

## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AS A SOFT POWER TOOL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15043508>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
26 January, 2025	26 February, 2025	11 March, 2025	18 March, 2025

### ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy serves as a pivotal soft power instrument, enabling nations to project influence and foster international relations through cultural exchange and mutual understanding. This research article presents a comparative analysis of cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the positive aspects of Saudi Arabia's initiatives. Employing qualitative research based on secondary data, the study explores the strategies, objectives, and outcomes of cultural diplomacy efforts in both countries. The findings reveal that Saudi Arabia has effectively harnessed cultural diplomacy to enhance its global image and strengthen bilateral relations, while Pakistan's efforts have been comparatively limited. The article concludes with recommendations for Pakistan to bolster its cultural diplomacy initiatives by learning from Saudi Arabia's successful strategies.

**Keywords:** Cultural diplomacy, soft power, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, international relations, cultural exchange, qualitative research.

### INTRODUCTION

In the realm of international relations, the concept of power extends beyond military and economic might to include the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion—a phenomenon known as soft power (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy, a subset of soft power, involves the use of cultural assets to promote national interests, enhance a country's image, and build bridges between nations (Cull, 2008). It is a long-term strategy that fosters mutual understanding, encourages people-to-people connections, and strengthens diplomatic ties between states (Melissen, 2005).

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, both influential players in the Muslim world, have taken different approaches to cultural diplomacy. Saudi Arabia has

strategically used cultural diplomacy to reshape its international image, diversify its economy, and promote cultural understanding through major global initiatives (Vision 2030, 2016). Its cultural diplomacy includes significant investments in arts, film, literature, and education to project a modern yet traditional image of the Kingdom (MiSK Art Institute, 2017). Pakistan, despite its rich cultural heritage, has struggled to leverage its cultural diplomacy potential due to internal political instability, economic constraints, and security challenges (Khan, 2013). While Pakistan's cultural exports, including music, literature, and cuisine, are globally recognized, its government-led cultural diplomacy initiatives have remained underdeveloped.

This research aims to explore how cultural diplomacy has served as an effective soft power tool for Saudi Arabia and why Pakistan has faced challenges in its implementation. The study highlights Saudi Arabia's successful strategies, analyzes Pakistan's limitations, and provides recommendations for Pakistan to enhance its cultural diplomacy efforts.

### Literature Review

The concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph Nye, emphasizes the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy is a critical component of soft power, encompassing activities such as cultural exchanges, international broadcasting, and the promotion of a nation's cultural heritage (Cull, 2008).

Saudi Arabia has increasingly recognized the importance of cultural diplomacy in its foreign policy. The Kingdom's Vision 2030 strategy underscores the role of cultural initiatives in diversifying the economy and enhancing its global standing (Vision 2030, 2016). The establishment of the Ministry of Culture and organizations like the MiSK Art Institute exemplify Saudi Arabia's commitment to leveraging cultural diplomacy as a tool for disseminating its values and fostering international partnerships (MiSK Art Institute, 2017).

In contrast, Pakistan's utilization of cultural diplomacy has been less pronounced. Challenges such as political instability, economic constraints, and security concerns have hindered the country's ability to project its cultural assets effectively on the global stage (Khan, 2013). While Pakistan possesses a rich cultural heritage, its efforts in employing cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool have been limited.

Despite the growing body of research on cultural diplomacy and soft power, there remains a gap in comparative analyses of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's cultural diplomacy strategies. While existing literature extensively covers Saudi Arabia's cultural initiatives within the framework of Vision 2030, there is limited scholarship on how Pakistan can develop a more structured approach to cultural diplomacy. Additionally, most studies focus on Western models of soft power, overlooking the unique geopolitical and socio-cultural contexts of Middle Eastern and South Asian countries. This

study aims to bridge this gap by providing a comparative assessment of Saudi and Pakistani cultural diplomacy, highlighting lessons that Pakistan can learn to enhance its global influence.

### Research Problem

Cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in shaping a country's soft power and international perception. While Saudi Arabia has made significant progress in leveraging cultural diplomacy through Vision 2030 initiatives, global cultural events, and educational outreach, Pakistan's efforts in this domain remain underdeveloped. Political instability, economic constraints, and a lack of institutional frameworks have hindered Pakistan's ability to project its cultural assets on an international scale. This research seeks to explore the disparities in cultural diplomacy between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, identifying the factors contributing to Saudi Arabia's success and the obstacles impeding Pakistan's progress. By addressing this gap, the study aims to offer actionable recommendations for Pakistan to enhance its cultural diplomacy strategies.

### Research Questions

How has Saudi Arabia effectively utilized cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool, and what impact has it had on its global image and international relations?

What challenges hinder Pakistan's cultural diplomacy efforts, and what strategies can be adopted to enhance its effectiveness in the global arena?

### Research Objectives

To analyze Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy initiatives and assess their role in enhancing the Kingdom's soft power.

To identify the challenges faced by Pakistan in utilizing cultural diplomacy and propose strategic recommendations for improving its global cultural engagement.

### Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing discourse on soft power and cultural diplomacy by providing a comparative analysis of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. By examining Saudi Arabia's successful initiatives, the research offers valuable insights into best practices that can be adapted by Pakistan to

strengthen its global influence. The findings of this study will be beneficial for policymakers, diplomats, and cultural institutions in Pakistan, enabling them to formulate effective strategies for cultural engagement. Additionally, this research adds to the academic literature on cultural diplomacy in non-Western contexts, emphasizing the importance of cultural soft power in international relations.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis to explore the role of cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Data is collected from academic journals, policy documents, government reports, and reputable international sources such as UNESCO, Vision 2030 publications, and cultural diplomacy case studies. A comparative analysis method is used to examine the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of cultural diplomacy efforts in both countries. Additionally, thematic analysis is conducted to identify key patterns and best practices in Saudi Arabia's approach, providing insights into how Pakistan can enhance its cultural diplomacy initiatives. By relying on secondary sources, this study ensures a comprehensive understanding of existing literature and policy frameworks, offering well-informed recommendations for Pakistan's cultural diplomacy development.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in Nye's concept of soft power, which emphasizes the ability of a country to influence others through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy serves as a mechanism for exercising soft power by showcasing a nation's cultural heritage, values, and achievements to foster goodwill and mutual understanding (Cull, 2008). This framework guides the analysis of Saudi Arabia's and Pakistan's cultural diplomacy efforts, focusing on how these initiatives contribute to their respective soft power.

Furthermore, the constructivist approach in international relations theory supports this analysis, as it posits that states build their international identities and diplomatic influence through shared values, norms, and cultural engagements (Wendt, 1999). Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy aligns with constructivist

principles by redefining its global image through cultural institutions, arts, and international collaborations (Hayden, 2012). Pakistan, on the other hand, has yet to establish a cohesive cultural diplomacy narrative that aligns with its historical and cultural strengths. By adopting a constructivist approach, Pakistan could reshape its international image and improve its diplomatic influence through targeted cultural initiatives.

### Findings, Discussion, and Analysis

#### Findings

#### Saudi Arabia's Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives

##### 1. Vision 2030 and Institutional Development

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 strategy underscores the importance of cultural initiatives in diversifying the economy and enhancing global standing (Vision 2030, 2016). A pivotal aspect of this vision is the establishment of institutions dedicated to cultural promotion. The Mohammed bin Salman "MiSK" Foundation, founded in 2011, exemplifies this commitment. MiSK focuses on education, culture, and media, aiming to empower Saudi youth and promote cultural understanding globally. Initiatives like the MiSK Art Institute, launched in 2017, have been instrumental in showcasing Saudi art on international platforms, such as the Venice Biennale in 2019 (MiSK Foundation, 2023).

Beyond institutional development, Saudi Arabia has undertaken significant reforms to foster cultural creativity and artistic expression. The establishment of cultural commissions, such as the General Entertainment Authority and the Saudi Film Commission, reflects the Kingdom's determination to position itself as a regional hub for cultural innovation. These institutions provide funding, training, and global networking opportunities for Saudi artists and filmmakers, further solidifying the country's cultural presence internationally (Al-Sudairi, 2019).

##### 2. International Cultural Engagements

Saudi Arabia has actively participated in international cultural events to promote its culture globally. The Red Sea International Film Festival, launched in 2019 and held annually in Jeddah, serves as a significant platform for showcasing regional and international films, fostering cross-cultural exchanges, and enhancing the Kingdom's international image (Red Sea Film Festival Foundation, 2023). The festival has attracted

global attention, with participation from renowned international stars and filmmakers, thereby integrating Saudi Arabia into the global cultural landscape (Red Sea Film Festival Foundation, 2023).

Additionally, Saudi Arabia has expanded its engagement with UNESCO and global cultural forums. By hosting and funding cultural initiatives such as the AlUla heritage preservation project, the Kingdom has demonstrated its commitment to preserving global cultural heritage. Saudi Arabia's participation in high-profile events like the Venice Biennale and its efforts in restoring Islamic cultural landmarks have positioned it as a key player in the global cultural scene. These engagements not only boost the country's international reputation but also establish it as a bridge between East and West in cultural diplomacy (Al-Saud, 2021).

### 3. Educational and Religious Outreach

The Kingdom has extended its cultural diplomacy through educational and religious outreach. The establishment of Mohammed Bin Salman Nonprofit City, also known as MiSK City, reflects a strategic move to create a hub for education, culture, and the arts, thereby attracting global talent and fostering international partnerships (Mohammed Bin Salman Nonprofit City, 2023). Additionally, Saudi Arabia has expanded scholarships for international students, reinforcing its soft power influence by promoting cultural and educational exchanges (Misk Foundation, 2023).

Saudi Arabia's religious outreach efforts have also played a crucial role in cultural diplomacy. The construction of major Islamic centers and mosques around the world, including the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and the King Fahd Mosque in Los Angeles, has strengthened its global influence. Through funding religious education and promoting interfaith dialogues, Saudi Arabia has enhanced its diplomatic relationships with numerous countries. These efforts have allowed the Kingdom to extend its cultural and religious values beyond its borders, fostering goodwill among Muslim-majority nations and beyond (Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations, 2023).

### Pakistan's Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives

#### 1. Institutional Framework and Policy Initiatives

Pakistan's cultural diplomacy efforts have been comparatively limited. While institutions like the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) and

the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are responsible for promoting culture, there is a lack of a cohesive and well-funded strategy akin to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The absence of a dedicated cultural diplomacy framework has hindered Pakistan's ability to project its cultural heritage effectively on the global stage.

However, Pakistan possesses immense cultural richness that, if strategically leveraged, can enhance its international image. The country's diverse cultural heritage, including Sufi traditions, classical music, and literature, remains an untapped resource for diplomacy. The revival of traditional art forms, such as truck art and calligraphy, and their promotion in international exhibitions could contribute to a more dynamic cultural diplomacy approach. Establishing independent cultural organizations dedicated to international outreach would enable Pakistan to engage with global audiences more effectively.

#### 2. International Cultural Engagements

Pakistan's participation in international cultural events has been sporadic and less prominent. While there have been efforts to showcase Pakistani art and film abroad, these initiatives lack the consistency and scale observed in Saudi Arabia's engagements. The limited presence in major international cultural forums has resulted in a subdued global cultural footprint.

Despite these challenges, Pakistan has taken small but meaningful steps to enhance its cultural presence. The country has participated in events such as the Lok Virsa cultural festival, which promotes traditional music and crafts, and the Pakistan Literature Festival, which brings together writers from around the world. Moreover, collaborations with international cultural organizations, such as the British Council and Goethe-Institut, have facilitated artist exchanges and exhibitions. Strengthening such partnerships and consistently engaging in international platforms would enable Pakistan to carve a more significant space in global cultural diplomacy.

#### 3. Educational and Religious Outreach

Pakistan has made efforts in educational outreach through scholarship programs and the establishment of educational institutions abroad. However, these initiatives are not as strategically aligned or globally recognized as those of Saudi Arabia. The lack of a centralized and well-funded

approach has limited the impact of Pakistan's educational and cultural diplomacy.

One area where Pakistan could enhance its soft power is through academic collaborations and student exchange programs. Establishing cultural centers in key international cities, similar to the Alliance Française model, would provide a platform for promoting Pakistani language, arts, and traditions. Additionally, greater investment in digital diplomacy, including online platforms showcasing Pakistani culture and history, could further elevate the country's cultural influence on a global scale.

### Discussion and Analysis

The comparative analysis of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's cultural diplomacy highlights the role of strategic planning and institutional development in enhancing soft power. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 provides a clear roadmap for cultural diplomacy, integrating it with broader economic and social transformation goals. The creation of the Ministry of Culture and organizations like MiSK Foundation demonstrates a systematic approach to using culture as a diplomatic tool. In contrast, Pakistan lacks a dedicated cultural diplomacy policy, which limits its ability to project its cultural influence internationally. Without a centralized framework, efforts remain fragmented and inconsistent, reducing their impact.

A key success factor in Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy is its substantial investment in international cultural engagements. The Kingdom's active participation in global events such as the Venice Biennale and the Red Sea International Film Festival has facilitated a positive rebranding of Saudi culture. These platforms allow Saudi artists and filmmakers to engage with global audiences, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Pakistan, on the other hand, has a limited presence in such high-profile international forums. While events like the Pakistan Literature Festival contribute to cultural exchange, they lack the global outreach and strategic promotion that Saudi Arabia has achieved. Strengthening partnerships with international cultural organizations could help Pakistan expand its cultural footprint.

Another critical aspect of Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy is its extensive educational and religious outreach. By funding scholarships, building Islamic centers, and supporting interfaith

dialogues, the Kingdom has effectively used education and religion as soft power tools. The Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and King Fahd Mosque in Los Angeles are examples of Saudi-funded initiatives that promote cultural ties and religious influence abroad. Pakistan, while hosting thousands of international students and engaging in religious diplomacy through Islamic organizations, has not leveraged these initiatives to the same extent. More structured educational exchange programs and research collaborations could enhance Pakistan's cultural influence.

The economic dimension of cultural diplomacy is another area where Saudi Arabia has outperformed Pakistan. Through investments in heritage tourism, such as the AlUla project, the Kingdom has transformed its cultural sites into economic assets that attract international visitors. These initiatives not only promote Saudi history and traditions but also contribute to economic diversification, aligning with Vision 2030 goals. Pakistan, despite possessing world-renowned heritage sites such as Mohenjo-Daro, Taxila, and the Lahore Fort, has not fully capitalized on cultural tourism. A more robust tourism policy that integrates cultural diplomacy could significantly enhance Pakistan's international image and economic standing.

Saudi Arabia's success also lies in its digital diplomacy and media engagement. The Kingdom has utilized digital platforms, film, and social media to shape global perceptions of Saudi culture. The promotion of Saudi films on platforms like Netflix and participation in global entertainment industries have played a crucial role in shifting international narratives. Pakistan's cultural output in cinema and digital media has grown in recent years, but it remains limited in terms of international accessibility and market reach. Establishing stronger ties with global streaming services and media platforms could enhance Pakistan's cultural diplomacy efforts.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia's approach to cultural diplomacy is characterized by government-backed initiatives, whereas Pakistan relies more on independent and grassroots cultural efforts. While grassroots initiatives contribute to cultural richness, state support is crucial for sustained international engagement. Establishing a dedicated cultural diplomacy division within the government could provide the necessary infrastructure to systematically promote Pakistan's cultural assets on

the global stage. Additionally, appointing cultural ambassadors and strengthening the role of embassies in cultural promotion could further enhance Pakistan's cultural diplomacy.

Finally, the political context influences the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy. Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy has been instrumental in shifting its global image from a conservative society to a progressive one embracing modernization. This transformation has been achieved through strategic storytelling and participation in international dialogues on art, heritage, and cultural diversity. Pakistan, facing security challenges and political instability, has struggled to project a cohesive and positive cultural narrative. By addressing internal governance challenges and presenting a unified cultural vision, Pakistan could strengthen its cultural diplomacy and improve its international standing.

### Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy stands as a model of strategic implementation and institutional support, effectively integrating culture into its broader foreign policy and economic vision. The Kingdom has successfully leveraged cultural diplomacy to reshape its global image, strengthen international partnerships, and diversify its economy. By investing in cultural institutions, international collaborations, and digital media, Saudi Arabia has demonstrated how cultural diplomacy can serve as a powerful soft power tool. This approach has not only enhanced its global cultural influence but has also positioned it as a leader in regional and international cultural engagements.

In contrast, Pakistan's cultural diplomacy remains underutilized despite its rich cultural heritage and potential for global engagement. The absence of a comprehensive cultural diplomacy strategy, coupled with limited institutional support and inconsistent international participation, has constrained its ability to project cultural influence. However, Pakistan has the opportunity to learn from Saudi Arabia's successes by developing a well-structured cultural diplomacy policy. Establishing dedicated cultural institutions, increasing participation in international cultural forums, and integrating cultural diplomacy with economic and tourism initiatives could significantly enhance Pakistan's soft power.

For Pakistan to elevate its global cultural presence, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. This includes stronger government backing for cultural diplomacy, expanded digital and media outreach, investment in cultural tourism, and structured academic and artistic exchanges. By fostering international collaborations and promoting its diverse cultural assets on the global stage, Pakistan can strengthen its diplomatic relationships and enhance its international reputation. Cultural diplomacy, if effectively harnessed, can serve as a bridge between nations, fostering mutual understanding and contributing to a more interconnected and culturally enriched global society.

### Way Forward

To enhance its cultural diplomacy and strengthen its soft power, Pakistan must adopt a structured and strategic approach similar to Saudi Arabia. A key step in this direction is the establishment of a **dedicated cultural diplomacy institution** under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This institution should be responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring cultural diplomacy initiatives, ensuring coordination between cultural, educational, and diplomatic sectors. By centralizing efforts, Pakistan can create a coherent and impactful cultural diplomacy strategy that aligns with its broader foreign policy goals. Additionally, appointing cultural ambassadors and expanding the role of embassies in cultural promotion can provide Pakistan with a stronger international presence.

Another critical aspect is **increasing participation in global cultural events** such as international art exhibitions, literature festivals, and heritage forums. Saudi Arabia has successfully positioned itself in global cultural dialogues by actively engaging in platforms like the Red Sea International Film Festival and the Venice Biennale. Pakistan must follow suit by ensuring the presence of its artists, filmmakers, and scholars in such events. Collaborations with organizations like UNESCO and the British Council can facilitate greater international recognition of Pakistan's cultural contributions. Moreover, Pakistan should leverage its film, music, and literary industries to project a modern and diverse image that resonates with global audiences.

**Digital and media diplomacy** also play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and increasing cultural influence. Saudi Arabia has effectively used digital platforms to showcase its heritage, promote cultural initiatives, and engage with international audiences. Pakistan should invest in producing high-quality documentaries, virtual museum tours, and cultural content for global streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and YouTube. Social media campaigns highlighting Pakistan's rich history, cuisine, music, and arts can help counter negative stereotypes and build a positive international image. Establishing a dedicated cultural diplomacy website featuring Pakistan's artistic and cultural initiatives can further enhance accessibility and engagement.

Additionally, **cultural tourism development** can serve as a powerful diplomatic tool. Saudi Arabia's AlUla project demonstrates how cultural heritage can be transformed into a global tourism asset. Pakistan, with its UNESCO-listed heritage sites such as Mohenjo-Daro, Taxila, and Lahore Fort, has immense potential to attract international visitors. A well-structured cultural tourism policy, in collaboration with the private sector, can boost Pakistan's economy while simultaneously strengthening its soft power. Investing in infrastructure, international marketing campaigns, and heritage conservation will not only enhance tourism but also promote Pakistan's image as a culturally rich and historically significant nation.

Finally, **educational and people-to-people exchanges** must be prioritized. Saudi Arabia's scholarship programs and religious outreach have played a significant role in fostering international goodwill. Pakistan can expand its academic exchange programs, offering scholarships for foreign students to study in Pakistan's top universities. Encouraging joint research collaborations with international institutions and hosting cultural exchange programs will help establish stronger global connections. Strengthening ties with the Pakistani diaspora can also serve as an asset, as expatriates can act as cultural ambassadors promoting Pakistan's heritage abroad. By investing in education, cultural diplomacy, and international collaborations,

Pakistan can effectively position itself as a key player in global cultural relations.

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