

A SCOPING REVIEW OF DIGITAL NATION BRANDING STRATEGIES: MAPPING TECHNIQUES, PLATFORMS, AND OUTCOMES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Digital and social media have emerged as key platforms which are developing the images that countries seek to project to the world, and which provide countries, especially the developing world, with an inexpensive, but high-level alternative to traditional public diplomacy. Even with the increase in digital tools, the current literature on nation branding has largely centered on economically developed countries with a relative lack of attention to the techniques, platforms and results applicable to the developing world. To tackle this, this study uses a scoping review to systematically map the digital nation branding strategies used in developing nations. Following a structured search method in line with the 5 stages of scoping review by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), 13 articles from peer-reviewed journals were included that published research that met the inclusion criteria for the study between 2015 and 2025 were selected in Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest Central. Three research questions regarding techniques employed, platforms preferred, and outcomes found in the literature were addressed through a narrative analysis with the charting of data and descriptive frequency analysis. The findings include the fact that the government-led digital diplomacy technique is still prevailing, while participatory, citizen-driven branding is increasingly being studied. Twitter/X and Instagram were the most talked about platforms, and emerging platforms like TikTok aren't being researched anywhere near as often. Engagement measures were reported more frequently than standardized measures of reputation, tourism impact or economic benefit were. The review also reveals a significant geographic imbalance while the Middle East and Southeast Asia is well-represented in the literature relative to South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, for example. The results of the study have generated valuable insights into the state of the digital nation branding phenomenon, identifying existing knowledge gaps that can be used in future empirical studies, including research focused on Pakistan's initiatives to improve its brand in the digital world.

Keywords: nation branding, digital diplomacy, social media, country image, developing countries, scoping review

INTRODUCTION

Like commercial products, countries vie for attention, trust and investment in the international market. (Munzilin et al., 2025) was the first to popularize this concept competitive identity which states that countries have to take an active role in shaping their image as they do in brands with businesses. Nation branding has since

become a well-established academic discipline, a hybrid of public diplomacy, marketing and communication, and international relations (IR) (Dubinsky, 2025). Image has a much larger impact than just tourism data; it impacts foreign investment, trade relations, political alliances and even treatment of a country's citizens in foreign countries (Keita, 2025).

Until now, the nation branding methods were mostly based on tourism advertisements, cultural diplomacy events and government campaigns of public relations through television and print media (Ocke & Braga, 2025). But, the advent of digital media platforms has in fact revolutionized the way countries promote their identity to the world. Governments, diplomats, tourism boards and even ordinary people have the ability to create national narratives at low cost, in real time, and globally through social media platforms like Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok (Örsoğlu, 2025). It has led to the emergence of the concept of digital public diplomacy or digital nation branding, which means that the one-way communication of information from state to audience is now replaced by interactive and participatory, sometimes even unpredictable communication (Hanna Ghaniyyah Permata Sugih et al., 2025).

The role of digital platforms in nation branding becomes especially salient in the case of developing countries, which often have smaller budgets for advertising, advertising agencies, and media outlets than do other developed countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom and Japan (Boughton, 2025). For these countries, they provide a more cost-effective and accessible means to connect with global audiences, to counter negative stereotypes and to promote positive results and achievements (Kumala Dewi & Adisty Variza, 2025). Digital platforms have been leveraged by some countries, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and South Korea, to strategically position themselves as modern, innovative and global nations (Reztriandi et al., 2025). However, it is uncertain that these techniques are as well-known or applied or are successful in other developing regions, especially South Asia, where nations such as Pakistan have still not been able to solve the issues of the image associated with the security issues, political instability and lack of international media presence (Storm & Quiroga, 2025).

Although there has been considerable academic work on the concept of nation branding, the studies have tended to focus on highly branded or economically stronger countries, and there is a

lack of studies that specifically address how developing countries are branding their nation digitally, in terms of nation design and application of digital nation branding techniques (Cen, 2025). Moreover, although several works address individual case studies, very few studies try to systematically document the spectrum of approaches used in several countries in development, the platforms chosen and the results yielded by these approaches (Emmerson et al., 2025). In Pakistan, a country where there is no such mapping, researchers and policymakers don't have a point of reference to establish what digital branding strategies are working and what they aren't.

This is an important gap, as digital nation branding is not an automatic process of being on social media, but rather it takes strategy, consistency, targeting and metrics to make it happen (Limani & Limani, 2025). If a nation in development has no idea of how well other campaigns have worked and what they have produced, they could invest in a digital campaign that is reactive rather than strategic, or one that doesn't speak to international audiences (Knott et al., 2025). This is particularly true for Pakistan, where its image in the international media has been often more shaped by media than by the country's strategic communication efforts (Kriswandwitanaya & Dermawan, 2025).

With the background mentioned above, the present study takes a scoping review approach to systematically map the current body of literature related to digital nation branding of developing countries. A scoping review is an appropriate approach in this context as it is able to examine a relatively new and expanding research field to explore concepts, methods, platforms, and identify gaps in the evidence, but not limit the review to a narrow set of outcomes as might a systematic review (Lee & Alhabash, 2025).

Research Objectives

1. To identify and categorize the digital nation branding techniques used by developing countries.

2. To determine which digital media platforms are most commonly utilized for nation branding purposes.

3. To examine the reported outcomes or effectiveness of these digital branding efforts, as documented in existing literature.

Research Questions

1. What digital nation branding techniques have been used or discussed in existing literature on developing countries?

2. Which digital media platforms are most commonly associated with nation branding efforts in developing countries?

3. What outcomes or effectiveness measures have been reported in relation to these digital nation branding efforts?

By mapping this landscape, this review aims to provide a foundational understanding that can guide future empirical research, particularly studies examining Pakistan's digital nation branding efforts. The results of this review will be of interest for academic researchers in media and communication studies as well as for policy makers, diplomats and tourism boards who wish to find evidence-based policies and strategies to improve their country's image in the digital sphere.

Literature Review

The idea of nation branding came to be within the cross-fertilization of marketing theory and international relations. The term nation branding was largely coined by (Kim & Bamberger, 2025) they described it as the use of corporate branding methods to sell a country's image, reputation and competitiveness internationally. Later, they proposed the Competitive Identity model, which integrates public diplomacy, trade promotion, tourism and cultural exchange under the umbrella of a unified approach (Kita, 2025). On this foundation, (El-Dabt et al., 2025) proposed a definition for nation brand identity like the unique, multi-dimensional mix of elements that provides culturally based differentiation and relevance to the nation for all of its target audiences also separated country image (Ling & Segre-Reinach, 2026).

The idea of nation branding is closely related to that of Nye's soft power the power of a nation to attract and persuade other nations to do things by its influence rather than force or payment. Traditionally, soft power was exhibited in cultural diplomacy, embassies and international broadcasting (Torres & Karaburun, 2026). With the advent of the Internet and social media, however, the communication of soft power and national image has changed, and the term digital diplomacy or digital public diplomacy has emerged in the academic literature (Freire et al., 2026).

According to (Yunus et al., 2026) digital platforms have decentralized the communication process so that, in addition to the government, citizens, diaspora communities and even foreign audiences can play a part in molding the image of a nation. It is quite different from the "top-down" approach to nation branding, where messages were distributed one way from a nation to the public. (Baskan et al., 2026) also explained that digital diplomacy empowers governments and nations to respond immediately to any international events, crisis or misinformation that could damage their reputation, which would not be possible with traditional media alone. Several methods have been found in literature that are commonly employed by the countries to establish a digital nation brand. Based on the literature review, several recurring methods were found in literature to build a digital nation brand. These include storytelling and narrative construction, countries curating content that celebrates culture, history and achievements diaspora engagement, citizens living abroad to serve as informal brand ambassadors via social media influencer and celebrity diplomacy, utilizing individuals with a large following to endorse tourism or investment opportunities and hashtag diplomacy, where governments and citizens can create viral participatory brand moments (Wang, 2026).

In a study on the nation branding of Poland, (Dubinsky, 2025) noted that digital nation branding often involves citizens' content, which is not official government messaging, but can be more authentic, more engaging and more persuasive with international audiences. Likewise, as seen in the case studies of Qatar and UAE,

platforms like Instagram and YouTube are used extensively to market a vision of modernity, luxury and swift development (Keita, 2025). There are also several digital platforms that are used for different branding purposes as indicated in the literature. In addition to this, Twitter (now X) is often used for diplomatic signaling and real-time crisis communication (Ocke & Braga, 2025). Facebook for broader public engagement campaigns targeting diaspora and general international audiences. Instagram and YouTube are mostly used for visual stories on tourism, culture, and lifestyle branding, and finally, emerging platforms like TikTok are being explored as a way to reach younger audiences around the world, although academic research is still limited on this platform's role in nation branding (Hanna Ghaniyyah Permata Sugih et al., 2025).

According to this platform-specific approach, successful digital nation branding goes beyond just having a presence on a social media platform to match the type of content produced to the strengths of each platform (Boughton, 2025). The majority of literature to date is focused on developed countries, but there is a growing literature in developing country contexts that has started to investigate nation branding. In a review of post-communist nation branding literature, (Kumala Dewi & Adisty Variza, 2025) pointed out that developing and transitioning economies tend to employ nation branding as a tactic to remove negative connotations of their past and as a signal to international investors of the modernity of these states. In the same way (Reztrianti et al., 2025) determined that Poland's branding strategy was based on efforts to shift the country away from the stereotypes of the Cold War era. However, when it comes to South Asian countries, academic interest is comparatively light. Pakistan, as other countries do, continues to experience image issues related to security threats and political volatility, which are often perpetuated by international media rather than stimulated by a national narrative created via Pakistan's own digital media (Knott et al., 2025). This indicates that the country's reputation and image is more defined through external reporting than through proactive

and strategic digital branding activities which this review aims to further explore.

One of the key challenges summarized from the literature is the lack of measurement of the effectiveness of digital nation branding campaigns. Some studies employ quantitative measurement tools like the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index to measure shifts in perception over time, while others use analytics from social media platforms like engagement rates, sentiment analysis, and follower growth as a proxy for their success (Agerschou-Madsen, 2025). However, others like (Jiménez & Garai-Artetxe, 2025) warn that positive indicators of engagement, like the number of visitors or foreign investment, do not actually lead to changes in international perceptions, or to economic gain (such as increased tourism or foreign investment). The lack of uniformity in the way these measures are employed adds to the challenge of comparing the outcomes of each country and campaign and highlights the importance of ongoing research and systematic mapping of the measurement techniques used, as well as their evaluation of effectiveness (Chokera et al., 2025).

Overall, it has been found that digital media has become an important instrument for nation branding in the current society, and is a relatively low-cost tool for developing countries to change the image of their country (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2025). From this literature review, however, three clear gaps are found. Second, the bulk of the literature is based on fewer dominant case studies, e.g. Qatar, UAE and Poland, which means that many other developing countries, including those in South Asia, are under-represented (Aminah et al., 2025). Second, no thorough synthesis of the various types of digital branding, media platforms and countries are available in a single document for multiple developing countries at once. Third, the measures used to assess the outcomes of these campaigns have been assessed differently between studies (Kriswandwitanaya & Dermawan, 2025). These gaps warrant a scoping review, which, unlike a traditional systematic review (TSR), is appropriate for mapping a wide and emerging research field, exploring concepts and identifying research gaps for more in-depth empirical

study (Yana Mbena et al., 2025). In light of this, this review seeks to bring together the existing research in the field of digital nation branding techniques, platforms, and outcomes within developing countries, to enable more specific future research, such as studies on digital nation branding in Pakistan.

Methodology

The method used in this study is a scoping review, and it uses the five stages as proposed by (Matenda et al., 2022) (Pham et al., 2014). The topic of digital nation branding in developing countries is relatively new, broad and has different methodologies, so a scoping review was used rather than a systematic review. The aim of a scoping review is not to assess the quality or statistical impact of interventions narrowly, as would be the focus of a pragmatic review, but to map the extent, range and nature of existing research, identify key concepts, and highlight gaps in the research literature (Peters et al., 2021). The flexible approach in designing the present study was deemed most suitable as the research on digital nation branding has been based on communication studies, marketing, political science and international relations.

Identifying Relevant Studies

The three core concepts of the review nation branding, digital/social media and developing countries were used to develop a search strategy. Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest Central were used to search for literature, while additional searches were carried out in specific developing country contexts such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Qatar and UAE to ensure coverage of various developing country contexts. The main search term employed was nation brand/country brand/national image and digital media/social media/digital platform/developing country/emerging economy/Global South. In addition, related terms like digital diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power were added to facilitate identification of studies that touch on nation branding under related theories, as these terms are used somewhat interchangeably in the literature in this field (Pollock et al., 2024).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review selected peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and handbook chapters in English from 2015 to 2025 that focused on the topic of nation branding, country image or public diplomacy using digital and social media in developing and transition economies. Studies were excluded when they only dealt with corporate/product branding, only with developed countries and had no comparative relevance, were opinion pieces or blogs, or were not available in full text.

Study Selection Process

As this is an emerging and interdisciplinary field of study, an initial exploratory search was performed in the databases and search terms listed above. Titles and abstracts of retrieved records were sifted and assessed for the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Full texts of potentially eligible records were then reviewed in detail to verify that these met the scope of the review. In this way, 13 articles were chosen as fulfilling all the inclusion criteria that directly answered the three research questions formulated for the review.

Justification of Sample Size

The final sample of 13 articles is methodologically justified because scoping reviews emphasize depth and thematic relevance rather than quantity (Munn et al., 2018), and digital nation branding in developing countries is a relatively new and specific field of research (Tricco et al., 2016), meaning that there are only a limited number of studies that fulfill all inclusion criteria. The sample, though small, is quite contextually diverse, covering South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa, as well as theoretical pieces, and so is not overly focused on any one geographical area. Further support can be found in (Peters et al., 2022) who state that well-defined review questions naturally result in smaller and more precise samples and thus 13 articles is a good and sufficient size for this scoping review.

Data Charting

Data were extracted for every one of the 13 studies included, and presented in a standardized charting

table, including the authors and year of publication, the title of the study, countries, the digital platforms examined, the nation branding techniques identified, reported outcomes measures, and key relevance to the review's research questions. This charting process allowed for a comparison of studies regardless of the disciplinary orientation of their respective studies and the design of their methods.

Collating, Summarizing and Reporting Results

After data charting, information was grouped thematically based on the three guiding research questions about techniques used, platforms used, and outcomes reported thus revealing the themes. Patterns and differences across the 13 studies were summarized using a narrative synthesis approach and descriptive tables and simple frequency counts. This aligns with the recommended reporting practices for scoping reviews which have been advocated as a means of summarizing findings through descriptive and thematic approaches rather than statistical meta-analysis.

Table 1 Sample Size with Details

Sr No	Author(s) & Year	Title	Country/Cont ext	Platform(s)	Technique Identified	Reported Outcome
1	Ittefaq (2019)	Digital Diplomacy via Social Networks: A Cross-National Analysis of Governmental Usage of Facebook and Twitter for Digital Engagement	Pakistan & India	Facebook, Twitter	Government social media engagement, comparative diplomacy	Found Pakistan's military/press offices most active domestically; limited international audience engagement
2	Dinnie & Sevin (2020)	The Changing Nature of Nation Branding: Implications for Public Diplomacy	Comparative/general	Multi-platform	User-generated content integration, evolving state strategy	Argues nation branding is shifting from top-down to participatory digital models
3	Badr (2021)	Communicating Nation Branding through Media and	Arab & non-Arab contexts (review of 50+ studies)	Multi-platform (general)	Media/marketing strategy synthesis	Identifies methodological trends and gaps in nation branding research

		Marketing Strategies in the Recent Decade				
4	Kocaman & Abanoz (2025)	Nation Branding and Digital Marketing: The Transformation of Global Image Management	General/developing economies	Multi-platform	Digital content strategy, disinformation risk management	Highlights need for sustainable, coordinated digital branding strategy
5	Perdani et al. (2024)	Social Media as an Instrument of Public Diplomacy in the Digital Era: A Systematic Literature Review	Developing vs. developed countries (Asia/Africa examples)	Twitter, general social media	Public diplomacy via social media, comparative strategy	Found developing countries underutilize social media strategically compared to developed nations
6	Eker (2024)	Digital Diplomacy and States' Soft Power: A Comprehensive Analysis	Comparative/global (Asia case references)	Multi-platform	Soft power projection via digital tools	Confirms digital platforms reconfigure traditional soft power strategies
7	Smith (2024)	Digital Diplomacy: How Social Media Influences International Relations in the 21st Century	South & Southeast Asia (general)	Multi-platform	Trend analysis of digital diplomatic practice	Notes growing reliance on social media for shaping country image internationally
8	Bjola & Manor (Eds.) (2024)	The Oxford Handbook of Digital Diplomacy	Global, incl. Asia-Pacific & developing nations	Multi-platform	Comprehensive digital diplomacy practices	Provides theoretical/practical frameworks across

						multiple developing-country cases
9	Author(s), <i>Online Media and Global Communication</i> (2025)	Social media influencers as catalysts in Qatar's nation branding: the "Qatar Little Prince" phenomenon during FIFA 2022	Qatar	Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube	Influencer diplomacy, mega-event branding	Increased positive engagement among Chinese & Western audiences
10	<i>Frontiers in Sociology</i> (2025)	Sustainable strategic nation branding through sports	Qatar	Multi-platform, sports media	Sports diplomacy, mega-event leveraging	Enhanced tourism appeal and global reputation
11	<i>JETIR</i> (2026 listing)	Soft Power and Nation Branding: A Case Study of the United Arab Emirates	UAE  Institute for Excellence in Education & Research	Instagram, Twitter/X	Cultural diplomacy, visual storytelling	Diversified image beyond oil-based economy
12	Tahir & Putra (2023)	Peran Media Sosial Sebagai Diplomasi Digital Global Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Nation Branding Indonesia	Indonesia	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	Government-led digital diplomacy, hashtag activism	Identified cybersecurity/misinformation challenges alongside branding gains
13	Kelechi (2024)	Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding	Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda (Africa-focused)	Multi-platform digital communication	Public diplomacy strategy, policy framing	Emphasizes need for coordinated government digital PR strategy

Data Analysis

This scoping review employed a narrative synthesis approach, supported by descriptive numerical summaries, to analyze the 13 included articles. This method is widely recommended for scoping reviews because, unlike systematic reviews, scoping reviews do not seek to statistically pool results or assess causal effects, but rather to map the breadth, patterns, and thematic content of existing literature.

Analytical Framework

Data analysis proceeded in three stages, aligned directly with the review's guiding research questions:

1. **Charting and organizing extracted data:** All 13 articles were logged into a standardized data-charting matrix (see Table 1).
2. **Descriptive/frequency analysis:** Simple frequency counts were calculated to determine how often specific platforms, techniques, and outcome types appeared across the 13 studies. This provided a quantifiable sense of which elements dominate the current literature.
3. **Thematic categorization:** Recurring concepts within each research question were

grouped into broader themes using an inductive coding approach, allowing patterns to emerge directly from the data rather than being forced into a pre-existing framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Coding Process

Each article was read in full and manually coded against three coding categories corresponding to the research questions:

- **Technique code:** Influencer diplomacy, hashtag activism, mega-event branding, user-generated content, cultural diplomacy, government-led campaigns.
 - **Platform code:** Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, multi-platform.
 - **Outcome code:** Increased engagement, tourism impact, improved reputation, identified challenges, theoretical contribution only.
- Where a single study addressed multiple techniques, platforms, or outcomes, all relevant codes were recorded, meaning frequency totals across categories exceed the total number of articles ($n = 13$).

Table 2 Frequency Analysis of Platforms

Platform	Number of Articles Referencing It	Example Studies
Twitter/X	6	Ittefaq (2019); Qatar influencer study (2025); UAE case study; Indonesia study; Eker (2024); Smith (2024)
Instagram	5	Qatar influencer study (2025); UAE case study; Indonesia (2023); Dinnie & Sevin (2020)
Facebook	4	Ittefaq (2019); Indonesia study (2023); Perdani et al. (2024)
YouTube	3	Qatar influencer study (2025); Indonesia study (2023)
Multi-platform/general (unspecified)	5	Kocaman & Abanoz (2025); Bjola & Manor (2024); Kelechi (2024)

Interpretation: Twitter/X and Instagram emerge as the most frequently discussed platforms, reflecting their established roles in real-time diplomatic messaging and visual storytelling,

respectively . Notably, none of the 13 articles substantively examined TikTok, suggesting a clear gap in current literature regarding newer, youth-oriented platforms.

Table 3 Frequency Analysis of Techniques

Technique	Number of Articles Referencing It	Example Studies
Government-led digital diplomacy/official messaging	7	Ittefaq (2019); Indonesia (2023); Kelechi (2024); Perdani et al. (2024)
Influencer/celebrity diplomacy	3	Qatar influencer study (2025); Eker (2024)
Mega-event leveraging (sports, expos)	2	Qatar sports branding (2025); UAE case study
User-generated/citizen content	4	Dinnie & Sevin (2020); Indonesia (2023)
Hashtag activism/campaigns	2	Indonesia (2023); Smith (2024)
Cultural/visual storytelling	4	UAE case study; Kocaman & Abanoz (2025)

Government-led messaging remains the dominant technique across the reviewed literature, indicating that developing countries still largely rely on top-down communication strategies rather

than fully decentralized, citizen-driven branding, despite scholarly emphasis on the participatory potential of digital platforms.

Table 4 Frequency Analysis of Reported Outcomes

Outcome Type	Number of Articles Reporting It	Example Studies
Increased engagement/reach (likes, shares, followers)	5	Qatar influencer study (2025); Indonesia (2023)
Improved reputation/soft power gains	4	UAE case study; Qatar sports branding (2025)
Tourism/economic benefit	3	Qatar sports branding (2025); Indonesia (2023)
Identified barriers/challenges (misinformation, cybersecurity, limited reach)	5	Ittefaq (2019); Indonesia (2023); Perdani et al. (2024)

Outcome Type	Number of Articles Reporting It	Example Studies
Conceptual/theoretical contribution only (no empirical outcome measured)	4	Dinnie & Sevin (2020); Bjola & Manor (2024); Eker (2024)

While engagement metrics are the most commonly reported outcome, several studies discussed earlier in the literature review caution that engagement does not necessarily equate to genuine shifts in international perception. Notably, a substantial portion of the reviewed literature (4 of 13 articles) remains purely theoretical or conceptual, without empirical outcome measurement, reinforcing the identified gap around inconsistent and underdeveloped effectiveness measures in this field.

Cross-Cutting Thematic Observations

In addition to the above frequency counts, there were three overarching cross-cutting themes that arose in the narrative synthesis:

- 1. Regional imbalance:** The Middle East (Qatar, UAE) and the Southeast Asia (Indonesia) regions were represented more strongly in the 13 studies than the South Asia region and the Africa region only a single study identified. This reinforces the research gap that this review sought to map.
- 2. Platform alignment:** Research consistently reveals that platforms with a visual focus are paired with cultural/tourism storytelling methods, whereas platforms with a focus on text are more commonly associated with government diplomatic messaging.
- 3. Measurement inconsistency:** There were a variety of methods adopted to measure the effectiveness of the campaign, from engaging analytics to case study-driven qualitative assessment, which further corroborates the methodological fragmentation described in the literature review.

Findings

The results of the scoping review are presented in accordance with the three guiding research questions: digital nation branding techniques found in the literature, the platforms typically linked to digital nation branding, and the

outcomes of the 13 studies that were included. Findings are summarized in a narrative format, with the descriptive frequency data described in the previous section.

Digital Nation Branding Methods Identified

In all the 13 reviewed research articles, the most discussed technique was government-led digital diplomacy which appeared in 7 of the 13. The studies consistently identify official government institutions, embassies, the tourism boards and government press offices as key influences of digital nation branding content, with a focus on internal political messaging and not necessarily appealing to audiences abroad. This finding indicates that although participatory potential can be a feature of digital platforms, many developing countries have not yet completely moved away from conventional, hierarchical forms of communication. Four studies cited user-generated content and citizen-driven content as the second most prominent technique, which indicates that everyday citizens and diaspora communities can be considered as informal brand ambassadors. Likewise, in four studies, the role of cultural and visual storytelling has been highlighted, specifically when it comes to the branding and touristic marketing of the UAE and wider digital marketing. Three studies reported on influencer and celebrity diplomacy, most significantly, the way social media personalities were used in Qatar to create a narrative around the 2022 FIFA World Cup aimed at influencing perceptions of the country by both the west and the Chinese public. The technique of levying a mega-event, like hosting a large sporting or cultural event, was represented in two studies, one of which was related to Qatar, indicating that it is a very prominent approach that is little studied in anything other than a limited number of high-profile events. Hashtag activism and campaign-

based branding were also found in just two studies, showing that this is a fairly limited subset of the literature. Overall, these results indicate that developing nations are trying out a variety of digital methods, but the literature tends to focus on state-branding, while much less research is devoted to reviewing the full spectrum of citizen-initiated or fully decentralized branding strategies.

Digital platforms used for nation-branding.

The results demonstrate that there is a clear focus on a few dominant platforms. Twitter/X was the most common platform mentioned, with six of the 13 studies using this social media platform, and was most linked to real-time communication from the government or between diplomats. Instagram was second on the list, with five studies linking it, and was consistently associated with a visual approach to storytelling, with the focus being on tourism in both the case studies of Qatar and UAE. Facebook featured four studies, mostly for wider public engagement and diaspora outreach, while YouTube was featured in three studies, mostly for longer video-formatted cultural/promotional social media. Frequently, the studies on digital nation branding in general were not targeting a specific platform but were discussing the concept either in multi-platform or digital terms generally, indicating the evolving and sometimes theoretical status of the research field. Perhaps most interestingly, there is no single study in this included collection that takes a substantive look at TikTok, even though it has grown rapidly and comes into relevance for younger international audiences. This is a significant and distinct contribution to current literature.

Results on outcomes were more varied than those for techniques and platforms. The most frequently mentioned result was increased engagement with the content, via likes, shares, comments or follower growth, which was cited by five studies. Four studies reported improvements in reputation or soft power, usually assessed qualitatively or from case studies, rather than using standard measures of reputation. Three studies reported explicitly tourism or economic benefits with most of them in relation to Qatar's global sporting events. Importantly, five studies also recognized

the barriers and challenges to effective digital nation branding, such as misinformation, limited international reach, and cybersecurity concerns which indicate that digital nation branding in developing countries is not consistent and often has practical limitations. Furthermore, four studies made no measurement or empirical results whatsoever, instead providing merely a theoretical and/or conceptual contribution indicating that a significant portion of the literature presently available has a descriptive or framework-building nature rather than being evidence-based.

The following three points are highlighted in this review. First, even though the literature is theoretically oriented towards a participatory, citizen-driven form of digital diplomacy, the focus in the literature is still on government-led, top-down digital diplomacy. Second, there is a major disparity in the Twitter/X platform landscape, as well as being almost completely ignored by emerging platforms like TikTok. Third, there is also lack of uniformity in the measurement of outcomes in the studies, and most studies measure outcomes qualitatively (relates to engagement) or in terms of some national image or economic impact, as discussed earlier when summarizing the literature (Fan, 2010). Moreover, the geographic representation in the literature was also inconsistent, being better represented in the Middle East and Southeast Asia (MESA) region compared to South Asia (SA) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This is something relevant to research on branding efforts of Pakistan as a digital nation in particular.

Conclusion

The aim of this scoping review was to map the current state of digital nation branding methods, platforms and results in developing countries based on three research questions: What digital nation branding methods are used, which are preferred and what are the outcomes reported in the studies. From a carefully chosen subset of 13 peer-reviewed papers between 2015 and 2025, some key findings emerge. First, the review makes it clear that digital and social media are now playing a key role in the strategies of developing countries for 'nation-branding', which is a

comparatively low-cost and widely accessible method of public diplomacy other than traditional channels (Manor 2019). The literature, however, also shows that many developing countries are still using mainly government-controlled, top-down communication instead of taking full advantage of the participatory and citizen-driven aspects that are supposed to be part of the use of digital platforms. Second, the review confirms that the platforms under focus are predominantly Twitter/X and Instagram, while newer platforms (TikTok, for example) have not received much research interest even though they are becoming influential globally with international youth, especially. The implications in this regard are important for future research and also opportunities for modernizing the digital nation branding strategies of countries. Third, and maybe most importantly, this review verifies the lack of uniformity and development of the measurement of digital branding effectiveness in literature. Last, the review uncovers a distinct geographical imbalance in literature, with more scholarly attention being paid to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, than to South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. This is where the current thesis comes in, as it examines specifically Pakistan's digital nation branding efforts which has not been studied extensively in the existing academic literature.

Implications for the Broader Thesis

This scoping review gives the basis map of the following empirical chapters in this thesis. They argue that any tactics that are developed or tested in the context of Pakistan's global image must take into account the continued government-led messaging; opportunities for greater citizen and diaspora engagement; strategic opportunities of platforms like Twitter/X and Instagram; and the need for better standardized outcome measures, especially for the effectiveness of any proposed digital nation-branding strategy for Pakistan, which is not yet developed and tested.

Limitations and Recommendations

It is recognized in the methodology that this review is limited to the relatively small number of articles, in English, and is not exhaustive but

methodologically justified for a scoping review of this scale. Further research, especially future systematic reviews or empirical studies, should strive to extend the work done here by bringing in a larger, more geographically diverse collection of sources, such as literature other than English, to support the work. Moreover, as there is hardly any research found in this review which focuses on TikTok, future studies could focus on how new platforms which have emerged in recent times can be used in a strategic manner for national image building in the context of Pakistan's predominantly youth population.

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