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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Destination Image; Cultural Diplomacy; Tourist Engagement; Tourism-Driven Soft Power; Global Image; Pakistan	This research aims to explore the influence of destination image, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement on the creation of tourism soft power and its role in Pakistan's image in the world. The study was based on Soft Power Theory and used a quantitative cross sectional design with 250 international tourists who had visited Pakistan. The data were analyzed by SPSS, AMOS with confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The findings showed that destination image, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement had substantial positive effects on the tourism-driven soft power and the tourism-driven soft power significantly positively affected the image of Pakistan in the world. The study introduces destination perceptions into the concept of Soft Power Theory by combining cultural encounters, tourist engagement and destination perceptions in a single model. The findings contribute to tourism and soft-power literature while offering practical insights for leveraging tourism experiences and cultural engagement to strengthen Pakistan's international attractiveness and global image.
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Introduction

Tourism has grown from its traditional role as an economic activity to a tool for countries to share their culture, identity, values and appeal to the world. Tourism can be a soft power tool in this sense as it can increase the familiarity, understanding and positive perception of destinations and their societies through direct contact with them. Ooi (2025) highlights that tourism can contribute to

building soft power as visitors gain knowledge and empathy from the experiences they have in the destination, and the country's destination branding can send an attractive image out to the world. Therefore, destination image is of special interest as tourists' perceptual and evaluative perceptions affect perceptions and representations of destinations.

Another aspect of cultural diplomacy relates to the linkage of tourism to international image building, via the transmission of national heritage, traditions, values and cultural identity to foreign publics. Research has shown that cultural diplomacy can be used to bolster the image of a country, as well as promote tourism and other soft power goals (Enaim 2021). This process is given a participative twist with the involvement of tourists, who tend to share their experiences, images, evaluations, and recommendations by means of digital platforms. Guerreiro et al. (2024) show how user-generated content and tourism experiences can affect the image of a destination and tourist engagement, from an online perspective.

Pakistan offers a paragon setting for exploring these connections given its varied topography, culturally rich heritage, religious institutions, archaeological sites, and adventure heritage tourism opportunities. Based on the evidence related to international tourists, destination image has been found to be a mediator between the Pakistan landscape, services, attitudes of local people and their perception of safety and other destination attributes and their intentions to visit Pakistan (Rauf et al., 2024). Therefore, tourism is also an opportunity for Pakistan to promote its culture and destination attributes to the world.

While Pakistan has vast tourism and cultural resources, the image it builds for itself overseas is through various sources of information and not through tourism promotion alone. The images, information, safety perceptions, and cultural narratives in the media can all shape foreign perceptions of the country, along with first-hand experiences of visitors. According to Nazir et al., (2022), the destination image significantly affects the international tourists' travel experiences and their behavioral intentions to visit Pakistan, and media exposure has a significant effect on the destination image and their travel experiences. International tourists can thus have perceptions which diverge from the representations since they have experienced the places, people, heritage and culture of Pakistan first-hand.

These could turn tourism into a means of cultural exchange and soft diplomacy, especially if they are later shared with the rest of the world by tourists. But the combined influence of destination image, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement in strengthening Pakistan's soft power and subsequently its image in the international world is not well established with empirical evidence. This poses an important challenge for both the tourism scholarship and policy makers on whether tourism can systematically contribute to the image building of Pakistan.

There is already a significant amount of research on the destination image and tourist behaviour, and the cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power research areas are separate. Engagement among tourists, such as through social media and the generation of user content has also been a subject of growing academic interest. For instance, Hussain et al. (2024) show evidence

of the relationship between tourist flows and interaction with tourism-related social-media content, highlighting the significance of digital engagement in modern tourist destination marketing.

However, they are still relatively unconnected. There is little research that has attempted to combine destination image, cultural diplomacy, tourist involvement, soft power of tourism and the global image in a single conceptualization. Most importantly, there is little empirical research looking into these relationships in Pakistan. Recent studies in Pakistan have indicated that media portrayals of the country's natural and cultural attractions can influence tourists' attitudes towards the country and towards tourism (Abbasi et al., 2025), but they cannot fully explain how the destination perception, cultural experience and engagement of tourists combine to create soft power and the broader global image of the country. The present study fills this gap by exploring the constructs within the context of tourism in Pakistan.

Research Objectives

RO1: To examine the influence of Pakistan's destination image on perceptions of the country's soft power.

RO2: To investigate the role of cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement in strengthening Pakistan's soft power through tourism.

RO3: To examine how tourism-driven soft power contributes to the formation of a positive global image of Pakistan.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does Pakistan's destination image influence perceptions of its soft power?

RQ2: How do cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement contribute to Pakistan's soft power through tourism?

RQ3: How does tourism-driven soft power shape the global image of Pakistan?

This study contributes to tourism research by positioning tourism not only as destination consumption but also as a potential mechanism of international image formation. It is an extension of soft power and cultural diplomacy scholarship by putting the image of the destination and the interaction of tourists into a framework of "national image building through tourism. The integration is pertinent, as public diplomacy is increasingly engaging in nation branding, digital engagement, cultural exchange, and international communication to help shape foreigners' perceptions of countries (Mazumdar, 2020). The research can offer empirical insights in the Pakistani context about the role of tourism experiences and cultural encounters in generating perceptions other than the traditional destination marketing. From a practical standpoint, its conclusions can help tourism authorities, destination managers, as well as those institutions involved in the field of cultural communication, promotion and tourist engagement, to be more coordinated

in their tourism promotions, cultural communication, tourist engagement and the creation of a destination image.

Literature Review

Tourism as a Source of National Image and Soft Power

The contemporary tourism is more than an economic development, as international mobility provides direct contact with the visitors, the host communities, the cultures and the national identities. Such encounters give rise to a more complete experience of countries (as opposed to just externally mediated information). Nepal's research findings indicate that the national image plays a crucial role in the perception and behavior of tourists from abroad, suggesting that an experience in tourism can link between destination evaluation and raising the national image (Zhang et al., 2020). Tourism can then create a national attractiveness when positive experiences with people, heritage, landscapes, and the everyday culture result in positive perceptions. Kuri et al. (2020) define and theorize this as tourism diplomacy, where culture, heritage, traditions, history, hospitality, and natural resources are resources for international relationship building.

Destination Image

Destination image represents tourists' accumulated perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and impressions regarding a place. The development of this has been widely viewed as a cognitive assessment of the destination attributes and affective responses that are based on tourists' feelings toward the attributes. Empirical findings have validated the interaction between cognitive and affective images and overall destination perceptions and behavioral responses (Duan & Wu, 2024). The relationship is particularly important in the context of emerging destinations where there may be low familiarity and perceptions of uniqueness and post-visit experiences may have significant influence. Marques and Antova (2021) determined that cognitive, affective and unique image aspects shape tourists' post-visit reactions in an emerging-destination setting. Furthermore, travel narratives can influence perceptions of new travel destinations via destination-specific attributes and general characteristics of travel images (Lupu et al., 2023). This is important in the context of Pakistan as destination perceptions, which go beyond attributes of the destination, may be evaluated as the country.

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is an approach to communication of the national culture to foreign publics for better understanding, attraction and engagement. This includes tangible and intangible cultural resources such as heritage, arts, traditions, religion, food, festivals, museums and cultural practices. Wüst and Nicolai (2022) illustrate how cultural capital, heritage, religious traditions and cultural infrastructure can be leveraged and utilized in a strategic manner to make an impact on how a country presents itself externally and to boost its soft power. Tourism offers a very experiential platform for such diplomacy, as tourists come in contact with cultural meanings directly. Cultural

institutions like museums can serve as enablers of tourism diplomacy and at the same time act as a messenger of cultural identity to the visitors (Zeybek & Öztürk, 2022).

Tourist Engagement

Tourist engagement can be defined as the active cognitive, emotional and behavioral involvement of tourists in a destination. Cognitive engagement deals with the degree of attention paid, learning and interpretation; emotional engagement is affective connection; and behavioral engagement is participation, interaction, sharing, recommendation, and other destination-supportive activities. According to Zuo et al. (2024), deeper involvement with intangible cultural heritage enhances the understanding and emotional connection of tourists to the destinations. Engagement also takes place in digital spaces, in which cultural atmosphere facilitates interaction online, via perceived distinctiveness and emotional reactions (Yin et al., 2023). Importantly, cultural experiences with tourists can trigger feedback and recommendation behavior (Yang et al., 2025), meaning that tourists who are actively involved in the cultural activity can be the agents of conveying perceptions.

Tourism-Driven Soft Power

Soft power is about creating power through attraction, not coercion; and culture is one of the elements that can create such attractiveness. In tourism, national culture is made visible and tangible: tourism visitors will meet with heritage, people, traditions, events, and social environments. El-Dabt et al. (2025) provide evidence on the contribution of a tourism-related event that is visible on an international stage to cultural exchange, national visibility, national attractiveness and soft power-based national brand. As such, soft power tourism can be defined as attraction created from the positive perception that emerges from the destination as a consequence of tourism experiences and moves towards the country.

Global Image of a Country

A country's global image is the aggregate of perceptions and associations that international audiences have on a country's identity, attractiveness, reputation, culture, people and capabilities. These perceptions come in different forms such as the media, diplomacy, products, culture and tourism. The relevance of tourism is especially significant for it allows for symbolic representation and firsthand experience. Empirical cross-country data reveal that there is a positive relationship between nation-brand strength and the factors related to tourism (Dineri et al., 2024). Therefore, good tourism experiences can enhance the national attractiveness and reputation, which eventually can lead to the enhancement of the national image in the world.

Theoretical Foundation

Soft Power Theory

This study was underpinned by the main theory of Soft Power Theory. Based on Nye's concept of coercive power and attraction based influence, soft power is the method by which nations shape foreign publics by means of appealing culture, values, identity and international behavior, instead of material coercion. New research shows that culture, national identity, communication and place branding are still the key mechanisms that drive the creation of soft power (Chotisarn & Phuthong, 2025). The tourism is a theoretical logic extended onto the individual level because the tourist experiences a nation's cultural and social resources. Therefore, soft power can be studied based on the perceptions of tourists on the attractiveness of a country based on the experiences they had in the tourist destination.

Theoretical Integration with Tourism

The proposed theoretical mechanism is Tourism Resources/Experiences lead to Tourist Perceptions and Engagement, which lead to National Attraction/Soft Power and subsequently to Global Image.

In this sequence, destination image is tourists' cognitive and affective perceptions of the destination, cultural diplomacy is their exposure to national culture and communication through heritage, traditions, cuisine, festivals, arts and social interaction, and tourist engagement is active cognitive, affective and behavioral involvement in the destination and cultural experiences. All these mechanisms can help create a tourism resource that becomes a form of national appeal by combining experienced with attractions. The resulting soft power means the attraction created by these encounters and then expectant to draw in tourists in the future is the result of it and would help to build Pakistan's image in the world in the future. This integration is consistent with the evidence-based findings that place branding is becoming more closely aligned with the image of a nation, communication, cultural identity, public diplomacy and international relations in the context of soft power. The model thus moves the focus from the state level resources to the tourist-perception level, where national attractiveness is lived, understood and may be expressed internationally.

Hypotheses Development

Destination Image and Tourism-Driven Soft Power

Tourists' perception of the attractiveness of a country is improved by a favourable destination image. Positive appraisals of tourism resources, people and experiences can go beyond the destination and contribute to strengthening national attraction via tourism diplomacy (Kuri et al., 2020).

H1: Pakistan's destination image has a significant positive influence on perceptions of the country's soft power.

Cultural Diplomacy and Tourism-Driven Soft Power

Cultural diplomacy allows tourists to experience heritage, tradition and national identity and fosters cross-cultural understanding. The cultural exposure can increase the attractiveness of a country and help in the development of soft power (Nasanbayar et al., 2025).

H2: Cultural diplomacy has a significant positive influence on Pakistan's soft power through tourism.

Tourist Engagement and Tourism-Driven Soft Power

Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement of tourists with locals and culture can increase their destination involvement and build positive attitudes (Zuo et al., 2024).

H3: Tourist engagement has a significant positive influence on Pakistan's soft power through tourism.

Tourism-Driven Soft Power and Global Image

Tourism generated attraction can impact the international perception through enhanced cultural visibility and the portrayal of a desirable national image, thus playing a role in the formation of country image (El-Dabt et al., 2025).

H4: Tourism-driven soft power has a significant positive influence on the global image of Pakistan.

Conceptual Framework

Proposed Research Model

The conceptual model aims to bring together the above literature and Soft Power Theory to present an understanding of the possible role of tourism related experiences in shaping the image of Pakistan internationally. The framework makes tourism-driven soft power the key endogenous construct which is linked with three tourism related factors namely destination image, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement, thus bridging the gap between Pakistan's global image and the three tourism related factors. Theoretically, this positioning is suitable as the familiarity, empathy and attractiveness of a country to tourists can be attained via their personal encounters with destinations and cultures (Ooi, 2025). Accordingly, the framework proposes that favorable destination perceptions, exposure to national culture, and active tourist involvement collectively provide distinct pathways through which tourism can generate soft-power outcomes.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

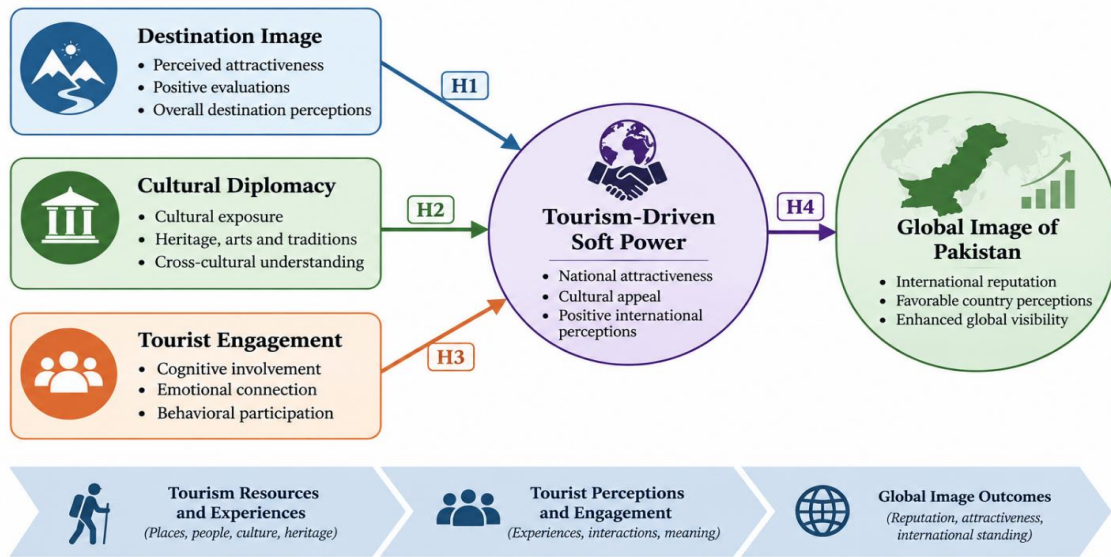


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

From Tourism to Soft Power: How Destination Image, Cultural Diplomacy, and Tourist Engagement Shape Pakistan's Global Image

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework illustrating the hypothesized relationships among destination image, cultural diplomacy, tourist engagement, tourism-driven soft power, and Pakistan's global image.

As represented in Figure 1, the links are between destination image and tourism driven soft power (H1), cultural diplomacy and tourism driven soft power (H2), and tourist engagement with tourism driven soft power (H3). H4 then connects soft power of tourism with Pakistan's image in the world. The middle is the soft power as the theoretical link between tourism perceptions, cultural exposure and engagement and national attractiveness. This logic aligns with the findings of El-Dabt et al. (2025), who found that tourism has a positive impact on cultural exchange and enhancing the image of the country.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to empirically examine the relationships among destination image, cultural diplomacy, tourist engagement, tourism-driven soft power, and Pakistan's global image. The quantitative approach was deemed appropriate due to the presence of measurable latent constructs and hypotheses that were theoretically derived in the proposed framework which needed to be statistically examined.

Research Design

A cross-sectional explanatory research design was employed. Data was gathered at one cross section to explore the hypothesized relationships between the study constructs. The cross-sectional survey design has extensively been adopted in tourism research for investigating the perception and behavioral relationships of the tourists through quantitative modelling, as proposed by Sarmah et al. (2022).

Population

The target population was the international tourists who had visited Pakistan. International tourists were the right population since their first-hand experience of Pakistan's tourist destinations, cultural resources, heritage, people and tourism environment helped them assess the destination-related attributes and their perceptions of Pakistan.

Sample and Sampling

The number of 250 international tourists was finally selected using purposive sampling. The respondents had to be 18 or above and have visited Pakistan to take part in the study. The respondents were selected purposively to ensure that they had first-hand experience related to the constructs that were being studied in the proposed model.

Research Instrument

Structured questionnaire was used which was adapted from existing measurement scales in the literature. The questionnaire was divided into six sections which included demographic and travel data, destination image, cultural diplomacy, tourist engagement, soft power of tourism and the global image of Pakistan. The application of the structured questionnaire and the adaptation of measurement scales for the tourism research in the field of destination perception has been well established in present tourism research (Xuheng & Sutunyarak, 2025).

Measurement Scale

Each of the construct items was evaluated on a five point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree). This type of response format allowed for the measurement of the differences in respondents' perceptions of the study constructs in a standardized format.

Pilot Study

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 foreign tourists to determine its clarity, comprehensibility and initial reliability before the actual survey. The pilot respondents were similar to the main respondents only that they were not included in the final sample of 250 respondents. The final questionnaire was administered after some needed refinements were made.

Data Collection

Data gathering was conducted using a physical and/or online questionnaire to international tourists who met the inclusion criteria. Respondents were informed regarding the purpose of the research before filling out the questionnaire and then gave informed consent. The participation was voluntary and confidentiality of individual responses was maintained throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed with SPSS and AMOS. Data screening, demographic profile, descriptive analysis, and reliability analysis were conducted using SPSS initially. Afterwards, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS to assess measurement model, model fit indices, convergent and discriminant validities. Lastly, the SEM was carried out to estimate the structural relations and test the hypotheses H1 – H4. CFA is then followed by SEM, and it is suitable to validate the latent constructs of the tourism and to analyse the hypothesized structural relationships between them (Dao et al., 2025).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were adhered to during the research process to ensure the participants respected rights, privacy and autonomy. The participants were made aware of the purpose of the study and they gave informed consent prior to participation. All the responses were anonymous and could be withdrawn at any time. There was no requirement to submit personally identifiable data and collected data were treated confidentially and used for academic research only. The procedures carried out were aligned with the general guidelines of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality in human-participant studies (Badampudi et al., 2022).

Results

The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. The demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, correlations, reliability analysis were performed in SPSS, while AMOS program was employed to assess the measurement model, model fit and structural relationships. Data for analysis included 250 respondents.

Demographic Profile

The data from the 250 participants was analyzed by frequencies and percentages based upon their demographic and travel characteristics. These results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic and Travel Characteristics of Participants*

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	151	60.4
	Female	96	38.4

Age Group	Prefer not to say	3	1.2
	18–25 years	51	20.4
	26–35 years	104	41.6
	36–45 years	51	20.4
	46 years and above	44	17.6
Region	Asia	65	26.0
	Europe	74	29.6
	North America	43	17.2
	Middle East	40	16.0
	Other	28	11.2
Visit Frequency	First visit	179	71.6
	Repeat visit	71	28.4
Main Travel Purpose	Leisure/Tourism	94	37.6
	Cultural/Heritage	63	25.2
	Adventure	52	20.8
	Religious	25	10.0
	Other	16	6.4

Table 1 indicates that most of the participants were male (60.4%) and female (38.4%). The largest age group was 26–35 years (41.6%). European tourists accounted for the highest share of region (29.6%) followed by Asian tourists (26.0%). The majority of the participants were new visitors to Pakistan (71.6%). Leisure/tourism (37.6%) was found to be the highest percentage of travel reasons, followed by cultural/heritage tourism (25.2%).

Descriptive Statistics

The following descriptive statistics were computed for Destination Image (DI), Cultural Diplomacy (CD), Tourist Engagement (TE), Tourism-Driven Soft Power (SP), and Global Image (GI). Pearson correlations were also run to explore the relationships between constructs.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	DI	CD	TE	SP	GI
Destination Image (DI)	3.041	0.999	1.000				
Cultural Diplomacy (CD)	3.186	1.005	.319**	1.000			
Tourist Engagement (TE)	3.105	1.044	.364**	.405**	1.000		
Tourism-Driven Soft Power (SP)	3.179	1.126	.578**	.529**	.544**	1.000	
Global Image (GI)	3.100	1.083	.405**	.371**	.412**	.662**	1.000

Note. N = 250; SD = Standard Deviation; **p < .01.

The perceptions of the study constructs ranged from moderate-to-positive with a mean score of 3.041 – 3.186. Each of the constructs was significantly and positively correlated with the others. Positive relationship was found on Destination Image ($r = .578$), Cultural Diplomacy ($r = .529$) and

Tourist Engagement ($r = .544$) with Tourism-Driven Soft Power. The highest correlation was found between Tourism-Driven Soft Power and Global Image ($r = .662$), which means that higher the level of tourism-driven soft power, higher was the positive perception of Pakistan over the global image.

Measurement Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to assess the measurement model. Standardized factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were examined to measure reliability and convergent validity.

Table 3: Measurement Model, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	Convergent Validity
Destination Image	DI1-DI5	.70-.81	.836	.871	.576	Established
Cultural Diplomacy	CD1-CD5	.71-.83	.852	.880	.595	Established
Tourist Engagement	TE1-TE5	.72-.84	.865	.886	.610	Established
Tourism-Driven Soft Power	SP1-SP5	.74-.86	.889	.899	.642	Established
Global Image	GI1-GI5	.73-.85	.875	.893	.626	Established

The final results showed that all standardized factor loadings were between .70 - .86, which represents good item reliability. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged between .836 and .889 and CR values ranged between .871 and .899 which is above the .70 recommended level. AVE values were all within the range of .576 to .642 and greater than .50. So, there is the internal consistency, composite reliability and convergent validity for all five constructs.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity Using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	DI	CD	TE	SP	GI
Destination Image (DI)	.759				
Cultural Diplomacy (CD)	.319	.771			
Tourist Engagement (TE)	.364	.405	.781		
Tourism-Driven Soft Power (SP)	.578	.529	.544	.801	
Global Image (GI)	.405	.371	.412	.662	.791

Note. Bold diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE; off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations.

The square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with the other constructs. The Tourism-Driven Soft Power square root of AVE was .801, higher than its highest correlation with Global Image of .662, for instance. Therefore, the Fornell-Larcker criterion suggested good discriminant validity between the five constructs.

Model Fit

The overall model fit was evaluated by chi-square/df, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Table 5: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Criterion	Obtained Value	Assessment
χ^2/df	< 3.00	2.184	Acceptable
CFI	$\geq .90$	.946	Good
TLI	$\geq .90$	.938	Good
RMSEA	$\leq .08$	.069	Acceptable
SRMR	$\leq .08$	.052	Good

The model overall fit was acceptable. The χ^2/df value of 2.184 was below 3.00, while CFI (.946) and TLI (.938) exceeded .90. RMSEA (.069) and SRMR (.052) were below .08. All of these indices suggest that a proposed model was a good fit to the data and suitable for structural model testing.

Structural Model, Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Testing

The four hypothesized relationships were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Standardized path coefficients, critical ratios and p-values were analysed to assess the significance of the proposed relationships.

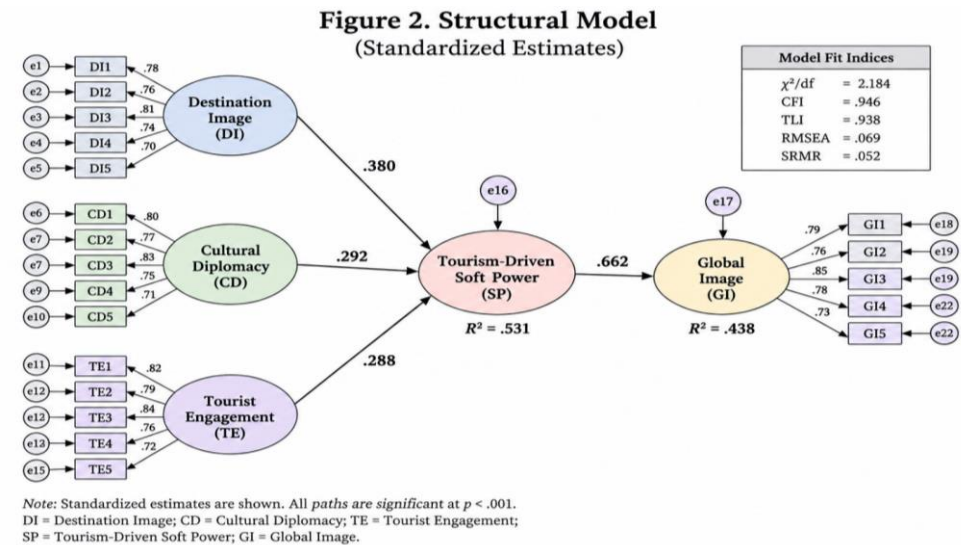


Figure 2: Structural Model

The structural model explained 53.1% ($R^2 = .531$) of the variance in Tourism-Driven Soft Power and 43.8% ($R^2 = .438$) of the variance in Global Image.

Table 6: Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	B	C.R.	p-value	Decision
H1	Destination Image $\rightarrow$ Soft Power	.380	7.930	< .001	Supported
H2	Cultural Diplomacy $\rightarrow$ Soft Power	.292	5.984	< .001	Supported
H3	Tourist Engagement $\rightarrow$ Soft Power	.288	5.801	< .001	Supported
H4	Soft Power $\rightarrow$ Global Image	.662	13.903	< .001	Supported

The results of the analysis of the structural model showed that Destination Image had a significant positive effect on Tourism-Driven Soft Power ($\beta = .380$, C.R. = 7.930, $p < .001$) thus supporting H1. Also, in relation to the effect of Cultural Diplomacy on Tourism-Driven Soft Power, the correlation was positive, C.R. = 5.984, $p < .001$, thus supporting H2. Likewise, the presence of Tourist Engagement positively affected the Tourism-Driven Soft Power ($\beta = .288$, C.R. = 5.801, $p < .001$) thus supporting H3. Lastly, Tourism-Driven Soft Power had a strong positive effect on Global Image ($\beta = .662$, C.R. = 13.903, $p < .001$), which was supported by the H4.

Table 7: Variance Explained by the Structural Model

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Variance Explained
Tourism-Driven Soft Power	.531	53.1%
Global Image	.438	43.8%

The variance in Tourism-Driven Soft Power was explained by the three factors: Destination Image, Cultural Diplomacy and Tourist Engagement together, accounting for 53.1%. The Global Image of Pakistan was explained by 43.8% of the variance in the Tourism-Driven Soft Power. These findings suggest a significant level of explanatory power in the proposed tourism-related factors included in the structural model.

All four respective hypotheses were corroborated. A significant positive relationship was found between Destination Image, Cultural Diplomacy, and Tourist Engagement with Tourism-Driven Soft Power and a significant positive relationship was observed between Tourism-Driven Soft Power with Pakistan's Global Image. The standardized coefficient (β) of the three antecedents of Soft Power was found to have the highest value for Destination Image ($\beta = .380$). The global image had the strongest structural relationship with Tourism-Driven Soft Power ($\beta = .662$) in the complete model.

Discussion

The findings offer empirical evidence for the framework of tourism and soft power as proposed by the researcher that destination image, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement positively

impact on the tourism and soft power of a destination which in turn enhances the image of Pakistan globally. Altogether, the results broaden the scope of tourism research by highlighting that the experience and perception of the tourists can be manifested in the national attraction and international image formation.

Destination Image and Soft Power

The result of H1 showed that the good image of the destination has a positive effect on soft power of tourism. This discovery implies that tourists' perceptions of destinations can go beyond perception of individual attractions to the perception of the country. This finding aligns with Nazir et al. (2021), who reported that the destination image affects the tourists' experience and behavioural intentions in Pakistan, and Rauf et al. (2024) who reported that destination attributes affect tourist perceptions and intentions. In the context of Soft Power Theory, appealing scenic resources, cultural assets, host culture and favorable destination experiences can serve as non-compulsory factors of national attraction. Therefore, destination image is an experiential path that can convert the tourism resources to soft-power value.

Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Additionally, this study supported H2, which deals with cultural diplomacy related to RQ2. It suggests that the experiences of tourists with Pakistan's heritage, traditions, food and culture, and social life can improve their perceptions of the national attractiveness. In this context, Wüst and Nicolai (2022) argued that cultural capital, heritage and cultural resources are crucial in the reconfiguration of soft power. It is also in line with Nasanbayar et al. (2025) who noted that cultural institutions play an important role in soft-power development. Thus tourism offers a context in which cultural diplomacy takes place in an experiential way: a context in which the visitor experiences national culture directly, but not in the formal diplomatic communication.

Tourist Engagement and Soft Power

The tourist engagement aspect of RQ2 was addressed by supporting H3. In terms of the result, it indicates that tourists who become cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally involved in a destination might gain deeper bonding with the host country. The result aligns with Zuo et al. (2024), which indicates that the creation of cultural heritage can deepen the knowledge of and emotions for tourists. Yin et al. (2023) also highlighted the importance of culture in tourists' online interactions. In theory, the involvement of tourists is significant, as the tourists are not only passive receivers of national images, but they can also be active communicators and conveyors of the experience of a tourist destination by becoming involved, interpreting, sharing and recommending the image.

Tourism-Driven Soft Power and Global Image

H4 was supported and addressed RQ3, confirming the positive impact of soft power generated through the tourism industry on Pakistan's global image. The discovery aligns with the hypothesis

that attraction that is created through tourism may go beyond the country's evaluation to the general perception of a country. This aligns with the findings of Dineri et al. (2024) that showed the relationship between tourism-related factors and nation-brand strength and that of El-Dabt et al. (2025) which proved the role of tourism-related international visibility and cultural exchange in soft power and nation-branding. Tourism, as such, may thus be used as a linking factor between the on-site experiences of visitors and the broader country-image formation process.

Over-all, the results support the framework proposed, tourists experiences, perceptions and engagement generate attraction at national level, which in turn will result in global image. The findings bring to the tourist-perception level the concepts of Soft Power Theory and offer practical demonstration of how destination image, cultural exposure and tourist engagement may be a complement on the way of attraction. Tourism related soft power is therefore a useful theoretical mechanism allowing a link between the tourism experience and the formation of international image.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study takes one step further on Soft Power Theory by showing the potential of the tourists' direct experiences in terms of national attractiveness. It combines destination image, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement in one, and ties tourism soft power with international image building. The study also provides empirical evidence from Pakistan, a context under-researched in the field of tourism.

Practical Implications

The results indicate that tourism authorities, destination managers, cultural and heritage institutions, and tourism marketers need to boost destination experiences, cultural communication and tourist engagement. Positive experiences of tourists can be transformed into improved national attractiveness and international image through coordinated international tourism communication.

Conclusion

This research explored the impact of destination image, cultural diplomacy, and tourist interaction on generating soft power for tourism and the effect of such soft power on the image of Pakistan in the world. The results confirmed the proposed relationships and all three research objectives. Firstly, destination image made positive contributions to the perceptions of Pakistan's soft power indicating the significance of a positive destination experience in creating national attraction. Secondly, destination image helped in improving the perceptions of Pakistan's image as a good destination. Second, cultural diplomacy and tourist engagement played a positive role in the tourism-driven soft power, emphasizing the significance of cultural interaction and active participation of tourists. Thirdly, the soft power impacts of the tourism positively affected Pakistan's international image,

suggesting that the tourism experiences also went beyond the destination perceptions to the general perceptions of Pakistan.

Theoretically, the study is an extension of Soft Power theory, as it is applied at the tourist perception level and combines destination image, cultural diplomacy, tourist engagement, soft power, and global image in a single construct. Empirically, it provides evidence from a travel context that is emerging and relatively under-documented in Pakistan. Overall, the findings reflect that soft power is an important tool that can be used to make the cultural resources, experiences, and interactions that Pakistan offers to tourists attractive and shape a positive image of the country in the eyes of the world.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits interpretation of changes in perceptions over time. Findings may not be generalizable due to use of non-probability purposive sampling. Furthermore, there may be response and common method biases in the self-report and common-source data. The study was conducted with a small sample of 250 tourists and the country-specific setting is an additional limitation that may reduce the generalizability.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in tourism-driven soft power over time. Where possible, larger probability based samples should be considered. Comparing tourists' geographic origin is a possible way to explore meaningful differences in perceptions and multi-country studies could establish whether the proposed relationships differ across national contexts. Deeper insights into tourists' cultural experiences and interpretation might be gained from qualitative and mixed-method approaches. Lastly, the proposed tourism-soft power approach would be more generalizable and cross-cultural if it could be replicated in other emerging tourism destinations.

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