved somewhat partial success in undertaking PD activities that can contribute towards the curation of 'Brand Pakistan' in host countries. However, while branding is a tall order, 63% of respondents believe that MOFA's PD efforts have garnered a greater understanding of Pakistan's culture amongst the foreign public.

The practitioners believe that Pakistan faces myriad challenges in its effective and sustained conduct of PD activities, including acute lack of resources (52%),

lack of professional understanding (20%), policy gaps (9%), conducting events only sporadically thereby losing momentum (9%), inter-departmental conflict (6%) and lack of will amongst the officers concerned (4%).

These figures contrast with the general public's perception that the lack of requisite policy framework and inter-departmental conflict were the major hurdles in conducting effective PD.

On balance, however, the former is anchored, and the latter in perception. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn regarding the importance of sufficient resource allocation to aid sustained PD efforts, and continuous skill upgradation modules to train the human resource better.

Regarding the required skillset, the sample set is almost evenly divided on content creation (23%), cultivating local contacts (23%), undertaking effective PR (26%), and all these combined (24%). This highlights that the practitioners themselves are self-aware of their limitations and hence, stand to benefit from sustained skill-upgradation modules that can meaningfully enhance their DD and PD toolkit, institutionalize PD within MOFA and discourage trends of 'islands of individual brilliance' at the cost of the institution itself.

This is followed by an inconclusive, even split on whether Pakistani diplomats possess the requisite skill set to undertake effective PD. It may be partially attributed to respondents' personal assessment, as Mission's designated social media Focal Person (SMFP), as to whether they possess the requisite DD and PD skills that are required, with each person casting his or her vote based on their perception of their own PD/DD proficiency-which runs the risk of being either overestimated or underestimated.

83% respondents believed creation of SCD positively affected Pakistan's PD conduct and 85.2% agreed that DD was critical to undertake effective PD and CD. This is an encouraging sign that MOFA is moving in the right direction with considerable buy-in of its policies despite SCD's brought new work culture that changed MOFA's communication; and change management is a notoriously difficult task.

Of the HOMs surveyed, 64.7% believed that Pakistan was practicing sustained PD contributing to creation of Brand Pakistan; this contrasts with opinion of mid-career practitioners 47% of whom believed it to be a partial success only.

47% of HOMs shared that Pakistan's PD initiatives resulted in better understanding of its culture in foreign publics; this again contrasts with mid-career practitioners 63% of whom held a stronger belief in effectiveness of MOFA's PD efforts.

76% of HOMs believed more training was required for Pakistan's diplomats to be equipped with the requisite PD skillset and 53% believed DD was not being effectively leveraged.



The tiered surveys showcase, albeit at a limited scale, the differences in perception that exist between the public and the practitioners as well as between the practitioners themselves. A targeted communication strategy is needed to create a better understanding of Pakistan's PD priorities within home publics and the Ministry itself. This would bring much needed clarity and singularity of purpose to all stakeholders and will eventually translate into a streamlined and scientifically informed PD strategy.

The survey also indicates that although the path is being rightly trodden but there remains a significant room for improvement vis-à-vis selection of PD avenues, training diplomats to upgrade their requisite skill sets and effectively leveraging DD to enhance and effectively project MOFA's PD efforts.

10. SECTION VI: Challenges faced by Pakistan in Conducting Successful Public Diplomacy

Pakistan faces considerable challenges in undertaking effective PD outreach. Firstly, there is lack of coherence at the governmental level in clearly enunciating FP priorities and demonstrating PD as part of it. This creates a confused policy outlay in which each governmental entity is working on soft image curation but without synergy that is required to translate the effort into meaningful and sustainable outreach. For example, TDAP, MOIB, MOFA and Ministry of Commerce may all be undertaking similar work (image building for trade promotion) but without a joint holistic strategy making a linear value chain that can translate into effective PD/ED outreach.

There is severe lack of human and economic resources, that impedes effective service delivery. SCD has no sanctioned budget of its own. It requests PP/PD division to release funds where required, contingent on their availability, which is itself underfunded and overstretched.

Furthermore, Pakistan's diplomats face an upward battle in attempting to improve Pakistan's global perception that has been distorted over decades. The process is painstaking and requires consistency of effort. There can be no shortcuts here which is a big challenge when viewed against the short-termism and myopic view of governments that focus their policy and fiscal efforts towards immediate gains to showcase during their years in power.

Another major challenge that MOFA faces in projecting Pakistan's positive image is problems with the product itself. 'Brand Pakistan' is non-existent in its positive connotation. However, it is pervasive in evoking images of an illiberal, undemocratic, repressive, autocratic, theocratic, 'Talibanized', underdeveloped, and intolerant society. It is extremely difficult to reverse this image particularly when viewed in the context of the toxic, hostile neighborhood characterized by EU DisinfoLab revelations of a sinister 5G warfare afoot.

Matters are not helped by Pakistan’s chronic political and economic instability that upends any long-term policy plans. Each political dispensation steps into government with its own ideas on how to conduct Pakistan’s diplomacy: some believe digital to be the future, others attempt to leverage cultural diplomacy, still others aim to undertake the quiet, dignified, traditional diplomacy with limited public interface. This confused policy landscape results in fragmented action plans that fail to yield optimal results.

A case in point is creation of PP&PD Division by PPP when they were in power, followed by creation of SCD (with duplication in mandate) by PTI and proposed merger of SCD with Spokesperson Office in the current PPP/PML-N dispensation. In a span of a decade, the PD structure has been revamped thrice and, in each case, there remains duplicity of effort resulting in wastage of human and capital resources.

Lack of skill-based training remains another major challenge. Ministry has no formal mechanism to ensure regular skill upgradation of its officers. Often, they are unprepared for assigned roles and therefore, are called upon to learn on-the-job. This behooves an institutional response to a systemic problem and is manifest in lack of effective service delivery.

10.1. SWOT Analysis

Table 8.
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strength	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pristine Natural Beauty • Cultural Diversity • Multi-Ethnicity • History • Indigenous Culture • Resilient/Warm People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Institutional Coherence • Low Literacy Rate • Rudimentary Infrastructure • Conservative Society • Politico-Economic Uncertainty
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Growth Potential • Space for Liberalism • Untapped tourism resource for the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Instability • Economic Default • Illiberalism • Radicalization • Terrorism



11. Conclusion

MOFA has been striving hard to highlight and project positive narratives vis-à-vis Pakistan as a stable democracy, a moderate and pluralistic society and a country with vast economic potential and rich cultural heritage. However, the effort remains scattered and an uphill struggle against a pervasive negative image. To rectify this, it is important to develop a broad strategic framework and work towards developing a country brand as an attractive counter narrative.

A sustained, strategic, long-term engagement and investment needs to be made utilizing a 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-nation' approach to truly capitalize on Pakistan's soft power potential; dividends can only be seen in the long term.

12. Recommendations

To achieve the strategic objective of effectively utilizing Pakistan's soft power potential, following is recommended:

12.1.1. Clear policy direction

- Overlapping between PP&PD, SCD and Spokesperson office should be rectified through rationalization.
- PD and StratCom targets should be set in consultation with PD Advisory Committee and Additional Secretaries Meeting in December each year.
- PD goals should be clearly communicated to all Missions; every Mission to submit yearly PD calendars along with KPIs.
- Finances should be allocated to missions based on a matrix proforma to assess merit of proposals received: impact expected, level of integration in host community, size of diaspora, image perception of Pakistan.
- A comprehensive PD Policy document should be drafted and circulated to all officers articulating a clear PD Vision 2050: a goal to strive for and direct all institutional effort towards

12.1.2. Skill Upgradation and Regular Training Sessions

- Regular PD training sessions and refresher courses should be run with junior, mid-career and senior diplomats.
- SMFPs should undertake monthly training on soft skills regularly offered by SCD.
- Ambassadors-designate and Press Counsellors designate should

undergo special PD and narrative projection training session prior to posting abroad.

- All probationary officers to undergo a mandatory graded training module.
- Spokesperson Office and SCD should undertake periodic trainings on DD, Media interface, Spinning Narratives, Countering negative news etc.

12.1.3. Data Led Assessment and Course Correction

- Holistic image assessment should be undertaken from each Mission and measures be taken to address specific challenges
- Digital media should be used for effective outreach
- Quantitative tools be used to assess monthly, quarterly, and yearly progress
- AI tools be used to undertake impact analysis
- News be monitored to do sentiment and trend analysis and countered where required
- SEO be used to have 'feel good' Pakistan stories at digital platforms
- Fake News Observatory be established within MOFA to monitor negative trends and counter where necessary

12.1.4. Adoption of 'Whole-of-Government' Approach

- MOFA be given lead on PD with support from all stakeholders including MOIB, ISPR and allied wings
- To plug the policy and implementation gap, a special Cultural Authority be notified under MOFA to integrate federal and provincial responses

12.1.5. Develop a 'Master Brand' Approach

- Identify Pakistan's 'Core' brand value
 - Sufi
 - Ancient Heritage
 - Melting Pot of Civilizations
 - Resilient
 - Passionate

- Build sub-brands of PD outreach around the master brand to amplify **one** message which over a period can become **the** message associated with Pakistan.

12.1.6. Invest in Excellence

- Pakistan must invest its resources in sports, liberal arts, science and technology, film and documentary, music etc.
- Winning international awards and competitions adds immensely to positive brand value of a nation.
- A liberal society is free from coercion and has more room to achieve excellence.

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